



Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration

## The Second Sunday of Lent

February 25, 2018

Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish

### Today's Scriptures

Ten generations after Noah, God began to choose a people for himself. To these people, he would reveal himself as the one and only God. He would give them his Law for guidance and would speak to them through the Prophets. He would make a covenant with his chosen people and would remain faithful to them.

To find this people, God started with one man: Abraham. God needed someone who could be trusted, someone willing to follow his directions, even though he could not understand God's will, his reasons for asking. So God tested Abraham. Like every person created in God's image, Abraham had the freedom to choose to do as God asked. When he was called to leave his family and homeland, Abraham obeyed, leaving behind his land, his family, everything he knew. Though he and his wife were old and infertile, God promised Abraham many descendants; Abraham trusted God to keep that impossible promise. Finally, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his beloved Isaac, the child born to fulfill God's promise. This was Abraham's ultimate test. How much was Abraham willing to trust God? When God saw that Abraham's trust was absolute, that he was willing to give up the life of his only child in order to obey him, God made Abraham the father of the people that he would set aside for himself. Through his descendants, God would send his promised one to redeem the world.

There are echoes of the story of Abraham and Isaac in St. Paul's assurances to the Roman Christians that God can indeed be trusted. The early Christians could not see God's will or protection in the discord, suffering, and persecutions they were facing. St. Paul reminded them that God had willingly given up his son Jesus to accomplish his will for them. God's will was to free them from the consequences of sin and restore them to new and eternal life with himself. St. Paul believed that no suffering or persecution in this life should alter one's faith in the God who spared nothing in order to give his children everything.

The Gospel reading for the Second Sunday of Lent is always the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus. In this story, Jesus took his three closest disciples, Peter, James, and John up a mountain, where his appearance underwent an extraordinary transformation. Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Jesus. The disciples were terrified. Peter proposed building tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah, something that was done during the harvest festival of Sukkoth, when some Jews believed that the Messiah might appear. Then God spoke to the disciples, identifying Jesus as his beloved son and bidding that they to listen to him. In his transfiguration, the disciples saw a glimpse of Jesus glorified but they did not understand this. This was what awaited Jesus, and them, as they trusted in God and obeyed his will wherever it led.

Please pray for Alpha.

### Sunday Readings and Backgrounds

#### Reading I: Genesis 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18

Because you trusted me, I will bless you greatly.

- In the story of the sacrifice of Isaac, the sin of disobedience that brought alienation and death is healed by obedience.
- The Canaanites believed the first born belonged to God.
- Abraham's test of faith emphasizes the fact that God demands obedience, not sacrifice.

#### Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 116: 10.15.16-17, 18-19

I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

#### Reading II: Romans 8:31-34

Who can be against us?

- The reading from Romans presents a parallel to God's demand on Abraham.
- God does not demand the sacrifice of Abraham's son as a price of the covenant relationship.
- God does sacrifice the life of his own Son to preserve the covenant relationship with humankind.

#### Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

He was transfigured before their eyes!

- The story of Jesus' transfiguration is full of symbolism.
- The images of cloud and mountain suggest Mount Sinai.
- Moses, the major figure in Exodus and the Sinai covenant, represents the law, and Elijah, the great ninth-century prophet of Israel, represents the prophets.
- Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and the prophets.

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# Here I Am

Today we hear the Genesis account of God's test of Abraham. Often when we think of Abraham as the man of great faith, we are remembering his leaving everything behind in order to go to the land God was preparing, in order to receive the promise that his descendants would be as uncountable as the stars. It is easier to think of that than of the day when God tested Abraham's faith by asking for Isaac.

As we read this narrative, we need to put aside our Western mindset and allow the Genesis author to lead us. The storyteller is talking about God and Abraham. This is not a story about Isaac, and focusing on him and his trauma will only lead us away from the question of the test God gave Abraham and what it tells us about the two of them.

God called to Abraham who responded, "Here I am," literally, "Behold me." On one hand, "Here I am" was the typical answer to hearing one's name called. In some cases, it carries a deeper commitment. "Behold me" could proclaim "See, I am here to do anything you command."

When Abraham said that, God did the unthinkable. The God who had led Abraham from his homeland, the God who had given him the promise of a land and progeny beyond counting said, "Take your son Isaac, the one you love, and offer him up as a holocaust." In effect, God was saying, "You gave up everything based on my promise, and I gave you the son who would fulfill that promise. Now, do you love me enough to give it all back?" Unlike Job from whom God took everything away, God asked Abraham to give it back freely, to sacrifice everything he had ever hoped for and all he had received in willing obedience to God.

Although our translations don't indicate it, God's command was gentle. God said, "Please." God made no threat about what would happen if Abraham didn't do as he was bidden. We simply hear the instruction to take Isaac, go to a place God would reveal, and to offer him as a sacrifice. Unlike prophets who protested that they were too young or speech-impaired or afraid, Abraham spoke not a word. He set out to do what he was commanded.

As we know, at the last minute, God again called. This time with an urgent "Abraham! Abraham!" In telling Abraham not to harm the boy, God said, "I know now."

We might see Abraham's test as inhuman, too great a demand. Most parents would say, "I would give my life for my child," but would balk at giving their child. The message of this story, the example of Abraham is one that has been pondered in the Scriptures, the Christian tradition and in world literature. It leads us to the core question of discipleship: What does God ask of us? Just how sovereign is God?

In the reading from Romans, St. Paul turns this the story inside out. While Genesis asked us to ponder what God can ask of us, Paul proclaims what God offers us. When Paul says, "God did not spare his own Son," he is implicitly comparing God to Abraham. Yet, whereas Abraham's test probed how much a creature might be asked to give the sovereign God, what humanity owes to its Maker, Paul says that the God who owes us nothing sacrifices everything for us. In Paul's mind, God is the sacrifice. Genesis presented us with the test of faith: How much do we owe God, how much are we willing to give God? Paul says that God's love, God's self-giving for humanity is immeasurable and that Christ's death and resurrection are the proof of that.

Today, this reading prepares us to hear the story of the Transfiguration, and challenges us to allow our concept of God to be transformed and amplified. The dazzling appearance of Jesus on the mountain is a sign of all the good God offers us. This week's readings give us a Lenten invitation to contemplate the image of God they present. Instead of calling us to say "Here I am," God tells us "Behold me in the Son." Then, God give us the same command that came from the cloud: "Listen to him."

Mary McGlone, CSJ

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