

February 25, 2018

Gen 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Rom 8:31b-34; Mk 9:2-10

Our first reading can be a bit disturbing. I know that at our bible study this week there were some mixed feelings. You may wonder why God asks Abraham to offer up his only son as a human sacrifice in the first place. But as we are going to see, there is more to this story. God actually doesn't want Abraham to kill his son, he is trying to teach a lesson. This is one of the great stories that prefigures the saving death and resurrection of Jesus - a death and resurrection that opens for us the great possibilities. These possibilities are shown in the transfiguration of Jesus that we hear about in the Gospel. But we all have to go beyond the wonder of revelation and out into the world. What does this mean for us - how can it inform our lives?

One thing it shows us is the nature of Love. Love has a cost - in fact love must cost, or it's not true love. There is this young man I know. He has this habit that when he says "goodbye" he also says, "I love you." Now he says this to lots of people. People who are family to him, friends he cares about, girls he disrespects and does not care about, people he is trying to manipulate for something, and even me. I know that he just says it sometimes as a reflex, and sometimes because he actually does mean it - but it feels like a hollow statement most of the time. These words have no cost for him. He doesn't allow himself to be bound to a commitment to anyone by them, he will always do what is in his best interest over anyone else's. To say words and to do actions are two different things - to speak a commitment and to act in commitment are two different things.

We hear in the first reading that *God put Abraham to the test*. He tells him to go and to kill his son and offer him as a human sacrifice. To understand what God is asking you have to know two things. First, it was the accepted practice in Abraham's time for people to offer their child in sacrifice to the pagan gods. So actually, the command God gives would have seemed reasonable to Abraham (who was still learning who the real God was). But the true God didn't invent humans sacrificing humans - humans did. Secondly, it is important to remember was that Abraham was a very old man, and his wife was also elderly and had already passed through menopause. This child that they conceived was not only a miracle from God - but was the only hope of God fulfilling his promise to give Abraham decedents. There was ***absolutely nothing*** more precious to Abraham than his son. On this son the whole promise of living on in the person of his ancestors was assured, this son was his proof that the God had been speaking to him was real. To give up this child would be a real cost - in essence, out of love for God, Abraham was willing to give the most precious thing he had - he was willing to give up his very self. God stops Abraham because God never wanted him to do it. God changes the misguided notion of

what pleases God and establishes a new pattern of sacrifice that was used by the Jews in the temple. In this system they offered an animal in sacrifice to “redeem” a human. Like Issac, from that point on people live because another is sacrificed in their place.

But why does God choose to keep this pattern of redemption through sacrifice? Couldn't God just decide to cancel our sins by a heavenly document or a simple word - yes God could. But in some ways that act of love would wring as hollow as the statement of “I love you” from the young man I told you about. God would be canceling everything without a cost, without a demonstration of the reality of the depth of the love God holds for us. God leaves in place the system humans created because at some level humans can understand how powerful a sacrifice this is. God offers himself up in place of us for the forgiveness of all of our sins. This God must REALLY love us he is willing to offer the most precious thing possible - God offers the second person of the Trinity - God offers God's very self for each one of us - it is a limitless sacrifice that applies to every person who will ever live. God redeems us by being sacrificed in our place and in place of our children. What more could God do to really act out the words “I love you.” We heard in the second reading: *He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?* There is no limit to this love.

But what does this mean for us and how does it inform our lives? When Jesus is transfigured in the Gospel he shows not only who he is, but who we are meant to be. At the Transfiguration the apostles see into the eternal time of God where all time is the same moment, and they see Jesus as he will be after his resurrection. They get a glimpse of what those of us who are joined to the body of Jesus in Baptism - and remained joined to that Body - will be after we pass through death. Once redeemed by Christ's sacrifice, and cleansed from sin, we are now able to be joined to the Body of Christ. But knowing this is only half of it - seeing into the glory that can be ours is only half of it - the message of the story is clear, the only way to get to what they saw in this revelation is to go back down the mountain and into the world. The path of Jesus is what leads him to his transfiguration - so too this path of Jesus - and walking with Jesus his what leads us to our transfiguration. God shows the depth of love by a gut wrenching sacrifice that makes transfiguration possible - what ways are we willing to show our love? We hear in Psalm 40: *Burnt offerings and sin-offering you do not request; so I said, “See; I come ... I delight to do your will, my God.”* The transfiguration is meant to affect the way we live our lives now - it shows us a revelation of what Christ has made possible for us by his sacrifice. What will we sacrifice for God and others this Lent and then send forward to be joined to that one sacrifice of Jesus during Mass? How will we respond in love to the great and costly sacrifice of love that God has made for us?