THE NEW SHOFAR

While it might looks and feel like things are out of control, behind the scenes there is a God who hasn't surrendered his authority. – A.W. Tozer

August 10th

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for…

Not surprisingly, the word "faith" is one of the most frequently occurring terms in the Bible (450 times) and it sits at the heart of the life and mission of the Church in the world. However, its true meaning is often obscured by limited or distorted understanding which is why toady's readings are important.

Our reading from Wisdom recalls the night when the Israelites left Egypt during the Exodus. And you can imagine what was going on in their minds? That night had been revealed to them beforehand, and they waited with great expectation, fear and… faith. so that they wait for that moment, rejoicing in the knowledge of what awaits them. The author stresses that "they trusted" in God's plan and that "his oath" would come true. History proved them right.

Therein is an essential element of true faith. Leaving Egypt involved a tremendous risk. The Egyptians were powerful, and not about to willingly let their slaves go free. ***If*** *God's plan should fail*, the Israelites risked death at the hands of their vengeful masters. Who should they trust? And they made their choice. By trusting in the reliability of God's promises and acting on them, the Israelites demonstrated true faith. They trusted God to the extent of leaving the uncomfortable but relatively secure environment of Egypt, risking their lives, and following God into the unknown.

The second reading further develops the notion of faith. It begins with the only systematic definition of faith found in the Bible – *faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*. According to this definition, faith is the trust that **what one hopes for**… and **which is not yet seen**… **will surely come true**. The author supports this definition with personal examples of the heroes of faith.

Abraham is our father in faith

The greatest example and illustration of faith cited is Abraham. God promised Abraham a land of his own. Trusting this promise, Abraham leaves his homeland and, like the Israelites during the Exodus, takes the risk of going into the unknown: without knowing where he was going, and how God's promise would come true. Once in the land of Canaan, living in a tent as a nomad, he holds on to the hope that this land would permanently belong to his descendants. The author interprets this hope as Abrahams' far-reaching anticipation of the heavenly city, Jerusalem, a symbol of eternal life. Furthermore, Abraham and his wife Sarah had no children. And yet God promised Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars of

heaven. Abraham never ceased to trust that this promise would eventually come true. It did, and Abraham's descendants became the great and numerous people of Israel.

However, the ultimate test of faith came when God demanded of Abraham the sacrifice of his only son and the child of the promise, Isaac. This was not a test of obedience but a test of ***trust***. Abraham was asked to demonstrate his trust in God to the point of letting go of what was the promise's apparent fulfilment – his only son. Was God contradicting himself by giving him a son and then asking that the child be returned to God through sacrifice? Abraham surely did not understand God's demand, but he kept on trusting God and acted in accordance with God's command. Because of Abraham's trust and confidence in God, Isaac was given back to him. God kept his promise.

The author of Hebrews uses this final example of trust in the face of death as a model for the Christian faith, which finds its fullest expression in the hope of the resurrection. Believers who maintain their trust in God's promise of eternal life, even in the face of inevitable death, manifest Abraham-like faith; they live in the assurance of something not yet seen. This assurance shapes their life on earth, where they live as strangers and migrants waiting to go home.

Faith gives us all the courage we will ever need

The gospel story further illustrates the meaning of faith. Jesus begins his teaching by calling on his "little flock" not to be afraid. This designation and exhortation imply that the disciples are only a small minority amidst a large and often hostile world. They are like "lambs among wolves". However, Jesus assures them that they have a glorious future ahead of them, because their Father, God, decided to give them a kingdom. Despite being little, insignificant and afflicted now, their destiny is eternal life in God's presence. The disciples are called to trust in this promise and shape their lives in the present world accordingly.

The first expression of this trust is the disciples' attitude to material wealth. According to this Gospel, each person has a fundamental choice to make – either to trust wealth and seek security in possessions, or trust God and seek security in faith. The first option ties a person to this passing world and is, therefore, a foolish choice, for this world passes away. The second option guarantees eternal life, and is, therefore, a wise choice. Naturally, only God can be trusted, as the giver of true and permanent life. Such a life is the treasure that the disciples ought to seek wholeheartedly.

Growing the faith: The enemy of faith is doubt. When we intentionally exercise intentional belief in the message, our ability to believe grows. Just as Spirit gives birth to spirit, faith gives birth to more faith (**John 3:6**). When we believe, like Abraham, that God has the power to do what He has promised (**Rom. 4:20-21**), our faith grows. The more we believe the message, the more of the message we are able to believe.