19 OT-C Do You Understand?

A disciple’s journey begins with baptism, usually when we are babies. And our parents are asked by Mother Church, “Do you clearly understand what you're undertaking?” Well, do we? Do we understand what is at stake with our baptisms?

We know that baptism has to do with faith and that faith, according to the Letter to the Hebrews, is “the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” But can we honestly say we understand what *that* means? What is hoped for? What is not seen? Or perhaps we should say “Who?”

Does the story of Abraham remind you of anyone?

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. He went out not knowing where he was to go. (Remember another guy who obeyed God the Father and let himself be led to his inheritance going out to a hill called Golgotha.)

By faith Abraham received power to generate so it was that “there came forth from one man himself as good as dead, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sands on the seashore.” (Remember another guy who once was dead and from whom new life generated for all of humanity? We call him the new Adam because of this.)

By faith Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promises was ready to offer his only son. (Remember another guy whose Father offered him up as a sacrifice only this time there was no ram waiting in the wings.)

Of course we are remembering Jesus. This is the realization of what is hoped for. Jesus is that which is not seen of whom the evidence points. Faith is what happens when we allow ourselves to live in relationship with Jesus Christ.

But be careful know what we are undertaking. The type of relationship we Catholic Christians are talking about is not a simplistic “I accept you in my heart Lord” relationship. The type of faith we are talking about is deeper than merely reciting some sentence declaring Jesus as the Savior and then we are saved. No, we are talking about a life-altering indeed life-ending faith.

The last symbol we are given at our baptism is a lit candle. It is given to us as we hear the priest say, “Receive the light of Christ. This light is entrusted to you to be kept burning brightly. You are to walk as a child of the light.” As a symbol of faith it is very appropriate. The flame seems to be alive moving with the breeze, seemingly fragile yet capable of consuming everything in sight. It gives us direction in the dark, warmth in the cold. It is both comforting and intimidating. And it can only be kept burning if the candle sacrifices itself.

In the same way the faith we are called to, the relationship we are drawn into with Jesus Christ, demands that we die. We must allow ourselves to be transformed into Christ. We must become the flame. How? Give alms, serve others, and obey the will of the Master. This is the preparation Jesus speaks of in today's Gospel. This is the transformation initiated at our baptism that we must embrace throughout our lives. We must decrease so Christ can increase within us.

Know what it is we are undertaking. We are undertaking a lifetime of dying to ourselves so as to be transformed into the image of the one we follow. “To those who are given much, much is expected.”

Christ gives us himself in Baptism, in Confirmation, in Holy Orders, in Reconciliation, in Marriage, in Anointing of the Sick, and in bread and wine changed into his Body and Blood. Jesus gives us all of himself. What do you suppose God wants in return?