

We can get a taste of St. Bernard Tolomei's self-effacing and generous nature in the letter we heard read last night. He's giving advice to a fellow monk on how best to pursue his vocation and it's advice applicable to us all;

Every action of soul and body becomes sweet to the one who toils, if they are done, and done purposefully, in the light of the Spirit. To God who rules over everything, everything belongs, and we cannot doubt that every creature waits to receive what is good for itself from his hands.

What is *good for itself* may, of course, include many events and many people we would rather avoid, but if the Spirit is at work all will be well; they become, indeed, the material through which the Spirit of God works in the perfecting of the soul. The demand on us is to surrender ourselves to this process of discipleship, to the following of God's will, to the recognition of all as within God's gift. Or as Bernard puts it with alarming simplicity

My brother, give what you have, yourself and everything.

If we look at the readings for today we see this same dynamic repeatedly asserted:

Now, the Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you.'
..so Abram went as the Lord had told him. (JB/RSV)

One commentary notes that there is no reaction on Abram's part to this divine command except that he obeys it. This strikes me as an action worthy of Wittgenstein – no words or further understanding are needed, the action speaks for itself. When we stop to understand, how often our faith falters – indeed, faith itself is at issue. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, this same call to total surrender is made, with Paul himself offering his own example of 'self-sacrifice' yet acknowledging that, as well as a work we do, this is also a work done to us by God.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (RSV)

Work out your salvation is a remarkable phrase but no less remarkable, perhaps, than Abram leaving his country without argument or Bernard's advice to Dom Pietro to *give what you have, yourself and everything*. The work we give or do is simply ourselves. Or, in the words of John's gospel,

A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus goes on to say that this does not just apply to himself but to his fellow disciples; that is, to his friends who, like him, now follow the same path. This is what friends do for one another and what God, *who rules over everything*, is also therefore doing for us.

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