

The theme or concept of faith has been dogging our footsteps throughout Lent. It was there most obviously last night in the reading from chapter 11 of the letter to the Hebrews, and is there again in the readings of today's eucharist, all chosen to highlight Joseph as a man of faith, summed up, perhaps, in that description of him as 'upright' (NJB) or 'just' (RSV) or as 'a man of honour' (JB) and open then to the possibility of faith, for faith is not something he has or even does, but rather a quality or attitude which enables God's will to be done through him. Indeed, it requires a certain emptiness of self in order for it to be so. He has to be able to surrender his own will, his own agenda, in order for another one, as yet unimagined and unknown, to take its place. This is, perhaps, what the story of Nathan and David is getting at: David has the wonderful idea that he should build a temple for God but God has other ideas and he has to surrender this ambition if he is to be faithful to God. Joseph thinks it's an honourable thing to divorce his betrothed informally so as to save her public shame, but one wonders whose shame he is actually protecting, and God has other ideas of what being honourable or just or righteous might be. This, of course, is equally true of Abraham. God is inviting Abraham and David and Joseph and us to enter new territory, to risk the unknown, even the unimaginable. Wittgenstein famously remarked that the pursuit of philosophy was about finding our way in an unknown land which sounds suspiciously like the spiritual quest too; an act of faith by a creature, confident that the creator God is already familiar with the land ahead and will guide us through it and all the dangers if we dare to remain upright, and don't look down! And, even if we do, God is still faithful. So our being upright or just or people of honour is not so much something we do for God as something God does for us, ultimately 'in Christ'.

*'Strong is his love for us,
he is faithful for ever.'*

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