

One commentator on Genesis, Joan Cook S.C. in the New Collegeville Biblical Commentary, notes that Verse 4 ‘does not record any reaction at all to the divine command (to leave his country and kindred) on Abram’s part, it simply reports that Abram obeys the Lord’s directive, taking his family and all his possessions to Canaan’. But Abram’s response is full of meaning and reminded me firstly of a story by the philosopher, Mary Midgely, describing her husband Geoffrey’s take on Wittgenstein as follows:

The builder says, ‘Bring the bricks’. The other chap brings them, and that’s meaning.

And this also made me think of obedience as full of meaning – that ready response to a command we hear so much of in the Rule of St. Benedict – *without grumbling*. The meaning, of course, is a matter of trust, of relationship. The monk so trusts in the Abbot as mediating God’s will, that God’s will, will be done, that the grace necessary to fulfil this command, including a lack of complaint, will be provided.

Something is happening not only in the action itself but in its meaning for the monk’s relationship with God. He’s been given meaning which he would not have otherwise through his own efforts. He may *think* it’s an effort of will on his part but it’s actually a revelation of God’s will.

You did not choose me, no, I chose you.

-is another way of looking at it. At first, of course, there’s a bit of a struggle because we don’t understand the full meaning of the command, but as we obey, as we obey immediately and without grumbling – and this can take a lifetime – so we may one day find ourselves running along the way of God’s commandments with a delight or spontaneity of love that cannot be described and, like the builder’s command and the other chap’s response, this does not need to be described further. It is as it is. Faith, then, as the revelation of God’s life and love among us giving every action its meaning.

I haven’t mentioned Bernard Tolomei. There’s no need to.

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