

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

Year B: Gen 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Ps 116; Rom 8:31b-34; Mk 9:2-10

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The story of Abraham and his son Isaac from the first reading today might cause some people to ask, “What kind of a God would command child sacrifice, even as a test of faith and obedience?” God had ordered Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as an offering, and Abraham responded with obedience and was about to do it, when the Lord’s messenger said to Abraham, “*Do not lay your hand on the boy. ... 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.*” At this point in the story, most of us feel great relief in knowing that God did not, in fact, want Abraham to sacrifice his son. He was only testing Abraham’s faith and obedience.

Child sacrifice is something so horrible and evil that we know God could never desire it or command it. It’s something unthinkable to us, something repulsive to our deepest notions and instincts of what is morally right. But then in today’s second reading, from St. Paul’s Letter to the Romans, it sounds like this is what God did in order to redeem the world. St. Paul writes, “*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?*” So, God spared Abraham’s son, Isaac, but He did not spare His own Son, Jesus Christ. God was willing to do what He did *not* require Abraham to do – He was willing to sacrifice His own Son, for our salvation.

But, some might ask: “If child sacrifice is evil and wrong, then why was it not wrong of God to sacrifice His Son on the Cross?” Well, the first thing to remember is that *God did not kill His Son*. No, evil men carried out the execution of Christ, and in a way, *we all* caused His death (cf. Rom 2:23-25; *Catechism*, 598). Jesus died to save sinners, including all those who would ever live, so by sinning, each of us made His death necessary. If we had not sinned, Christ would not have had to die.

But, God did not kill His Son, even though He *allowed* Him to be killed by evil men. And, God did not *force* Christ to die for the world, either. No, God the Father asked His beloved Son if He would give His life for our salvation. Unlike Abraham’s son, Isaac, who was bound as a sacrifice, Our Lord Jesus went freely to His death, knowing that it would redeem the world. Our Lord gave His life freely out of love for us. So, it was not the evil of child sacrifice that redeemed the world, but rather the greatest act of love that the world has ever seen – a perfectly

innocent and holy man dying freely to save those who were guilty, including the very men who were putting Him to death.

And this is what we are preparing to celebrate during this holy season of Lent. The whole season of Lent is a time to get ourselves spiritually ready to recall the Paschal Mystery of Christ's suffering, death and Resurrection that redeemed the world. We will celebrate this great event at the end of Lent, during the most sacred days of the Triduum, when we will recall very solemnly what Our Lord Jesus Christ did to save us. And we need this season of Lent to get ready.

During Lent, we focus on the intense love of Christ that caused Him to offer his life for us. It was love for us that kept Jesus moving toward the Cross. The more we focus on Christ's love for us, the more beneficial and powerful Lent will be. We should try to imagine His Sacred Heart beating with love for each of us and for our salvation. "Jesus knew and loved us each and all during his life, his agony and his Passion, and gave himself up for each one of us" (*Catechism*, 478). He desired our redemption so much that He was willing to die for it. He loved us literally to death – to His own death on the Cross.

And when we consider God's great love for us, it should inspire in us a greater desire to love Him and others in return. We shouldn't be content just to remind ourselves how much God loves us, without it having any effect on how we live. That would be only a shallow and sentimental faith. No, the truth of God's love for us should *inspire* us and *motivate* us to live a certain way. At a minimum, it should inspire us to be faithful to God. But it can also inspire us to be heroic in our love for others, and to do great things for God. As St. Paul said, "*For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; ... He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised*" (2Cor 5:14-15).

Hopefully, many good things will be happening in our souls during this season of Lent. Hopefully, our sacrifices and disciplines will be making us more like Christ, who sacrificed His life on the Cross for us. And hopefully, our reflection on how Christ died out of love for us will inspire us to love Him and others more in return. If we do that, if we make love of God a real priority in our lives, then this holy season of Lent could be a time when our lives are changed forever.