

## Homily Notes for the 2<sup>a</sup> Sunday of Lent, B February 25, 2018

Readings: Gen 22: 1-2.9.10-13; Psalm 116; Rom 8: 31-34; Gospel: Mk 9: 2-10

### 1. Central Thought: Who really is Jesus?

The readings for the Second Sunday of Lent highlight Jesus' **identity** as *God's beloved Son* (revealed at his baptism and transfiguration). Our faith is strengthened as we see the continuity of the themes of faith over so many years of the biblical testimony.

### 2. The first reading shows why the Jewish people were always looking for "the lamb of God."

Abraham shows his faith in God by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac. But at the last minute, the Lord provided a Ram (not a lamb) for the sacrifice and Isaac's life was saved. Isaac prefigures Jesus.

### 3. Notice how offensive it is to us to think of Abraham sacrificing his Son, but how easily we talk about God, the Father, being willing to offer the sacrifice of His Son for our sins.

While Abraham's son Isaac was spared, God's beloved son Jesus underwent a cruel death on the cross. Later, on the same hill (then just outside of Jerusalem) the only Son of God was not saved but was offered as a sacrifice for our sins. Because of this faith, the Lord renewed his promise to Abraham for the blessings of land and progeny.

### 4. The linking of this story with the Gospel reading emphasizes God's infinite love, as seen in the redemptive sacrifice of his own Son for the salvation of the world.

If the mystery of the sacrifice of Abraham's beloved son, Isaac, is hard to understand, the mystery of the death of God's beloved Son, Jesus, is far more challenging.

### 5. That is why Paul reminds us, in the second reading, that God the Father did not spare his own Son's life.

What an irony and paradox! God spared Abraham's son, but not his own! Why? Because God loves us with an everlasting love. Paul interprets God's willingness to sacrifice his own Son as proof of His great love for us.

### 6. In today's Gospel, the Transfiguration, Jesus is revealed as a glorious figure, superior to Moses and Elijah.

He is identified by the heavenly Voice as the Son of God. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him." Describing Jesus' transfiguration, the gospel shows us a glimpse of the heavenly glory awaiting those who do God's will by putting their faith in Him.

### 7. Today, reflecting on our readings and inspired by the "Great Adventure" Bible study, I would like to strengthen our faith by showing the connection of basic themes and ideas across great time.

8. First is the theme of offering the first born son as a sacrifice. This is the final and culminating event in the covenant formation between God and Abraham. In Genesis 22 God calls on Abraham to sacrifice his son. Finally, Isaac was spared. Jesus was not.

9. A second consistency is the location. Mount Moriah where Abraham went to offer Isaac as sacrifice is the same location as Jerusalem (cf. 2 Chr 3:1). This is, therefore, the same location at which the very Son of God, Jesus, was sacrificed on Calvary. This is why Jerusalem, among all the cities of the world, is so sacred to Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

10. The third theme is that of the "lamb" for sacrifice and Jesus being identified as the Lamb of God. Isaac asked, "Where is the lamb for the burnt offering." Abraham replied that God would provide. But God provided a "Ram" not a lamb. This left the Jewish people looking for the "lamb" who is Jesus. Hence, John the Baptist's words when identifying Jesus, "Behold the lamb of God" (Jn 1:36) And it is Jesus in heaven, "Standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb that seemed to have been slain" (Rev 5:6). In this Jesus is identified as the Paschal Lamb without blemish (of the Exodus and of the Passover) who saved the new Israel from sin and death (Ex 12, Isa 53:7, Jn 1:29,36, 1 Pet 1:18-19). "The Lamb of God" is the chief title for Christ in Revelation, used 28 times. This goes all the way back to Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac.

**11 A fourth parallel is that of Jesus's priesthood being that of the order of Melchizedek, not of the Levites.** This is developed in Hebrews 5 – 7. Melchizedek is more ancient than Moses and the Law. Jesus was of the tribe of Judah, not Levi, so here we are identifying Jesus's priesthood with a more ancient priesthood, closer to Father Abraham himself. ). His priesthood was "declared by God according to the order of Melchizedek (cf. Ps 110:4, Heb 5:1-10). This leads us to another relevant issue, the tithe.

**12. A fifth theme related to Father Abraham is that of offering the tithe to Melchizedek, the "High Priest of Salem."** It is first mentioned before the "Testing of Abraham" in Genesis 14 when Abraham offers a tithe of the booty from his war with the five kings to that mysterious priest, Melchizedek. Melchizedek was king of Salem (Jerusalem

**13. There is a principle that "the lesser person is blessed by the greater".** Melchizedek blessed Abraham. So Melchizedek is greater even than Father Abraham. And Jesus is greater than Melchizedek, though of his order of priesthood. If Abraham felt compelled to offer his tithes to Melchizedek, should we not be more eager to offer our tithes to Jesus? (See Hebrews 7.1-28)

**14. And what does the offering of tithes represent?** It represents our faith and our obedience to our Lord. And if we do not offer up the whole tithe? Then we will not be blessed by God in the way he promises to bless his faithful. See Malachi 3:8-10.

"Dare a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me! And you say, "How do we rob you?" In tithes and in offerings. You are indeed accursed, for you, the whole nation, rob me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and try me in this, says the Lord of Hosts: Shall I not open for you the floodgates of heaven, to pour down blessing upon you without measure?"

**15. A Further parallel of Melchizedek to our Eucharist is that he brought forth Bread and Wine for the ceremony when Abraham presented his tithes.**

**16. Reflection back to last week's application to our present day and the threats in our schools and violence in our society.** What were the three cultural conditions that Dr. Stout in *the Sociopath Among Us* stated that are causing this sickness? Were they not "**impulsivity, irresponsibility, and lack of remorse**"? In order to tithe and plan our giving to the Lord do we not have to reform our impulsivity, our irresponsibility and lack of remorse? Is not this discipline of tithing a means of training in virtue for the more important elements of salvation that await us?

**17. Then, looking forward,** this is particularly timely because next week we will be hearing the Bishop's Annual Appeal and will need to be planning our giving. Next week I will make a suggestion for how to look at our giving, our tithing, and what the Catholic guidelines for this are. I really want to emphasize the spiritual benefits of tithing and other spiritual practices so we can understand their application in our lives.

**18. Pointing to who Jesus is and strengthening our faith by pointing out the very great consistency in the development of biblical themes over so many centuries.** We have seen 1) the consistency of the sacred offering of the first born son, 2) Mt. Moriah, Jerusalem and Calvary being the same location; 3) The offering of the "Lamb" for the sacrifice and Jesus being "the Lamb of God"; 4) Jesus's priesthood being that of the order of Melchizedek, not of the Levites; 5) the offering of the tithe to Jesus being more important than Abraham's tithe to Melchizedek; and even 6) the use of bread and wine by Melchizedek parallel to the Eucharist. All these themes, then, fit together to produce responsible and virtuous Christians in our society. We truly are the answer to what our culture needs! What an amazingly accurate and deep historical faith we have! What a gift to be Christian and Catholic!