

Several themes link today's readings: the necessity of obedience – of doing God's will; the necessity of love and of doing this will lovingly, that is, with joy: and the possibility of death in God's service. So they touch on that fundamental tension in our lives of faith and works: allowing God to work in us but that 'allowing' still requires something from us; an openness to grace; a surrender of self-will; an abandonment of our own plans so that something new, something different, can emerge; allowing God, then, to be truly our creator and creative in our lives down to the very last detail. This dynamic is present from the word 'go', from the very beginnings of our recorded history- in the command to Abram to leave his country and his kindred and his father's house, to step out in faith, to risk the unknown, with the promise that blessing and joy will come, not only to himself, but to others. He will become a blessing for others. This dynamic is now crystallised or exemplified for us in the life and death of Christ and in that of his followers, such as St Paul and the writer of John's Gospel, and not only exemplified but made possible for us in Christ if we share in his identity, in his very self, if we remain in him as a vine must remain attached to its rootstock if it is to bear fruit. Bernard Tolomei lived this dynamic too, giving up a life of ease and relative security as a lawyer and a member of one of the wealthiest families in Siena to be first a hermit in the desert of Ancona , though in a loose community of other hermits, and then to become part of a more formal, more organised cenobitic monastic community, eventually though reluctantly made its superior only to finish his life returning to the city to minister to those suffering from the plague, only to die there in this service with many of his fellow monks. If there's a pattern to his life which is applicable to us it's this willingness to change and be changed in the service of others.

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