

When we are facing personal crisis, we often feel totally alone. No one in the world, it seems, has gone through what we are going through. There is no place to turn for comfort. We feel abandoned by the very ones we think should be the most supportive. Most of all, we feel abandoned by God.

Our readings today remind us that even in the most difficult and trying situations, God is with us. There can be no better examples of people who triumphed over adversity and held on to God's promises than Abram, Paul and Jesus. We too are called to live as they did, in hopeful expectation as we await the outcome of God's promises.

Abram was called by God to leave his homeland with his family. He became prosperous, yet still felt cheated because he had no heir. God did not seem to have kept the promise. He quickly began to blame God for his condition. But God took him outside of himself and said. "Your descendants will number the stars."

And Abram say that he really was blessed. When the insecurities crept back in, once more God renewed the covenantal agreement between them. God even gave Abram a ritual that would symbolize what would happen if either broke the agreement. "May I be split open and left to die," God is saying to Abram, "if I do not keep the promises I

have made to you today." Abram had little reason to believe what God said. Yet he trusted in a promise so outrageous that it was beyond belief.

Do we ever stand in Abram's place – called and chosen as God's own chosen people as we are? Do we complain that the world owes us a living? Do we expect things to go our way without any effort? Do we think simply because we are Christians that God will make everything easy? Are we resentful when our expectations are not fulfilled? Does it suddenly become God's problem to fix and sort out our messy lives?

It is easy – in fact, utterly human – to refuse to take responsibility for our actions. Yet when we open ourselves up as Abram did and allow God to take us outside of our stunted selves and see the stars in all their glory, then we can look at life in a bigger way. We know how blessed we are. And how unworthy of that wonderful call! And if we forget again, then God reminds us again. God calls us out of the darkness as he called Abram. God helps us to wrestle with our private demons. God graces us and we begin to trust the promises again.

And then there is Paul. Paul was writing to the Philippians from prison. In the midst of his own personal

struggle and deprivation, he wanted to reassure them so that they would continue in spite of all the problems and hardships they faced. Philippian society was decadent.

They lived at a time of excess. They were a people obsessed with sexuality. They overused their resources. They searched for meaning in a meaningless existence. Paul demands of them a quality of life, a higher purpose that will give meaning and direction to their lives. He calls on them to live their beliefs. If they believe that God is building a kingdom of love through Christ, they will live loving lives that that refuse to condone the society in which they live. They will not live their lives focused on instant gratification, but will seek inner peace and spiritual growth.

We all seek models in our lives to imitate and lifestyles to copy. In our materialistic society it is easy to make choices that kill the soul. Our choice as Christians is crucial, for we are called to emulate Christ. Jesus' path was one of suffering and death. Do we ever wonder why our paths should be so smooth and our

way so easy? While we claim to follow Jesus, most of us find little in our journey through life that resembles suffering or sacrifice for the sake of others. How do we proclaim

God's love?

And then there is Jesus. "Get away from here," the Pharisees warn him, "for Herod wants to kill you." Jesus often reacts to "daily news" items such as this one. His parables and stories are a response to real events going on in real peoples' lives. He lived in the real world and knew and responded to the current political situation. Even in the face of personal danger he did not back down.

"Go and tell that fox what you see happening!" he tells them. And he gives them a hint of what is to come. Jesus journeys under a divine imperative. He will not stop his ministry when threatened by the power of the Jewish authorities, those of Palestine, or even those of Rome.

Much as Jesus is concerned with his mission, he is even more concerned for the spiritual welfare of humanity. As a mother hen gathers her young under her wings, so he yearns for their spiritual well being. Yearns so much, in fact, that he will face death on the cross to accomplish it.

How do each of us live out our call in the real world? It takes courage to stand up for what we believe. Our faith is of little effect unless we are willing to deal with the painful realities of daily living. We have an obligation to proclaim God's love in a real and tangible way. How do we go begin to work for a society that is just and equitable? Do we have

the courage to stand up for what we believe? Are we speaking out about injustice and lies by our leaders? Are we helping those who are ill-treated in our world?

The struggle to bring peace and justice into the world is a sign that God's sheltering wings embrace us. May we know the comfort and grace of God on our Lenten journey. And may we offer that embrace to others. Amen.