

2nd Sunday of Lent, Year B, February 28th, 2021

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

Abraham lived 1500 to 2000 years before Christ. God has been true to his promise: he has given Abraham a son by Sarah. Now it is Abraham who should show his fidelity to God by being ready to sacrifice his son in recognition that the boy belongs to God. The firstborn of every creature belonged to God—a way of proclaiming God's sovereignty. And each firstborn was to be "redeemed" by the substitution of an animal sacrifice. We were reminded of this tradition just a few weeks ago when we celebrated the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple and offered the customary sacrifice (a pair of turtledoves or young pigeons) to fulfill the Mosaic Law.²

1God put Abraham to the test. Here we see God testing Abraham, not to trip him up, but to develop his character. Just as fire refines ore to bring out the precious metals, God refines us through difficult times and events. We have two ways to go when we are tested: we can complain, or we can try to see how God is stretching us to develop our character.⁵ He called to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am!" he replied.

2Then God said: "Take your son Isaac, your only one, God identifies Isaac as his "only son" because Ishmael has already been lost in Abraham's eyes because he and his mother have been sent away and are living in the desert of Beersheba. Isaac is from Sara, Abraham's wife while Ishmael is from Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant.¹⁴ whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. Later this hill would be called "Salem," and still later, "Jerusalem."¹ In 2 Chronicles 3:1 it is identified with the mountain on which the temple of Jerusalem was built, to stress the holiness of that site.⁶ There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you." Abraham, the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son.⁴ (CCC 2572) Isaac must have been at least a teenager at this point because, as we learn in a few verses, he carried the wood up the mountain (a figure of Christ carrying his cross) while Abraham carried the fire (matches hadn't been invented yet) and the knife.¹⁴

9When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

10Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son. The main point of this story is Abraham's faith. He obeys God even when God's command does not make sense to him. He entrusts to God his whole future, which is represented by Isaac. Because of Abraham's faithfulness, at the end of the story the angel reaffirms God's promises to him.³

11But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven, "Abraham, Abraham!" "Here I am!" he answered.

12"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger. "Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son." God is satisfied just by Abraham's sincere intention to do what he asked of him. It is as good as if he had actually done the deed.⁶

13As Abraham looked about, he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket. Hebrew legend says that one horn was cut off to free the ram and this became the first shofar (the trumpet used to call the people to prayer and to war).¹⁴ So he went and took the ram and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. Some of the Church Fathers see this ram as a prefigurement of Jesus Christ, insofar as, like Christ, the ram was offered in sacrifice in order to save man.⁶

15Again the Lord's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said:

16 “I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son,

17 I will bless you abundantly and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants shall take possession of the gates of their enemies, This is the third covenant God makes with Abraham. In Genesis 12:2-3 God promised Abram three things: 1) Land which was the subject of the covenant of Genesis 15 and was fulfilled in Moses, 2) Royal dynasty which was the subject of the covenant of Genesis 17:1-19 and was fulfilled in David, and 3) Worldwide blessing which was the subject of the covenant made here and was fulfilled in Jesus the Christ.¹⁴

18 and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command.” Other people’s lives were changed because of the obedience of Abraham. (Since we are the only Bible some people read, others may be changed because of us!) Jesus Christ himself will be the descendant in whom all the nations of the earth shall find blessing.⁴ (CCC 706)

Romans 8:31b-34

Brothers and sisters: Having discussed the various aspects of the new Christian life in union with Christ and the reasons that give a basis to Christian hope, Paul concludes this section with a triumphant hymn to the love of God that is made manifest in Christ Jesus.⁸

31b **If God is for us, who can be against us?** St. Ambrose writes: “The Lord who has taken away your sin and pardoned your faults also protects you and keeps you from the wiles of your adversary the devil, so that the enemy, who is accustomed to leading into sin, may not surprise you. ONE WHO ENTRUSTS HIMSELF TO GOD DOES NOT DREAD THE DEVIL.”⁴ (CCC 2852)

32 **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?** The words that Paul uses of God are the very words that God used of Abraham when Abraham proved his utter loyalty to God by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac at God’s command. God said to Abraham: “You did not spare your only son for my sake.” Paul seems to say: “Think of the greatest human example in the world of a man’s loyalty to God: God’s loyalty to you is like that.” Just as Abraham was so loyal to God that he was prepared to sacrifice his dearest possession for the sake of God, God is so loyal to men that he is prepared to sacrifice his only Son for them. Surely we can trust a loyalty like that for anything!⁷

33 **Who will bring a charge against God’s chosen ones?**

34 **It is God who acquits us, who will condemn? Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.** Intercession is a prayer of petition and supplication. Jesus is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners. He is able to save those who draw near to God through him.⁴ (CCC 2634) All that is needed is that we desire to receive this divine help.⁹ In Hebrews this intercession is linked with Christ’s priesthood.⁸

Mark 9:2-10

On the Second Sunday of Lent we always hear the story of the Transfiguration, which is now the 4th Luminous Mystery of the Rosary. This year the reading is from Mark who is very concerned about the true identity and mission of Jesus. He has Jesus silence the apostles so they will not overemphasize the glory of his relationship with God. The secret that is not yet revealed is that Jesus is not going to fulfill messianic expectations that center on glory, majesty and triumph over foreign nations. Rather, he will accomplish his mission by undergoing the agony of death on a cross.²

2Jesus took Peter, James and John These three who were so close to Jesus were also present with him at the bringing back to life of Jairus' daughter, and they will be the closest to him in the agony of Gethsemane.¹¹ These three are the only apostles who Jesus renamed: Simon became "Peter" which means "rock", while James and John were called "Boanerges" which means "sons of thunder." **and led them up a high mountain** This "high mountain" is traditionally identified with Mt. Tabor in southern Galilee. Theologically, this mountain is the New Covenant counterpart to Mt. Sinai, where Jesus manifests his divine splendor just as God revealed his glory to Moses on Sinai¹⁰: 1)both take place on the seventh day; 2)both occur on a mountain; 3)both Jesus and Moses take three companions with them; 4)the faces of both Jesus and Moses shine with God's glory; 5)both involve the glory-cloud of God's Presence; and 6)both events involve God speaking through a heavenly voice.⁽⁸⁾ **apart by themselves.** The principals in the story are Jesus, Moses, Elijah and God. The witnesses are Peter, James and John. According to Deut. 19:15, two or three witnesses must concur in bearing witness to anything.¹¹ **And he was transfigured** Jesus freely renounced his divine glory and became man in order to redeem us by his passion and death. He became like us in every way but sin. Here Jesus willed that the glory that was always his as God should be revealed in his body.¹¹ **before them,** The Transfiguration balances out the shock of Jesus' first Passion prediction in 8:31-33, strengthening the faith of his three closest friends who are destined for special leadership positions in the early Church. Beholding the glory of Jesus assures them of his divine Sonship and shows them the glory that they will receive if they stay by his side.¹⁰ Seeing the splendor of his divine glory is meant to encourage them to follow the difficult way that lies ahead and to see what lies on the other side of the cross. **GOOD FRIDAY WILL HAVE AN EASTER SUNDAY!** This applies to us as well for "the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." (Rom. 8:18)

3and his clothes became dazzling white, White clothing is a frequent apocalyptic image of otherworldly glory.⁸ **such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.** A fuller was one who was in the business of cleaning and whitening cloth. It was carried on outside the city of Jerusalem where the "fuller's field" is mentioned.¹²

4Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Moses, Israel's law giver, had been dead for some 1500 years. Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, had been whirled up into the sky 800 years before and the prophet Malachi had said (4:5) that God would send him "before the coming of the great and awe-filled day of the Lord."⁽¹³⁾ These two were both connected with Sinai and by their presence on the new Sinai they witness to the fulfillment of the OT in Jesus.⁸

5Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, "Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." The tents referred to here are small shelters like those in which the Israelites dwell during the liturgical feast of Booths. Peter requests to build these shelters in his desire to prolong the heavenly experience.¹⁰

6He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. As in Gethsemane, Peter is lost for words at the mystery of Christ.⁸

7Then a cloud came, The cloud was an OT image of God's presence.⁸ **casting a shadow over them;** Overshadowing is also an OT image. It described God's dwelling among his people. The fact that the disciples too are overshadowed by the cloud shows that, far from being mere spectators, they are deeply involved in the mystery of Christ's glorification as representatives of the new people of God.⁸ **from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."** Like Jesus' Baptism, this event reveals the Trinity: the Father's voice is heard, the Son is transfigured (9:2), and the Spirit is

present in the cloud.¹⁰ Jesus is now the prophet like Moses whose teaching must be heeded under penalty of extermination from God's people.⁸

⁸Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them. When the vision ends, the disciples see only Jesus, suggesting that he replaces both the Law and the prophets in the new age.³

⁹As they were coming down from the mountain, he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone, except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead. The disciples are told not to tell others about the vision, indicating a concern that people will seek the glory without the cross. Only after the passion and the resurrection can this event be properly understood.³

¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant. The belief in a collective resurrection was accepted by many Jews during NT times. Only the Sadducees expressly denied it. The disciples are here perplexed that Jesus speaks of an individual resurrection, since they as yet had no clear understanding of a dying and rising Messiah.¹⁰

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) The Commentary Notes of Tim Grey, (2) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (5) "The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (6) "The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch," (7) "The Letter to The Romans" by William Barclay, (8) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (9) "The Navarre Bible: Romans and Galatians," (10) "Ignatius: The Gospel of Mark" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "The Navarre Bible: St. Mark," (12) "Smith's Bible Dictionary", (13) "To Know Christ Jesus" by Frank Sheed, and (14) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.