

Covenant and Transformation

Covenants are about transformations, relationships, promises and change. At the thousand-foot level the first and most significant covenant is the creation experience where God created the universe and promised to be present, as it continues to unfold: “the heavens declare the glory of God...and the firmament shows God's handiwork” (Ps 19). In this creative action God made humanity and promised “I will be your God and you will be my people” (Heb. 8:10) This covenantal relationship is the basis of all other historically grounded covenants.

For approximately four thousand years people, who have tried to live out the Judeo or Christian traditions, have recognized covenants. Covenants are generally understood to be promises made between a divine being and a people. Covenants are transformative. They result in new energy to change individuals and create new communities.

Covenants In Sacred Scripture

Abraham lived in Mesopotamia at least 2000 years before Jesus was born. The oppressed Abraham was promised prosperity, many descendants, and the land of Canaan. Abraham, in turn, promised fidelity to God. Circumcision became a sign of the covenant (Gn 17:10). The celebration of that covenant was often seen in offering animals to God. The covenant with Abraham is considered by many in the Judeo-Christian tradition to be the original basis or revelation of humanity's relationship with God (Yahweh). This covenant transformed a nomadic group into a community of interconnected people, God's people.

Moses was a major prophetic figure who lived about 1200 years before Jesus. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush—a bush that burned but was not consumed by the flames—a symbol of the divine nature of the revelation. God calls Moses to lead the people out of the oppression of Egypt and the Pharaoh into the land of Canaan, a land of “milk and honey,” a continuation of the transformation process. A sign of that covenant is the Ten Commandments. The celebration of that covenant continues today in the feast of Passover in the Hebrew tradition. (Ex 19:1 ff)

The greatest covenant from the Christian perspective is the “new covenant” brought about through the life-death-resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul talks about the “old” covenants being fulfilled by Jesus's life-death-resurrection (Gal 3:15 ff). Jesus is the mediator of the “new covenant” and this is celebrated in Eucharist—where all participate in and deepen their identities as the Body of Christ. The “new covenant” continues to unfold in each celebration of Eucharist today and it transforms communities across the entire earth to be Gospel oriented.

Common Elements found in Covenants

Covenants stories have three things in common. There is a sense of creation or liberation from oppression, and interconnectedness; there is a pledge of fidelity; and there is a sign or symbol of the promises made. At St. Anthony parish as we prepare to celebrate our centennial, we are reminded of our continual commitment to deepen our relationship with the Spirit of God and our relationships with one another. We are reminded of our interconnectedness to all creation and to all people beyond our parish and even our country. An example of this is how we are energized by our *Santisimo Sacramento* covenantal relationship.

St. Anthony on the Lake and Its Covenant

The covenant we are now forming is not a brand-new covenant, though it may be stated in contemporary language. It is a renewed one, based on commitments made more than 100 years ago.

This covenant is one where we pray to be re-energized to begin our second hundred years, connected to our larger Church, our world and our universe and to be a grateful and transforming influence in all.

We ask to be liberated from the oppression of materialism, consumerism and we want to be freed of whatever is keeping us from deepening our relationships with God and one another. We desire to be faithful to our baptismal promises, to more deeply embrace the meaning of our unfolding faith and to integrate it seamlessly into all aspects of our lives, to truly realize "all is holy." This renewal will be celebrated and symbolized in a covenant which we will make as part of our expression of gratitude for all who have gone before us in faith over the past hundred years and for all the sacrifices they made.

Our covenant will reflect our unique promises of the recognition of the Spirit's presence and support on our faith-filled life journeys in the twenty-first century.

Today, we, members of St. Anthony's parish community, prepare to extend our commitments to move forward, transformed by divine grace and our relationships with each other. We pray to increase our awareness of God's presence in our everyday lives; to deepen our response to our expanded consciousness of the Spirit's presence and to expand our understanding of the Spirit's creative power working through us to contribute to an evolving and sustainable universe. We desire to co-create with the Spirit a Church and world where justice reigns and all are aware of and know they are participants in the great and wondrous unfolding universe. We are being called to create a contemporary covenant recognizing and expressing gratitude for God's guiding presence over the past 100 years and believing that the Spirit of the Living God will continue to guide and transform us, in the name of Jesus Christ,

From our Listening Sessions we learned...

Our parish listening sessions revealed that the major elements of the Biblical covenants are already embedded in the community of St. Anthony on the Lake. Six desires surfaced which reflect aspects of a covenant and will continue transforming us into a Gospel Covenant Community.

- 1) a yearning for deeper relationships with one another;
- 2) a commitment to reach out to those in need and free them from oppression;
- 3) gratitude for the joyful, welcoming nature of the parish and for our past and current parish leadership;
- 4) a desire to learn more about the meaning of the Mass to enhance our relationship to God;
- 5) a wish to collaborate, be interconnected with others;
- 6) the hope for more opportunities to journey together as adults with great support noted for the Family Program and Alpha.

We have all the faith-filled desires and right ingredients to move forward to be an intentional Covenant Community that promises fidelity to the Living Spirit of God and to one another in an evolving universe!