

2 Lent A 2008

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Scott Hahn's book, *A Father Who Keeps His Promises*, begins with the following story. Back in 1989 there was a catastrophic 8.2 magnitude earthquake that hit Armenia leaving over 30,000 people dead. In the middle of the chaos a distressed father ran to the school where he had dropped off his son earlier that morning. He kept remembering the promise he had made many times to his son: "No matter what happens, I'll always be there." When he reached the site where the school had stood, he saw only a pile of rubble; he stood there in shock. But then with grim determination, he began to dig over the place where his son's classroom had been. With his bare hands he pulled up bricks and plaster, while others stood and cried in disbelief. Someone said, "Hey mister, it's no use, they're all dead." He replied: "You can grumble or you can help me lift these bricks." Only a few pitched in. He kept digging, for hours...12 hours...18 hours...24 hours...36 hours. Finally, into the 38th hour, he heard a muffled groan from under a piece of wallboard. He pulled back the wallboard and cried, "Armand!" And a frail little voice replied, "Papa?!" Other weak voices began calling out, and eventually 14 of the 33 students were rescued. After Armand had gotten out he began to dig to help others. Everyone standing there heard him as he turned to his friends and said, "See, I told you my father wouldn't forget us." That story not only captures the essence of Scott Hahn's book, it explains the heart of the Scriptures. You see, the whole Bible is the story of our heavenly Father, who also

keeps His promises to us, especially to help us when we are lost in sin.

In the first reading today from the book of Genesis, we hear one of the first promises that God makes in the Bible. He promises Abram that he will have many descendants, and those descendants would become a great nation. Now, granted, it took God nearly 800 years until that kingdom was established in David, but God kept His promise. And in the gospel God the Father goes beyond His promise to Abram. He sends His Son so that we can inherit heaven. God didn't want to give us merely an earthly kingdom, but rather a heavenly one. A friend of mine in the seminary once told me that God always answers our prayers. And when He says "no" to what we ask Him, it's only so He can give us something even better. *Now, that doesn't mean that if we ask God for \$100, and He says "no" that He's going to give us \$1000!* God is a Father who keeps His promises: He fulfills His promises at the right time and in the best way.

Folks, sadly, we live in a world of broken promises. It is old news to say that politicians make promises during their campaigns that they fail to keep during their tenure in office. It makes us very cynical when we hear their campaign rhetoric. Aren't broken promises at the bottom of our housing and credit problems today? Someone signed a contract and promised to do something that they ultimately failed to do. 60% of marriages end in divorce, even though they all began with the sincere promise to last "until death do

us part.” Many years ago, I was taking a bus ride back to seminary and fell into conversation with the bus driver, a very astute man. At the time inflation was rather high and I asked him what he thought. He replied, “My friend, the problem is not the high cost of living, but rather the cost of living too high.” In other words, we make promises – whether to the mortgage company, to our country, to our spouses, to our friends – and then we fail to keep them, and the cost of these failed promises is high for all of us. God is a Father who keeps His promises, but we are children who frequently break ours.

My friends, the 40 days of Lent are an invitation to reflect on God’s great love for us, and His unbroken promises. You know, sometimes we think that we’re beyond God’s help, that we’ve been away from the church for far too long, or that we’ve done such terrible things that God could not possibly forgive us. We might feel like those Armenian school children trapped beneath piles of bricks and plaster: beyond hope and beyond help. Well, like that Armenian father, God never gives up on us and continues to work to save us, no matter how many years of sins we’ve piled on top of our selves. Scott Hahn argues that God is a Father who keeps His promises, and that this is at the heart of the entire Bible. Folks, if you look closely enough, you’ll see that this same astounding fact is also at the heart of your own life. “See, I told you my father wouldn’t forget us.”

Praised be Jesus Christ!