

Commentary for the Second Sunday of Lent



with lasting life

If we remain faithful at all times, God will bless us

The first reading of today tells us of the test to which Abraham was put when ordered by God to offer his son, Isaac, in sacrifice. It is one of the most moving accounts in the Scriptures. Part of it has been left out in today's reading to avoid it becoming too long, but I invite you to read it complete at home. (Gen. 22, 1-19) You will find in it light and strength in your moments of trial.

Yahweh was ordering him to kill his only son, and burn him on an altar, just as lambs were offered in sacrifice! Abraham could have asked God a number of questions: Lord, did you give this son to me only to take him away? What about your promise that I shall become the father of numerous nation? If my only son dies, how will your promise be fulfilled? Is this the sort of love you say you have for me?

Fortunately, Abraham did not question God's love for him; he trusted him as he had always done. He was determined to carry out God's command, no matter how painful.

There are two points in our life, High points and low points. During high points, life is beautiful.

We love everyone. We hug our friends and we forgive all our enemies. On such a day, we wonder how we ever thought life could be difficult. But during low points, nothing goes right. "We feel oppressed and sinned against, misjudged, out of place, and lost. It's a time when we number more enemies than we have and find fault with every friend. On such a day, it is difficult to know why we ever thought life easy." Faith is like that too, following the rhythms of happiness and sadness, ecstasy and agony, light and darkness.

When moments of darkness come, we should follow the example of Abraham in today's first reading.

Abraham's faith flickered and almost failed when he thought God was asking him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. It pained Abraham's heart and confused his mind. But Abraham trusted God. And God didn't let him down. God blessed him beyond his wildest dreams.

In a similar way, God tests our faith. When this happens, our hearts are pained and our minds are confused. But if we trust God, as Abraham did, God will not let us down. In the end, God will bless us, too, beyond our wildest dreams. The Apostle James puts it this way: "Happy is the person who remains faithful under trials, because when he succeeds in passing such a test, he will receive as his reward the life which God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12)

I have always seen today's gospel reading as an excellent example of the ingredients that would normally constitute prayer – be it of intercession or praise or thanksgiving. It tells us that prayer is a response to Christ's invitation to come up the mountain, that is, to leave behind for a while our ordinary, everyday concerns and place ourselves quietly in the presence of God. It is an invitation to be alone with Christ. The climax of the story is the command from the cloud: "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him". Prayer consists above all in listening, in hearing the word of Jesus. God speaks, but he doesn't shout. We need stillness and quiet to hear his voice, his word. Particularly nowadays when so many of us live in a noisy environment with our senses constantly under assault and our minds distracted. In such a world we can easily become spiritually deaf to God's voice – and indeed spiritually dumb: unable to utter a prayer either for ourselves or for anyone else. God speaks to us through the events and experiences of our daily lives.

And so, this is the good news of today's readings. It reminds us that faith is a lot like life. Faith has its mountains and its valleys. When we are standing on a mountain, it is easy to believe and to love God.

But when we are standing in a valley, it is hard to believe and to love. But if we remain faithful during these trials, God will reward us with the life that he has promised to those who love him.

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