

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT YR B 2021.

**Gen 22:1-2,9-13,15-18 Romans 8:31-35,37 Mk 9:2-10**

Let's take a quick poll: how many of you get a little nervous when you hear today's first reading? The one about God asking Abraham to sacrifice his child?

Do you ever ask yourself, "What kind of *sick* parent would agree to kill their own child? And what kind of *sick* God would ask a father to kill his son?"

Do we *really* have a God who would say to us: "OK, moms and dads, here's a little test of faith: I'm going to see if you are willing to end the life of your child. Ready. Set. Go." I've had to preach about this passage for 13 years now. And it does raise lots of questions. So I've studied it, read about and prayed about it.

And in my studies, I learned something. In ancient times, human sacrifice was part of many religious traditions throughout the world. Whether it was the Incas and Aztecs; native Hawaiians; or the people of Carthage, Rome, China or Egypt – human sacrifice was part of their ancient religious traditions. Somehow, they thought their deity would be worshipped and their lives would be improved by the death of others, sometimes even their children.

Ancient Israel was surrounded by religions which engaged in this horrible practice. And there is some evidence that, at first, even the Hebrew people thought that this is what God wanted.

Then along comes Abraham, doing his best to understand what God wants. As the story is told in today's first reading, Abraham believes that God wants him to sacrifice Isaac. And Abraham seems ready to do just that.

But by the end of the story, God has decisively intervened. "Abraham, Abraham. Do not harm him!" I don't want the blood of a boy. I want your faith and trust. Do not harm him!

Scholars believe that, through this narrative, God made something clear to the ancient people of Israel. God made it clear that the sacrifice of human lives was NOT what God wanted. While other religions around ancient Israel might continue this practice for centuries, the Hebrew people remembered this story of Abraham and Isaac, and they understood: God does not want us to kill each other. God is not praised when we tell ourselves that our lives will go well if we just sacrifice a child or two.

When we first hear it, this reading may sound horrible and sick. But when this story was first written down, it was a major step forward in our understanding of God. God has said *no* to death.

As we listen to this ancient narrative, we may wonder how anyone could think that the death of a child would be pleasing to a deity, or a guarantee of a good life for adults. Such 'old fashioned thinking...'

But, sadly, this thinking is still alive in the modern soul of humanity. Even in the last hundred years, children have been sacrificed repeatedly because adults think it will bring some 'blessing:'

+ millions of Jewish children died at the hands of the Nazis, because Hitler convinced a nation that their future would be bright if just enough Jewish kids died...

+ hundreds of thousands of Armenian children died because the Turks believed this was necessary for their nation's well-being...

+ countless Chinese children died because Chairman Mao insisted that the future of the nation required their blood...

+ Christian children in some Africa keep dying because terrorists who call themselves Muslims believe it is God's will...

In our modern world today, the most dangerous place for a child to be is... in their mother's womb. More children's heartbeats are violently ended there, than anywhere else. Apparently, there are still many adults who believe that for *their* life to go as they planned, a *child's* heart must stop beating.

Every life is precious. Every life, from the child whose heartbeat is only detectable through an ultrasound, to the elderly person whose memories have faded. Every life is precious.

And about all of them, God says, "Do not lay a hand on them. Do not harm them."

God's own child, Jesus, was sacrificed... killed because political and religious leaders thought that things would be better if *Jesus* died. But God says *no* to death, and *yes* to life.

In the mist of that first Easter morning, at a tomb which was now empty, God made things very clear: I am not glorified by death – I am glorified in life.

In the Gospel reading today, Jesus took with him Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain. There in their presence Jesus was transfigured. And he becomes radiant with *love*, radiant with *glory* and *life*!

On that mountaintop, the disciples catch a beautiful glimpse of what Jesus *will look like* when the passion is completed and the resurrection happens.

The transfiguration I think, is God's way of showing us, that all of our crosses, all of our sacrifices, all of our suffering are leading us toward the risen Christ. They are leading us to life, they are leading us to resurrection. Jesus is the light in our darkness.

We are made in the image of God; we carry the splendour of divinity within us and therefore we are capable of such things as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, compassion... These are beautiful things. Goodness transfigures us.

There are over 1.3 billion Catholics in the world today. What could happen in our world if, following the example of Jesus, we decide to participate in moments of transfiguration.

+ you see someone that you've been angry with. You want to tell them how angry you are, but instead you decide to say something beautiful. You say, "I forgive you." *Transfiguration.*

+ you have had a terribly busy week. The phone rings, and it is a friend who needs something. You're exhausted, but you decide to do something beautiful. So you say, "I'll be right over." *Transfiguration.*

+ You've had a horrible day, and now you're walking through the front door to encounter your less than perfect family. You're tempted to vent all your frustrations on the people who know you best. But you decide to do something beautiful, and you ask the first person you see, "How was your day?"

+ you want to pass judgement on someone. Then you remember that you are not perfect. Your patience had run out. Then you remember God's patience with you. Then you decided to notice and do something. Do something beautiful. You are participating in transfiguration.

Every time that kind of grace breaks through our weakness, we are catching a glimpse of heaven, we are touching the reality of eternal life.

May the radiance of your glory light up our hearts, and bring us safely through the shadows of this world until we reach our homeland of everlasting light.

Fr Patrick