

The Bishop's Message
June 2009

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

When the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "...We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses..." (Heb 12:1), he is referring to persons like Abraham, Moses and Amos. He refers to them as part of that grand host of Old Testament heroes and heroines whose lives pointed toward the ultimate focus of faith -- Jesus Christ, Himself.

Think about the difficulties of Abraham's situation. When God directed him to establish himself and his family in a strange land, he abandoned the comfort and security of Haran. His faith in God impelled him to face a new and unknown situation. Abraham did not know where he was going or what he would encounter. But his obedience made possible the Nation of Israel and the worship of the One, True God.

In like fashion, consider the odds facing Moses. Enslaved in Egypt, the Hebrews nonetheless had the certainty of food to eat and a place to live. The unknown lay ahead with no earthly assurance of being able to obtain resources to meet basic human needs. When Moses led the people of Israel through the Red Sea, there was no promise of being free from adversity. Moses' faith in God alone and his perseverance in that faith, which far exceeds any temporal assurance, made the Exodus and their establishment in the Promised Land a reality.

Amos could have continued as a shepherd and farmer in the hill country. Instead, he answered God's call to preach a hard message to a complacent world. It was a thankless job. Scorned by his hearers, Amos prophesied with the certainty that God wanted him to do so.

True faith always requires a "singleness of heart" through which conflicting allegiances are identified and rejected. When Jesus proclaims that He has come not to bring peace, but division, He speaks of the consequences that faith in Him can entail. Holding to the Christian faith may bring strife to the family, the desertion of friends, personal discomfort and even physical death.

Jesus seeks our absolute commitment to Him and to His Gospel -- no matter what! Knowing there is never any ultimate earthly assurance, we rely on Him in whom only there is certainly -- Jesus Christ -- and that great cloud of witnesses

watches with deep love, hope and support. God calls us to be faithful and, by God's grace, we will be faithful -- beginning with our worship of Him and extending to every portion of our lives.

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