



Your Son, Your Only Son Whom You Love
How God's love works in our lives. He only asks what He has given to us.

by a Visitation Sister

March 2005

Dear Friends of the Sacred Heart,

“God’s love for us was revealed when God sent into the world his only Son so that we could have life through him; this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God’s love for us when he sent his son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.” 1 John 4:9-10

What is one resurrected body against the army of dead stretching back through the world’s history? In the face of all the horrors of history, does the light of Easter dwindle to insignificance? On the contrary, the blinding light emanating from the empty tomb bathes the world in a hope that is inextinguishable. God acts. God takes the initiative in our human history with a willingness to touch this world of ours, to touch our human living and dying. God, our Father, loves us; he comes to meet us in Jesus, his only Son. His only son. These words are reminiscent of another father, Abraham, and Isaac, his son, his only child whom he loved. We know the story well, a story of rupture with the familiar, of journey to an unknown land, of excruciating sacrifice, prefiguring that of Jesus’.

Abraham heard a Voice. A Voice which spoke to Abraham’s heart. When life was more than half spent, Abraham, at 75 years of age, obeyed the Voice to leave his homeland, his father, his family and leave for a land which would be shown to him. This migration is the absolute beginning of the action of God in history, as creation is the beginning of his action in the cosmos and the Incarnation is the beginning of the future world. Yahweh orders Abraham to begin something new which implies a rupture with the idolatrous beliefs of his people who worshiped other gods. The departure of Abraham is a rupture with idols and the beginning of the worship of the true God. He is the symbol of the soul who leaves the visible things in order to go before invisible things. He walks in the obscurity of faith. The model of the Christian is Abraham setting off towards a country unknown that God will show him. Abraham left “without knowing where he was going.” It is precisely because he didn’t know where he was going that he knew that he was on the right track. For he was sure then of not being led by his own intelligence, but of being led by God.

For Abraham, faith was a new dimension of his thinking that the world had not yet known, which didn’t find a place in the ordinary conscience and exploded the restricting truths of our experience and of our reason. Simultaneous with the order to depart, this rupture with the past, the election of Abraham is a promise, the announcement of a future. The object of this promise and the object of faith is the mystery of salvation of all nations. “All families will be blessed in you.” He is asked to believe that he will be “the father of a great nation,” when his wife Sarah is sterile; that by his descendant, by one of his descendants, the blessing of God will extend to all humanity and it is the announcement that the Messiah will be his descendant: “Abraham quivered with joy because he would see my day” Jesus would say of him (Jn 8:56). The expectation of Abraham is already the beginning of ours. Abraham believed, alone in an entirely pagan world, in the salvation of all nations, thus persevering in faith,

God be Praised!



despite contrary appearances. We must continue to wait, in the Advent of the church, the gathering of all nations in the One who takes his flesh in a daughter of Abraham. It is the mystery of the birth of Isaac of a sterile woman, figure of the birth of Jesus of a virgin.

In obedience to the Voice, Abraham set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to an unknown land. Twenty-five years after Yahweh promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars of heaven, he and his sterile wife, Sarah, gave birth to the child of promise. He was one hundred years old and Sarah ninety. Some time later, Yahweh put Abraham to the test. "Take your son, your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering on a mountain I will point out to you. Rising early next morning Abraham saddled his ass and took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. He chopped the wood for the burnt offering and started on his journey to the place God had pointed out to him. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. Then Abraham said to his servants, 'Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there; we will worship and come back to you.' Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering, loaded it on Isaac, and carried in his own hands the fire and the knife.

The Fathers saw in Isaac's carrying the wood a figure of Christ carrying the cross. They then took charge of Jesus and carrying his own cross he went out of the city to the place...where they crucified him. Jn 19:17

Then the two of them set out together. Isaac spoke to his father Abraham, 'Father' he said. 'Yes, my son' he replied. 'Look,' he said 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham answered, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering'. Then the two of them went on together. When they arrived at the place God had pointed out to him, Abraham built an altar there, and arranged the wood. Then he bound his son Isaac and put him on the altar on top of the wood. Abraham stretched out his hand and seized the knife to kill his son. But the angel of Yahweh called to him from heaven. 'Abraham, Abraham' he said. 'I am here' he replied. 'Do not raise your hand against the boy' the angel said. 'Do not harm him for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son.'

Since God did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all, we may be certain, after such a gift, that he will not refuse anything he can give. Romans 8:32

Then looking up, Abraham saw a ram caught by its horns in a bush. Abraham took the ram and offered it as a burnt offering in place of his son." (Genesis 22:3-14) God promised Abraham that from Isaac would come a great race and He demanded him to annihilate this hope. Isaac, the reward of faith, becomes the test of that same faith. Paradoxically, there is demanded of Abraham's faith the surrender of that faith's only basis, since it is through Isaac the promise must be fulfilled. Abraham's perfect obedience was expressed in action as when he was commanded to leave Ur.

The sacrifice of Isaac is the great test of the faith of Abraham. The author of the letter to the Hebrews tells us: "It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to



sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead; and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead (Heb 11:17-19). Here it is the text itself that presents to us the sacrifice of Isaac as a figure of the resurrection of Christ, that is to say, the accomplishment of salvation through his apparent failure. The sacrifice of Abraham is a figure of the sacrifice that the Father made of the One who is the only, the truly Unique One, the Christ. The difference between the sacrifice of Isaac and that of Christ is that the first was not consummated. Isaac was offered, but not immolated. Isaac, rendered living to his father, but not resurrected, is a figure of Christ risen from the dead. We see in this episode a striking figure of the Passion of Christ; the apparent failure becomes the source of the realization of the promise. It is from this very annihilation that will come the realization. Now the Passion of Christ is also the apparent failure of his work. At the moment when He is in the tomb, the apostles scatter, all seems lost. And yet, it is in restoring life through the supreme test of faith in the Passion that by the Resurrection the promise realizes itself. It will often be this way for us also through the night of faith, through apparent failure, through the annihilation of this or that hope of ours, that the plan of God will be realized in us in this mystery of death and of resurrection which is at the heart of Christianity

Indeed at the end, Isaac is saved – the lamb is a mysterious sign of the Son who becomes the lamb and a sacrificial victim, thus revealing to us the true face of God: the God who gives himself to us, who is entirely gift and love, to the end. This God appears in creation and in history. He seeks us in our sufferings and in our questioning. He shows us what it means to be a human person: to give ourselves in love, which makes us God.

The Resurrection of Jesus is foundational in the faith of every Christian. Easter Sunday can never be deleted from the pages of history. History does not go on aimlessly and it will not conclude with Good Friday. Easter is not an account of a miracle that happened a very long time ago: it is the breakthrough which has determined the meaning of all history.

Faith in the Risen One is faith in something that has really taken place. Faith stands on the firm basis of this reality. The Risen One cannot be seen like a piece of wood or stone. He can only be seen by the person to whom he reveals himself. He reveals himself to the one who loves, for love is the indispensable organ if we are to see and apprehend him. He shows himself to those who walk with him.

“No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.” John 1:18

May these remaining days of Lent awaken us to the present hour, to the silent energy of divine goodness which is knocking at the door of our being and wanting to refashion it. The One we worship is not some remote power. He himself has knelt before us to wash our feet. We are bowing before him who has bowed before us; because in bowing we are entering into a love which does not enslave but transform.