

2nd Sunday of Lent Year “B”

March 1, 2015

God will provide.

Readings: Genesis 22: 1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Romans 8: 31-34; Mark 9:2-10

At the root of many people’s struggles with faith is the realization that we ourselves are powerless, and that we must rely on another for our sustenance. Three simple words...*God will provide* is perhaps all we need to remind us of this utter dependence on one outside of ourselves. God has to provide, because we cannot.

The account in today’s first reading is one of the most widely known accounts in all of the Old Testament, and is selected for our consideration during Lent. It is the story of Abraham, called to sacrifice his only Son, Isaac, in obedience to the Lord God.

Perhaps you felt a certain amount of anger and disbelief when you first heard this account of Abraham and Isaac as a child. Perhaps you could not comprehend how a father would actually proceed to sacrifice his own son, to see him die. You would not be the only one to be puzzled by this account. Yet, such account gives rises to more profound reflection, as people of all ages and times have tried to make sense out of the episode. The early Church Fathers could not put this story down, so much did it fascinate them.

We have all felt at the end of our rope with family members before. But that is not going on here. We have a father who deeply loves his son, who isn’t the least bit angry with him, and is asked to do the most incredible thing, really almost unbelievable. He was asked to sacrifice his only son as a holocaust, as an offering to God.

Why would God do that? Why would he possibly ask someone to give their very life for the sins of others? Is God playing some sort of trick, some horrible joke? This episode may only be understood with the eyes of faith.

For if you stop and wonder why God would do that, then it would seem in a similar vein you should equally question why God the father would send his only-begotten Son down to this earth to die for us.

One theologian from the 3rd century wrote about Isaac as a figure, or “type” of Christ. He saw this text as rich with meaning:

The careful, yet loving response of Abraham moves me greatly. I do not know what he saw in spirit, because he did not speak of the present but of the future: *God will provide for himself a sheep*. His reply concerns the future, yet his son inquires about the present. Indeed the Lord himself provided a sheep for himself in Christ.¹

God himself did not spare his only Son, as we heard in our second reading. Isaac was the type of Christ, the foreshadowing of the ultimate sacrifice. Abraham represents the ultimate man of trust in God; trust no matter what. The words of St. Paul in 1 Cor. 10:13 seem appropriate here: “No trial has come to you but what is human. God is faithful and will not let you be tried beyond your strength; but with the trial he will also provide a way out, so that you may be able to bear it.” Abraham trusted that God would provide a solution.

The account also foreshadows the Eucharist. Yes, we provide the bread and wine, yet both the victim and the priest are the same in the Eucharist- Jesus Christ. It was beyond Abraham’s own power to save his son; he lacked what was needed to complete the sacrifice. Only God could intervene. God provides the sacrifice, and God gives him back the laughter of joy, literally and figuratively. The name Isaac has had varying interpretations, but at its root it means “laughter.”

¹ Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 8, 6-9. 1

The story moves full circle and the joy returns once and for all. We may pray never be put to the test in a manner like that; but at the same time, we know that we will be tested in some way. We must pray for grace to remain steadfast even in the face of trial.