

2nd Sunday of Lent – Year B

In the first reading, we hear of the story of the sacrifice of Abraham. This story is not just a protest against the practices of child sacrifice that were common in those days, and explaining it simply as an example of trusting in God when all seems impossible doesn't reveal the full meaning of this event. Each of these explanations are insufficient in understanding the sacrifice of Abraham because we need to see this from the perspective of faith, and then it becomes an event that helps us better understand our salvation. We call Abraham our father in faith because he was the first to believe in the promises God made to him and his descendants. And his faith was tested and proven in the sacrifice of Isaac. This is *the watershed moment* in salvation history – our faith today is derived from that of Abraham. We wouldn't be gathered here today if it wasn't for the faith Abraham showed on this day.

Let us, for a moment, step back and look at the story of Abraham and what led to this event on the mountain Moriah that we read today.

When Abraham (who was called Abram at that time) was 75 years old, God made a covenant with him, promising that he would be the father of many nations, and they would inherit the land God appointed for them. But Abraham was childless and he became tired of waiting for God to fulfill his promise, so when he was 85, his wife Sarah, gave him the maid, and he had a child with her. This child's name was Ishmael. But God did not promise the covenant blessings to Ishmael, but to Abraham's own son with Sarah. Abraham wasn't always the shining example that we hold him up to be; he did doubt God's promise, and he tried to take things into his own hand. But, when Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 90, Isaac was born.

Isaac and Ishmael never got along – Sarah treated Ishmael and his mother harshly, there was always contention between the two boys; the bible describes Ishmael as a wild donkey of a man with his hand against everyone. The descendants of Isaac are the Jews, Christians, and Catholics. The modern descendants of Ishmael are the Muslims. So perhaps when you hear of conflicts between these two largest religions in the world, now you know the rest of the story. If only Abraham had trusted in God from the beginning, then how different would our world be today?

This brings us to the events we heard in the first reading. Here is Isaac, whose conception was somewhat of a miracle; he is the heir to the promises made by God; he is Abraham's only begotten son, and now God is asking Abraham to sacrifice him? How are we to make sense of this? Why is this important to us today, in Burlington, on the 2nd Sunday of Lent in 2021?

When I was in seminary taking my scripture classes, one of the ways to interpret and study scripture is through typology. A *type* is a person or event in the Old Testament who prefigures or foreshadows in some way a more significant person or event in the New Testament. For example, the 12 tribes of Israel on which their nation was founded are a *type* for the 12 Apostles on which the Church is founded. The sacrifice of Abraham is a *type* which helps us

understand our salvation. Abraham is a *type* for God the Father who offers in sacrifice his son, Isaac, who is a *type* for Christ; Isaac carries the wood, which is a *type* for the Cross, carried by Christ. Isaac, and Christ, are only begotten sons, both conceived through miraculous circumstances. Through Isaac, the covenant God made to Abraham (to be the father of many nations) is fulfilled, so too, the covenant God made with us is fulfilled through Christ. The 3 day trip Abraham made with Isaac before Isaac is released is a *type* for the 3 days that Christ spent in the tomb before being “released” from death. The ram caught in the thicket by its horns which becomes Abraham’s sacrifice, is also a *type* for Christ, God’s own Son, who will be crowned in thorns. The Lamb provided by God that Abraham anticipates is fulfilled in God’s own Son, Jesus, who is provided for our perfect sacrifice. Finally, the mountain where Abraham is sent to sacrifice his son, the mountain Moriah, is not only the location where Jerusalem will be founded, the place of the future Jewish temple and place of sacrifice, but also, the place where Christ, the Lamb of God, is crucified.

So the Sacrifice of Abraham is meant to point to, to foreshadow, our redemption in Christ. This account clearly describes, in language and events we can understand, the work of our redemption. If Abraham, who is imperfect, did not withhold his only son whom he loved, then how much more would God the Father, who is perfect, willingly give his only Son for us? How else can we possibly understand God the Father giving up his only Son for us without the heart breaking and agonizing example of Abraham? We come to appreciate deeper the sacrifice of Christ, the love of God the Father, the cost of our redemption. We are to see that these events are fulfilled and perfected in Jesus; we are to see in these events how much God the Father has done for us – not that he is some deity that demands sacrifice to be appeased, but that, as St. Paul says, “He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not also give us everything else?”

When we celebrate the Easter Vigil, we will make our Profession of Faith. Here is your homework for this week: look ahead to the Easter Vigil in your Sunday Missal, and carefully read over the profession of faith that you will renew at that time. What do these statements mean to me? Do I know why I profess these truths? How do I specifically live out each day, the faith I profess? Does my faith shape the way I make my decisions, or the people I hang out with, or where I spend my time, talent, and treasure? In a few moments we will profess our faith together with the Creed, but as we also journey closer to Easter when we will renew our own baptismal promises, let us strive to live our faith as we should, in trust, obedience, and humility after the example of Abraham, and to also praise and thank God the Father, for giving up his only Son, for us, as we prepare to celebrate these sacred mysteries at Easter.