

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

LECTIONARY #26

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

A reading from the Book of Genesis

God put Abraham to the test.

He called to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am!" he replied.

Then God said:

"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love,

and go to the land of Moriah.

There you shall offer him up as a holocaust

on a height that I will point out to you."

When they came to the place of which God had told him,

Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.

Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.

But the Lord's messenger called to him from heaven,

"Abraham, Abraham!"

"Here I am!" he answered.

"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."

As Abraham looked about,

he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.

So he went and took the ram
and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son. »

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihz

This reading can be challenging. In your

preparation, read all of Genesis 22:1-18,

including the verses missing from the

lectionary reading. God is not asking for

child sacrifice (a pagan practice) but is

asking for faith and trust.

Moriah = moh-ri-uh

Heighten the story by emphasizing

"your son," "only one," and "you love."

The idea of a beloved son is heard again

in the Gospel reading.

Read the command to do no harm with great
intentionality.

READING I

In this abridged account of the "Binding of Isaac" (*Akedah* in Hebrew), God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Abraham obediently gathers all the necessary sacrificial implements and travels with Isaac to a mountain in the land of Moriah where, at the last instant, God intervenes by sending a messenger who alters the instructions, thus sparing the boy. With Abraham's faith having been clearly demonstrated, a ram is sacrificed instead of Isaac. The story closes with God, again through a messenger, blessing

Abraham with many valorous descendants who will bring blessing to all earth's nations. Although this is a familiar story to many of us, it still raises many questions that we can prayerfully ponder as we renew and deepen our habit of prayer this Lent. Why did God, who knows Abraham's faith, test him in the first place? Why test his obedience and not some other area of potential weakness? Why test him in this way, with an invitation to sacrifice his beloved son? And, once Abraham demonstrates obedience, why wait until Abraham sacrifices a ram to bless him? Hadn't he already passed the test? Such questions highlight an important reality revealed in this story: our relationship with God entails sacrifice. In time, and based on the type found in Isaac, Jesus offers the perfect sacrifice on the cross reconciling us with God. Christ's sacrifice is fully efficacious for our salvation. At the same time, as Christians, we are called to imitate Christ. Thus, we might ponder how our relationship with God is calling us to sacrifice and how our interior disposition toward God might need to change to better respond to God with Abraham-like faith and generosity.

Again the LORD's messenger called to Abraham from heaven

and said: "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you acted as you did in not withholding from me your beloved son, 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, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing—all this because you obeyed my command."

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19 (9)

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.
I believed, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted."
Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.
O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your handmaid;
you have loosed my bonds.
To you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving,
and I will call upon the name of the Lord.
My vows to the Lord I will pay
in the presence of all his people,
in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

READING II Romans 8:31b-34
A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

If God is for us, who can be against us?
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?

READING II

This passage from the letter to the Romans highlights how the willing, sacrificial death of Jesus, his resurrection, and his ascension to God's right hand change the whole logic of human existence, especially for God's chosen people. Prior to Jesus, God's chosen people were to live by the law and the sacrificial system given at Mount Sinai. In this context, when the law was violated, God could justly condemn individual members or the entire chosen people, but a sacrifice could be made to rectify the ruptured relationship with God. But when Jesus

Paul is not seeking information but is confirming an obvious conclusion using the rhetoric of questioning. Use a rising inflection for each question.

GOSPEL

Jesus. We know that God will give his chosen ones everything along with Jesus, that any charge brought against God's people will not require a sacrifice greater than that of Jesus, and that ultimate condemnation cannot be leveled against God's people because God has acquitted them.

On the second Sunday of Lent each year, an account of the transfiguration is proclaimed and the version in the Gospel we read from today in Mark is paradigmatic. Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up a high mountain alone,

The abundance of God's blessing is described in various ways.

Abraham exemplifies a faithful servant. The responsorial psalm will echo the willingness to serve faithfully.

For meditation and context:

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? 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.

GOSPEL Mark 9:2-10

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

Jesus took Peter, James, and John and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no fuller on earth could bleach them. Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses, and they were conversing with Jesus. Then 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." He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them, from the cloud came a voice, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.

As 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. So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant.

The right hand implies the position of honor.

A narrator sets the scene but quickly gets caught up in the excitement of what he is describing.

fuller = FUL-her = A fuller prepares wool to be made into cloth.
Elijah = ee-LI-juh

Peter momentarily gets hold of himself enough to speak. Stumbling on what to say, he offers . . . housing? The energy-charged situation increases with the appearance of the cloud.

Change from Peter's trembling tone to God's commanding voice.

Pause for the scene change. End with the even tone of a narrator.

gloriously transfigures, is accompanied by Elijah and Moses, and converses with them. Peter suggests raising tents (*skēnē* in Greek) for Jesus, Elijah, and Moses. The proposal recalls the tent or tabernacle in which God dwelt with his people from the revelation at Sinai until the completion of Solomon's temple. This proposal, albeit praiseworthy, highlights the uniqueness of Jesus. First, Elijah and Moses were prophets, while God alone occupied the tabernacle. Second, as the content of God's message makes clear, God's revelation in Jesus is fundamentally new and different from all prior revelation. Jesus is the beloved Son to whom the disciples are to listen. The word "listen" (*akouō* in Greek) recalls God's initial mandate to "hear" (*shema* in Hebrew), the great commandment in Deuteronomy 6:4. So, atop this mountain surrounded by another sacred cloud, Jesus' disciples are led to understand that Jesus is the incarnate law, not another prophet. Third, the abrupt end of the transfiguration signals that the high point of God's revelation in Jesus is yet to come. Finally, Jesus' instruction to keep the matter secret until the resurrection indicates that the transfiguration is an interpretive key for the more fundamental revelation accomplished in Jesus' death and resurrection. So, Peter's tent-building proposal may have been commendably pious, but the call to ponder the meaning of rising from the dead is the core take-away from this transfiguration account. After all, Jesus reveals that this mystery—the paschal mystery—is the goal of our journey through Lent and life. E.W.