

## Fr James' homily for The Second Sunday of Lent 2021

First Reading: Genesis 22:1-18  
Second Reading: Letter of St Paul to the Romans 8:31-34  
Gospel: Mark 9:2-10



Fasting is a fine Lenten discipline, and a good weapon in our spiritual armoury all year round...but we never fast on a Sunday, including during Lent. Sunday is always a feast. Certainly today we have the richest of feasts of holy scripture. Just as on the first Sunday of Lent we always reflect on the Gospel of Jesus going out to the desert for temptation by Satan, so today on the second Sunday of this most holy season the Church always listens to the Gospel scene of the Transfiguration of Jesus on Mount Tabor. To do so we turn the pages of Mark's Gospel ahead somewhat from our Sunday-by-Sunday reading of his Gospel in 2021.

The Transfiguration is one of the most awesome and mysterious events in the Gospel. So important is it that St Peter reflects on it more than once, as related in his letters and in the Acts of the Apostles. Today it is combined with another of the most striking and mysterious events in the biblical record: the drama of the sacrifice God demands that Abraham makes of his son, Isaac.

This story always shocks us. It is repugnant to us. The scene of God telling someone to kill his only child is, literally, awful. It seems to depict a vicious, abusive and vindictive God and a crazy Abraham. What is happening here? Well, really you have to read the scriptures asking yourself the basic question: do I believe God is good and faithful to his promises and always unchanging love?? For, God has made a promise to Abraham, renewing the covenant we heard of last Sunday, that Abraham will have countless descendants through his precious child. Abraham has already waited decades with Sarah to become parents at all.

Abraham has unflinching faith in God's promise...even as God seems to emphasise how dreadful is his request, saying that this is his "only son" whom he loves with an unimaginable love. Even so, Abraham is utterly calm. What is this about? It is suggested that these are shock tactics by God, if you like. To get our attention through the ages, we have to be shocked out of our sleep. Where we are spiritually deaf and numb, God has to shout at us and jab at us if we are to understand him and turn to him.

A basic spiritual truth is underlined here as part of our Lenten discipline: that love of God must always come first if we are going to be able to love all the other good things and use them properly and to love other people well and properly. To get this is to live a rightly ordered life and works out for us in countless ways.

As you've heard me say many times, the genius of our faith has always shown us that ALL of scripture is in the end about Jesus, that this is part of divine revelation. So, when we hear of Abraham's sacrifice of his son, we see in advance the meaning of the sacrifice of Calvary, where God makes the ultimate sacrifice he does not ask of Abraham. That is why we hear the Gospel of the Transfiguration in Lent, as St Peter himself later tells us, to help our understanding of the faithfulness of God in Jesus.

St Paul today beautifully compliments these scriptures with his powerful confession of faith in God: "who can be against us?" Romans chapter 8 is one of the greatest testimonies in all of scripture. So, a rich feast for us to digest today: let us look long and hard at how we listen to the Son, about how we trust in his father, about in what order we place the things we love. This year particularly we might be especially receptive to such reflection, and to reflect on "what rising from the dead could mean."

Amen.

*Fr James and Fr Tom wish you a blessed Sunday. Keep safe and well, and never hesitate to pick up the telephone and be in touch. See you in church I hope! Keep in close contact with the website for news of how practical plans are developing.*