

2nd Sunday of Lent Year “B”
February 27-28, 2021

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 beyond ourselves. God must provide, because we cannot.

Today’s first reading is one of the best-known accounts in all of the Old Testament and is presented for our consideration during Lent. It is the story of Abraham, called to sacrifice his only Son Isaac, in obedience to the Lord God. Oh my, how I have struggled with this passage!

Perhaps as a child you felt a certain amount of angst in hearing the story of Abraham and Isaac. It seems incomprehensible how a father could even contemplate such an action. If you felt flummoxed, you are by no means alone. This account has given rise to more a profound reflection, as people of all generations have grappled with it. The Church Fathers could not put this story down, it so fascinated them.

At times, we have all felt at our wits end with family members. However, that is not what is going on here. Here, a father deeply loves his son and isn’t the least bit angry with him. Yet, he is asked to do the most incredible thing, literally “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? Was God playing some sort of trick, some horrible joke? This account can only be understood with the eyes of faith. Consider this—if wonder why God would demand such a thing, then in a similar vein you might equally question why God the father would send his only-begotten Son down to this earth to die for us.

Origen, a Church father from the early 3rd century, illustrates the spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament whereby the ram and Isaac are seen as types of Jesus Christ and Abraham is seen as a type of God the Father:

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. One way to make sense of this passage is through a “spiritual interpretation,” whereby persons, places and things foreshadow something deeper. Abraham represents the ultimate person of trust in God. It is also worth noting that Origen was just a teenager when he witnessed his own father, Leonidas, dragged from his home by Roman soldiers and ultimately martyred. Imagine seeing that!

The words of St. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians come to mind: “You will not be tested beyond your strength.”² For us, this may be beyond our strength; for Abraham it wasn’t because he trusted that God would provide a solution. It forces me to consider where would I draw the line with the Lord? At what point would I say, “Lord, I’ve had enough”?

Many are at that point now with the isolation they experience. Many students in public schools are long beyond that point, pining for the daily interaction with friends in person that is so critical to their own socialization and intellectual development.

Others have suffered tremendous economic setbacks through no fault of their own. But they have been feeling the pain now for months on end. While positive signs are ahead, some of the damage cannot be undone.

¹ Origen, *homily on Genesis 22* (Hom. 8,6 8. 9:) commentary by Crossroads Initiative online resources

² 1 Cor. 10:13

This episode also teaches us that God himself provides the sacrifice. This too foreshadows the Eucharist. Here, both the victim and the priest are the same in the Eucharist— Jesus Christ. It was beyond his 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 does mean “laughter.” The story moves full circle. The joy returns once and for all.

In the midst of our Lenten penance, now is typically the time when many give up. They have had a stumble or two in their Lenten observance, so decide to let it go. Resist that temptation! Stick with the program.

We may pray never be put to the test in a manner like Abraham. 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.