

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Second Sunday of Lent

### **First reading:**

(Genesis 22.1-2, 9-13, 15-18)

*The Sacrifice of Isaac*

Every parent must be moved by this terrible and touching story. How could a parent do such a thing? And the boy was Abraham's last hope for the survival of his family, granted to him to fulfil God's promise. The narrative becomes slower as they approach the point. Note how Isaac is allowed to carry the wood, but Abraham carefully carries anything on which the child might hurt himself, the fire and the knife. One can imagine the jaunty boy trotting along beside dad, bouncing questions at him, and dad's monosyllabic answers as he nears the moment he dreads. Yet he trusted in God right up to the brink of disaster, somehow confident that God would rescue him from this terrible deed. As Paul stresses, it was not anything Abraham did that justified him, not his obedient action, but his total trust in God. Can I claim such total trust in God's love?

The tradition of the Church sees in this tragic story a 'prequel' of God's offering his only, beloved Son for the salvation of the human race, a mysterious preparation for that supreme offering which we celebrate at Easter. The goal of this season of Lent is kept before our eyes as we advance along the way.

### **Question:**

How could a loving father do this?

### **Second reading:**

(Romans 8.31-35, 37)

*Paul rejoices in God's love*

Paul reflects on God's love: if God loved us sufficiently to deliver up his son for us, there is no limit to his love.

Paul begins the letter by exposing the human race as mired in sin. Of this the sin, the disobedience of Adam - and 'Adam' means 'man' in Hebrew - is the symbol. Then Paul shows that the perfect, loving obedience of the Second Adam, Christ, to his Father unravels our disobedience, and set us steady again in God's love.

The Cross is the supreme act of love: Jesus loves his Father even to death. God accepts this death out of love for the human race. Nothing, continues Paul, can separate us from this love, not life or death, not human or superhuman powers.

As an example of this love, he then shows how even the Jews who rejected Jesus remain God's beloved people. In the end, they, too, will be saved by that love.

### **Question:**

Do you see Christ's obedience as the heart of his sacrifice?

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## **Gospel:**

*(Mark 9.2-10)*

### *The Transfiguration*

As the time of the Passion approaches, the foreboding of the disciples grows. Jesus sustains them by this vivid experience of his more than natural nature.

On the Holy Mountain of revelation, they see him transformed. It was a real visual experience, albeit described in symbols familiar from the Bible, brilliant white clothes and so on. Moses and Elijah are seen there because they also had experienced the vision of God on the Holy Mountain. For Moses, this was at the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai; for Elijah, in the cave of Mount Horeb.

The disciples were frightened, confused and overcome at the awesome experience, and yet comforted in a way which made Peter want to prolong it. This will later be the rare reaction of Christian mystics, a reassuring terror and a frightening homeliness, the awareness of a presence that is at the same time awesome and comforting, an experience that cannot fully be put into words. The Voice from Heaven is an echo of the Voice at Jesus' Baptism. There, however, it was addressed to Jesus, whereas here it is spoken to the disciples, proclaiming Jesus as authorized teacher, the extension of that same divine voice.

## **Question:**

Is fear the right attitude we should have to God?

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