

## Homily for the Second Sunday of Lent 2021

Whenever we feel that we have a comfortable image of God, up comes a reading like today's from the Old Testament to confound us. The story of God's testing of Abraham is shocking and proved to be a tremendous ordeal of faith, not just for Abraham but for Isaac as well.

Abraham was to take his only son to the land of Moriah, bind him, cut out his heart and burn his body as a sacrifice to God.

God demanded this. God needed this of him. These were savage times and human sacrifice was not unknown as a way of appeasing or honouring the God or Gods.

Abraham had no choice. He could not escape God and Gods' demands, so he had to trust and to hope, right up to the moment when with a heavy heart he raised the knife to strike, that God would relent.

For Isaac it was much harder. He loved his father and submitted obediently to him. The full horror of what was about to happen to him must have slowly dawned upon him, but never the reason why. Why would his father do such a thing to him? Surely, he would change his mind at the last moment.

Both trusted in love, Abraham upon God's loving kindness and Isaac upon a father's love. For a few moments both entered into a terrible darkness. But in that darkness fidelity, trust and obedience were Transfigured into a moment of blazing faith and joy when God stayed Abraham's hand.

The test or trial was over, and all had passed. Abraham had passed the test of obedience put to him by God. God had passed the test of love and mercy put to him by Abraham. Isaac had passed the test of loving obedience put to him by his father Abraham, and Abraham had passed the test of a parent's love put to him by his son Isaac.

From that triumph of loving obedience springs the whole history of Salvation.

From Abraham, the father of God's chosen people, the Israelites, down through the generations to Moses and then to the person of Christ.

The persons of Abraham and Isaac are sort of figures for us of God the Father and Christ the Son.

It is part of the whole mystery of our Redemption that God the Father had to willingly sacrifice his only beloved Son and that Christ, like Isaac, had to lovingly offer himself in obedience as a sacrifice upon the altar of the Cross.

What God could not ultimately ask of Abraham he did ultimately ask of himself.

The Gospel story of the Transfiguration of Christ before his disciples symbolises in a way a persistent truth of the Christian life.

There are many times in our lives that we are asked to walk in some form of darkness, the darkness of uncertainty, pain, despair, or the cloud of unknowing.

These for us are times when God asks for loving obedience and fidelity. We may be asked at great cost to ourselves to be faithful to God's law. It may be the burden of being faithful to the dictates of our own conscience. Like Abraham and Isaac in the desert, or Christ himself on Mount Tabor, it is in the centre of our personal darkness that Transfiguration takes place, and that darkness becomes irradiated by the presence of God.

Transfiguration is both a rhythm and a promise of all Christian life. If sacrifice is demanded of us like Abraham and Isaac, then for those who are faithful, sorrow is transfigured into joy, darkness to light, despair into hope, doubt into faith and death itself into eternal life.

Like Peter and the apostles, in the face of our own Transfiguration experience, the words should always well up to our lips, 'Lord it is good for us to be here'.