

INTRODUCTION. LECH-LECHA: “GO FORTH”

לֵךְ-לְךָ - *lekh lekha*

The words sound as difficult as the Polish language.

But this time, it is Hebrew. ;)

These are the first words of the first reading.

The first words God speaks to Abraham.

Lech-lecha – “Go forth,” “go forth, you,” “you, go.”

Abraham is the father of our faith, and his life follows the rhythm of a repeated *lech-lecha* – “Go forth!”

His story is therefore a symbol of an endless going forth,
of continually crossing the boundaries of what is known and familiar.

The story of Abraham is our story.

It is always a story of going forth, of countless departures...

To set out - means to “detach oneself,” to let go.

It means leaving “the land of your kinsfolk and your father’s house.”

leaving behind everything that constitutes the familiar landscape of human life.

1. THE WORD OF GOD RESTORES OUR AGENCY

Dear Sister Damiana,

in your vocation, you too have gone forth to the land that the Lord has shown you,
because you heard the word of God.

The word of God restores Abraham’s agency.

He is no longer merely the son of Terah; he becomes the protagonist of his own story.

God speaks life in the midst of a history marked by death, darkness, and barrenness.

Abram hears this word and sets out on his journey, leaving the past behind, symbolized by Terah,
and opening himself to the future.

2. GOING OUT IS ENTERING IN

The expression *lech-lecha* – “go forth,” “you, go” – is an interesting construction.

It could be translated as “you should go,” “go forth, you,” or even “go for yourself” –
for your own benefit, for your own good.

The expression also contains a movement “toward oneself.”

And so, going out is at the same time entering in.

But not a self-directed, autonomous “going into oneself.”

Rather, it is entering into oneself, and also into one’s own history, in complete surrender to the will of God.

A person’s vocation does not simply erase the past.

Rather, through the power of God Himself, through His word, it gives meaning to what seemed
meaningless in that person’s history.

3. THE SECOND “LECH-LECHA”

The Hebrew expression *lech-lecha* occurs only twice in the Bible.

And both times, it appears in the story of Abraham.

The first time is at the beginning, in the passage we have just heard.

But it also appears at another equally dramatic moment, in the twenty-second chapter of the Book of Genesis.

There, God tells Abraham to go forth to the land of Moriah, where he is to offer his beloved, his only son Isaac.

Lech-lecha is a kind of bracket around Abraham's life.

The first time, Abraham leaves his past behind.

The second time, he is asked to leave his future behind.

Sister Damiana, in your vocation, God invites you to surrender both your past and your future.

God is the One who, just as He did for Abraham, gives you a promise.

4. THE PROMISE

But is God's promise really about how many descendants Abraham will have, or how much land he will possess?

As Abraham walks with the Lord, living in the tension between the fulfillment and the apparent non-fulfillment of the promise, he discovers something far more important:

GOD HIMSELF IS HIS PROMISE.

This is also what the religious vows are about.

We can embrace chastity, poverty, and obedience.

We make a promise to God.

But God promises us something incomparably greater:

He gives us Himself.

Because we know that the point is not how much land we will possess, or how many descendants we will have.

The point is that we have a relationship with God.

As Jesus will say:

"Abraham, your father, rejoiced because he saw my day; he saw it and was glad." (Jn 8:56)

5. FRANCIS – THE TESTAMENT

The discovery that God alone is enough is an experience shared by many saints.

Soon, on October fourth, we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of when Saint Francis of Assisi himself "saw the day of the Lord".

Shortly before his death, sometime around the end of September or beginning of October, Francis dictated his Testament, which begins:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way. While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.

There were many turning points in Francis's journey as he answered God's call to conversion.

But when Francis speaks about himself, he chooses one event as particularly significant: his encounter with the lepers.

"The Lord Himself led me among them," he said.

Again: "You, go."

One of his biographers, Thomas of Celano, tells us in the *Memoriale* how Francis overcame his fear of another human being.

One day, while riding on horseback, he encountered a leper who asked him for alms.

Francis did not simply remain on his horse and toss the man a coin.

He got off his horse.

He approached the man.

He kissed him.

He showed him love.

What was bitter became sweet.
Love turns the order of things upside down.
It is through the suffering of another person that Francis discovered his own sin and his own weakness.
It is in another human being that he discovered Christ Himself.

Ecce homo.
Behold the man.

This encounter is face to face.
St. Brother Albert did exactly the same thing.

Notice, dear Sister, how your veil and religious habit leave your face and hands visible, so that another person may encounter Christ in you, and you may encounter Christ in him.

The face of the Other calls you to responsibility, regardless of whether the Other is convenient for you, attractive to you, or similar to you.

This was the experience of St Francis and St Brother Albert.

It was also the experience of Blessed Sister Bernardyna, who said:

“The suffering of my neighbor is mine as well.”

And in a particular way, it was the experience of your patron saint, St Damien of Molokai, the nineteenth-century Flemish priest who gave his life in service to people suffering from leprosy in the Hawaiian Islands.

6. THE GOSPEL: “REMAIN IN ME”

Sister Damiana,

In a moment, during the rite of religious profession, you will be asked whether you wish
“to devote your whole life to the service of the least, the poorest, the most abandoned, and those most distant from Christ, by sharing their simple living conditions, their work, and their poverty.”

Where are you going to find the love and strength for all of this?

Jesus gives us the answer.

“Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

Without me you can do nothing.

The first reading says:

GO FORTH.

The Gospel says:

REMAIN.

This is not a contradiction.

Go out of yourself, but do not go away from Me.

CONCLUSION: GO FORTH AND REMAIN

Sister Damiana,

today Jesus says to you:

“Go forth.”

And at the same time:

“Remain in me.”

Go forth from what is familiar, from what you would like to secure and control, from what you would like to be able to predict.

Go forth toward the human person, especially the least, the poorest, the most abandoned.
But remain in Me.

Because only then will your going forth not become a scattering of yourself, and your love will not burn itself out in service.

Today you surrender your past and your future to God.

And He gives you Himself.

Perhaps this is the deepest meaning of your first religious vows:

It is not about where you will ultimately arrive.

It is not about how much you will accomplish.

It is about the One with whom you will walk.

So, Sister Damiana, go forth.

And remain.

Go forth toward the human person.

Remain in Christ.

And then what is bitter may become sweet.

May your life be such that, after encountering you, another is able to say:

In this face, in these hands, in this love, I encountered Christ.