

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT, CYCLE B

*Gen. 22: 1-2, 9a, 10-13; 15-18 + Psalm 116 + Romans 8: 31b-34 + Mark 9: 2-10*

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: March 1, 2015

Abraham has had a long relationship with God.

Abraham's trust in God has been tested numerous times, and with every test his trust grows in God's goodness and generosity.

As Abraham looks back on his life, he can clearly see in every time of testing, God provided him what he needed.

There is the first test---obedience to the call to leave everything he knew behind.

He obeyed God's summons to leave his home in Haran and strike out on an adventure where God promised him land and many descendants.

Along the way, there is the dust-up with the Pharaoh in Egypt, where he almost lost his wife, Sarah, to the most powerful man in the land.

Even in the big mess-up with Hagar, when Abraham, still childless, decides to take things into his own hands and produce a son

through Sarah's maidservant, God provides a way forward.

Read chapters 12-22 of Genesis and notice the other tests Abraham endures, like the one with Lot, so that Abraham's faith, forged in the flames of testing and trial, might be more precious than fire-tried gold.

Finally, at an age way beyond the ability to generate a child,

God grants Abraham a son, Isaac, the child of promise.

God provides a miracle in flesh and bone from the sterile womb of elderly Sarah.

But now comes the ultimate test of Abraham's faith,

the ultimate test of Abraham's trust that God will provide.

God asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, the child in whom all the promises of God reside, Abraham's only son, the apple of his eye, his beloved.

Now we wonder, what kind of God is this who commands a father to sacrifice his only son? What kind of God would make such a horrific request?

In order to understand the power of this sacred story, we need to walk around in the world in which Abraham lives.

Abraham lives in a world where child sacrifice is common.

Parents would sacrifice their children to the gods in order to appease them, in order to ensure a good harvest, in order to remain in the favor of the gods.

Because this was thousands of years before the age of science, the ancient people did not understand the causes of drought and disease--- they saw these happenings as punishment from the gods for something they, the people had done, to make the gods angry.

In order to be on the good side of the gods, the very best gift was required--- the gift of their very own flesh, their very own child.

Now we “enlightened” ones who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century quickly condemn such barbaric behavior, but in the time of Abraham, it was the norm.

It was the way people tried to find some measure of control in a world largely out of their control.

For they lived in a state of constant dread and anxiety.

Even when the harvest was bountiful because of plentiful rain and sunshine, they thought they owed the gods something for this bounty, and the ultimate sacrifice, one of their children, would be a proper expression of gratitude.

So, either out of sense of having done something terribly wrong to offend the gods and thus cause a shortage of foodstuff, or out of a sense of gratitude for a good harvest, the ancient people were constantly trying to placate the gods of sun and rain, the earth and the sky.

They were always anxious and fearful, believing in gods who took from them, who were angry and against them, who always had to be pleased, or else their wrath would fall upon the people.

Abraham thinks he, too, needs to pay the ultimate price to the God who has called him to be a “Father of a Great Nation”, who has vowed to give him the “Promised Land.” But in this sacred story, which has captured the imagination of Jews, Christians, and Muslims (since Abraham is the father of these 3 great religions),

we discover an important truth about the God of Abraham---

He is not against Abe, he is for Abe; he is not a God who takes life, but a God who gives life; he is not a vengeful, bloodthirsty god but a God of mercy.

But before the God of Abraham proves how he is different from the others gods, Isaac’s life hangs in the balance.

The editors of our lectionary have omitted verses 3-8 in Chapter 22, which are an important part of this sacred story.

On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of their journey, Abraham spots Mt. Moriah.

Then Abraham and Isaac leave the servants and begin to walk up the mountain, with Isaac carrying the wood for the holocaust and Abraham the knife and the fire.

As they make their way to the mountain top, Isaac throws out a zinger of a question. “Father, here are the fire and the wood, but where is the sheep for the holocaust?” Abraham’s reply reveals his deep, abiding trust in the God, even while dread weighs him down: “*God himself will provide the sheep for the holocaust.*”

So God does, sending an angel to stay the knife, and providing a ram for the offering in place of Isaac. God provides.

Verse 14 is also left out of today’s account, where Abraham names the site, “*Yahweh-yireh*” a Hebrew expression meaning “*the Lord will see,*” or better yet, in reference to Abe’s reply to Isaac about where the animal for sacrifice will come from, “*God himself will see to it.*”

What kind of God would ask a father to sacrifice his son?

Not the God of Abraham, not the God of Jesus Christ.

Moreover, God blesses Abraham, and assures Abraham of something even more—that Abraham’s descendants will be a blessing for generations to come.

That includes you and me, since we are descendants of Abraham, for he is our Father in faith.

Such is the extravagant love of God for humankind, a love we see evident in his Son, Jesus Christ.

Our Heavenly Father did not spare his only Son, but handed him over for us all.

This God of ours gives us, out of love, the very best he has to give, his only Son. Our Heavenly Father sees the people to whom he has given life and provided every good thing on the earth are lost and cannot find their way back home to him, the Provider of Life and giver of all good things.

It is this God and Father who out of love hands over his Son, entrusting that which is most precious to Him to us, in order that we might know how much we are loved and might find our way, through the Son, back home to our Heavenly Father.

Therefore, it is not we who are called to sacrifice what is most dear to us, but God who sacrifices what is most dear to God.

This is our God---a God who is **for** us, never against us.

Even when we feel like God has turned against us during times of suffering or tragedy, the truth of the matter is that God is **with** us in His Son,

who freely chooses to embrace all the suffering and tragedy of humanity.

God-in-Christ does not shake his fist at us in anger, but as we look to the cross, opens his hands in self-giving love to all those who suffer,

opens his arms from the cross on the Mount of Calvary to embrace all of humanity.

This is the great Good News that Jesus, the beloved son of the Father, announces to the world both in word and deed, by his life and death and resurrection:

God is always for us. God is always on our side.

God will provide everything we need.

The Son of God dies on a cross, the sinless one in place of us sinners, sacrificing his life that we might live as beloved sons and daughters of the Father.

Along with Peter, James, and John, we need to listen to him, listen to Jesus and learn from him about God's providential love.

For Jesus daily depends on the Father providing Jesus what he needs, so that when death comes the Beloved Son trusts that the Father will make a way forward for him into the glory of resurrected life.

In Jesus, God stretches out his hand to feed our hunger for divine life and love.

From the glory of the mountaintop of the holy Eucharist, God provides all we need.

The Risen Lord comes to us as food for the journey, as the saving drink of salvation, revealing to us the Triune God:

God the Father who is **for us**, Christ Jesus the Son who is **with us**, and the Holy Spirit who lives **within us**.

The Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—blesses us with abundant life.

So we might become the open hand of God to others, providing what they need.

Generously, joyfully, and lovingly.

*Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi*