

Homily For the 2nd Sunday of Lent - Year B

St. Peter's 10/12/5 Sunday Masses - February 28, 2021

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-18 "Take your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and offer him on the mountain."

Psalms 116:9-19 "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones."

Rom 8:31-37 "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all, will give us everything."

Mark 9:2-10 "From the cloud there came a voice: This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!."

Answer That Call

Introduction

It's nice if you have a way of identifying who is calling on your phone. You can decide whether it is a friend or a scam, family member or a solicitation to buy or donate. How many times have you answered a call, then regretted it. Do you want new windows, your furnace ducts cleaned, your lawn aerated?

Abraham got a call with the biggest test of his long life. Possibly he wished he hadn't answered a chilling request. Peter got invited to go up a mountain, where he was terrified by a demonstration of a cleaning product even better than bleach. It terrified him so much he just babbled almost incoherently let alone make a decision about whether to buy into it.

Abraham was tested. Peter was terrified. Jesus was transfigured. But that's not where it ends. These events lead to a call you and I will have to decide whether to take or not this Lent. We will be asked to make a decision about our own lives and whether the one calling can be trusted in our own lives. Testing, terrifying, transfiguring and trusting.

Tested

Every call from the Lord seemed like a test to Abraham. First it was: Take everything you own and move a thousand miles away. Then later: Try not to laugh when an angel promises a child in the old age for you and your wife, Sarah. Then,

the test of no calls for ten years waiting for that promised child while you and your wife get really old. You know, in ancient middle east culture, not to have a child is equal to not having a relationship with the gods. You have nothing to offer, either in this generation or the generations to come.

Speaking of offering, that son is born and growing up strong and obedient, an overwhelming joy to his mother and father. But, then, out of the blue, another call to Abraham from God. Now, if someone knew what that call would be about, they would say: Don't answer, Abe! What does Abraham do? Looks like God's plan is working out just fine. So he answers: Here I am. But God says: Abraham, take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.

Now there is nothing in the Scriptures to tell us about Abraham's shock or disbelief or anguish at this demand. But I think we can imagine all of the above. I have a son, an only son, a beloved son, and I certainly would not obey such a shocking demand. But this is a different time. In the ancient Middle East, the gods of the people *do* demand the sacrifice of their children. That's how people show their allegiance. Perhaps we shouldn't be that shocked, considering the ways we sometimes sacrifice our children today: To the gods of choice, or technology or pornography.

Still, we can imagine Abraham declaring: I know that's your right, but you promised a son through whom you would make a great nation which would one day be a blessing to the world. Now you want me to kill my beloved son as an offering to you? And yet, there was Abraham, packing the wood for the fire and the knife for ... well, you know.

What about Isaac? He has all the confidence in the world of his father's love. But, when they get to Moriah, he gets the message from his father and finds out that *he is* the sacrifice. So, Isaac carried the wood for the sacrifice, obediently allowed his father to tie him, climbed on the altar himself, for most certainly his 100 year old father could not force him, then waited obediently and in silence for the deadly blow his father was about to strike.

In a movie about this event from the book of Genesis, Isaac asks his father: Is there nothing that this God cannot ask of us? In our dark moments, times that feel like death, we might forget to trust that God tests those whom he loves because God has a plan for us, as he promises in Jeremiah 29, for your good, not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

Transfigured

Like Abraham, Peter had received a call from Jesus. Some local teacher got into his boat and said, let's go catch some fish. After a huge catch, the teacher said: From now on you will be catching people. Over time, Peter had come to hope that this teacher, Jesus, was the Messiah, the promised saviour. However, he had no idea what test he would have to endure.

Jesus had begun to teach his disciples that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, priests and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. Then, Jesus takes three disciples up on a high mountain, and they saw divine glory burst forth from his body. We read that "his clothes became dazzling white, such as no bleach could make it." That sounds like a Tide advertisement. Peter was terrified by the glory of God in Jesus. It was too much for him. What the text tells us is that he started babbling about making tents for Jesus and Moses and Elijah so they could stay there.

Tempted

Abraham and Isaac must have been tempted not to do what they were asked, no matter what the cultural practices of the day. God shouldn't do that. It's just not nice. Peter was tempted to take what he saw and try to keep it for himself. We also experience the temptation to avoid the tests of our faith and to hang on to the high experiences of life.

There is a story from the Desert Fathers: Abbott John had prayed that all his temptations be taken from him. Having achieved this, he went to one of the elders and said: You see before you a man who is completely at peace. The elder told him to go out and pray that some struggle be stirred up in him. Only through

his struggles would he grow in the spiritual life. After that, Abbott John only prayed that God would give him strength to deal with his trials.

Trusted

Abraham reached out his hand for the knife. At that moment, God called again, through an angel. Again, Abraham answered: Here I am. That means he was still listening, even in that darkest of moments. The angel said: "Do not lay your hand on the boy, for now I know that you fear (or trust) God, for you have not withheld your son, your only son."

Every year on this Sunday in Lent, the Church celebrates the transfiguration of Jesus on a mountain, the shining forth of the glory of God in him. Another call came, directed at Peter and James and John: "This is My beloved Son. Listen to him." Moses and Elijah were there but God's voice did not say: "These are My beloved sons." This appearance of glory was the affirmation for Peter, James and John that Jesus is the Son of God, the chosen and the beloved, who is about to die for faithfulness to the Father, so that the world may trust and believe that God is only love.

Later, these three will be overcome with terror and grief as they wait by a garden while Jesus sweats blood while he prays to conform his will to the divine plan of salvation for the world. Later they will flee from the exact same spot at Calvary, also called Moriah, where he became the new Isaac, the new beloved son, whose sacrifice is carried out, not by a loving father, but by the hatred of the world.

Later, Peter will be strengthened by the memory of glory at the Mount of Transfiguration to proclaim to the world what they heard him say many times: "Do not be afraid. It is I." Today, Jesus has not stopped saying: "Do not be afraid. It is I."

St. Paul, in the second reading today, asks: "If God is for us, who can be against us? The answer is: No one. Paul uses exactly the same language said of Abraham. He who did not spare his own son has made us conquerors of every terror and every sin. What remains is for us to live in that glory, that love.

What Must We Do

Abraham didn't know exactly how the promise of blessing would be fulfilled. We do. It's Jesus Christ, who gave himself up for us. He is our Isaac, who carried the wood for his sacrifice, who let himself be placed on the altar of sacrifice.

The glory and the sacrifice of Jesus continues to be manifested. People like Fr. Kolbe gave himself in place of a fellow prisoner at a death camp who had a family to return to. I have a brother who turns 65 today. Happy birthday Paul. He is the only one with grandchildren, four of them. I would love it if he came to church with me, but I see how he pours out his life for those children and how he dedicates almost his whole life and how he would die for any of them without the least hesitation. That is the obedience of Isaac. It is the love of Jesus Christ himself. Christ is alive.

While still on earth, the disciples saw the divine glory shining in the body of Jesus. While still on earth, the faithful receive his Body and Blood and hear the Father's voice speaking to them in the depths of their hearts: "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him."

The Word of God invites us - calls us - to go up the mountain with Jesus, to see his glory, then go down the mountain and be with him in his agony, his passion. Or, to let him enter our agony, our passion. During his trial, the governor Pilate, showed Jesus, disfigured by scourging, to the people and said: "Behold the man." Today, as on that mountain, do not doubt that God the Father says to us right here and now: "Behold, my Son, my beloved. Listen to him." You can trust him with your pain, your emptiness, your longing, your doubt. He has proven himself trustworthy. All that remains this Lent is that we will trust him. Will we pick up the phone when it rings and say: Here I am. My trust is in your love and faithfulness.

Key Verses Today

Entrance Antiphon: *It is your face, O Lord, that I seek. Hide not your face from me. (or) Redeem us, O God of Israel, from all our distress.*

Collect: *O God, who have commanded us to listen to your beloved Son, be pleased, we pray, to nourish us inwardly by your word.*

Genesis: *God tested Abraham: Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering. Abraham and Isaac came to the place. Abraham built an altar and laid the wood. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son ... But the Angel of the Lord called to him: Abraham, Abraham! And he said: Here I am. The Angel said: Do not lay your hand on the boy, for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son. Abraham saw a ram and offered it up instead of his son. Says the Lord: Because you have not withheld your son, your only son, I will bless you and make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven. And, by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.*

Psalms: *I kept my faith, even when I said: I am greatly afflicted. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones. I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.*

Romans: *If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? It is Christ Jesus, who died and who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.*

Mark: *Jesus led them up a high mountain. And he was transfigured. His clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. Elijah and Moses were talking with Jesus. Peter said: Rabbi, let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. Peter did not know what to say, for they were terrified. From the cloud there came a voice: This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him! Suddenly, they saw only Jesus. He ordered them: Tell no one what you have seen until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.*