

## Genesis 17:15-22 (JB)

<sup>15</sup>God said to Abraham, “As regards your wife Sarai, you must not call her Sarai, but Sarah. <sup>16</sup>I shall bless her and moreover give you a son by her. I shall bless her and she will become nations: kings of peoples will issue from her.” <sup>17</sup>Abraham bowed to the ground, and he laughed, thinking to himself, “Is a child to be born to a man one hundred years old, and will Sarah have a child at the age of ninety?” <sup>18</sup>Abraham said to God, “May Ishmael live in your presence! That will be enough!” <sup>19</sup>But God replied, “Yes, your wife Sarah will bear you a son whom you must name Isaac. And I shall maintain my covenant with him, a covenant in perpetuity, to be his God and the God of his descendants after him. <sup>20</sup>For Ishmael too I grant you your request. I hereby bless him and will make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous. He will be the father of twelve princes, and I shall make him into a great nation. <sup>21</sup>But my covenant I shall maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear you at this time next year.” <sup>22</sup>When he had finished speaking to Abraham, God went up from him.

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## The courage to hope

Brother Claudio of Taizé

As we begin this “reflection week” in Taizé, we have heard this morning an ancient story from the book of beginnings — Genesis. It is a dialogue between God and Abraham, in which God affirms for the fourth time the promise made to Abraham and his wife Sarah: a son and numerous descendants.

Yet by this point, 20 to 25 years had passed since they first heard the promise. Can we sense a certain frustration? Doesn't it seem a foolish risk to trust a God who makes specific promises as if thrown into the air, without saying when they will come about? Aren't they wasting their energy—and even their ability to trust?

Abraham and Sarah are called the father and mother of faith (cf. Heb 11:8-12) because they did not trust God just once. They learned to trust again and again in different situations. Their trust grew into hope, and in this story, we can see some elements that invite us to enter into this growth.

One element is the name of Sarah. In the Bible, giving a name signifies belonging and reveals a person's identity. In our passage, it might seem at first sight that God is giving Sarah a new name. But according to the original text God simply told Abraham: “Do not call her Sarai, but her name is Sarah.” This is not so much a change as a revelation of her

true name — Sarah, which means “princess,” the one who rules. God reveals her to Abraham as a full partner in God’s plan... it is as if God wants to be sure that Abraham sees Sarah for who she truly is.

A second element is Abraham’s laughter. He laughs at the idea of becoming parents at their time of life and suggests a more realistic plan — having descendants through his and Hagar’s son, Ishmael. God accepts this realism. Ishmael’s family will be numerous and receive a blessing. Yet God confirms that the promise will be fulfilled through Sarah and makes a commitment. The word “covenant” shows that God takes full responsibility for this plan. Abraham’s realism is not seen as lack of faith but it allows him to listen to the whole of God’s promise.

In other words, if we listen attentively, we understand that Abraham is not merely hearing the same promise again; he is being challenged—challenged to see Sarah for who she truly is and to trust a God who, taking his perspective into account, is fully committed to this plan.

In the words of the philosopher José Andrés Murillo, Abraham is challenged to a “lucid trust”—a clarity in human relationships, a “trust that is active and committed to the conditions that make it possible.” Applied to faith, this trust embraces our individual perspectives while remaining attentive and receptive to God’s light, and so it makes us reconsider what we think we know.

So, I hear this text as an invitation to update my trust: to dare once again a dialogue with God; to see others for who they truly are; to speak my mind in peace, listening to God’s promises of life anew, without closing myself off simply because I think I’ve heard them before.

### **Questions for sharing**

- x What is your name? What does it mean? Who gave it to you?*
- x Are hope and optimism the same? What is the difference?*
- x Trusting God may seem easy for some people and difficult for others. What difficulties have you faced, and what has helped you to grow in trust and hope?*