

Homily of Second Sunday of Lent, Year B, 2024

Genesis 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18; Psalm 116:10, 15-19, Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

The first reading is about Abraham. A brief background of him may be helpful. Abraham was called by God to leave his native land for the land God was to show him. Abraham, although 75 years old, obeyed God and left his father's house, his relatives, and his land and "went as the Lord directed him" (Genesis 12:1, 4).

Abraham was a hundred years old, and Sarah was ninety years old when Isaac was born (Genesis 17:17). "With human being, this is impossible, but with God, all things are possible" (Luke 19:26). God makes grass grow upon mountains! (Psalm 147:8). In today's first reading, God commanded Abraham, "Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering ..." (Genesis 22:2). What a command! Go and sacrifice the child Abraham and Sarah desired and prayed for all their life! Go and sacrifice the child born at an advanced age with no possibility of having another child! Abraham obeyed. He set out with his servants and Isaac.

As they were on their way, Isaac asked Abraham a heart-wrenching question: "The fire and wood are here, where is the lamb for the sacrifice" (Genesis 22:7). This question could have made Abraham change his mind from offering his son as a burnt sacrifice. But Abraham, being a man of obedience and a man of faith, replied, "God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice" (Genesis 22:8). This was a prophecy because God provided a ram, not just a lamb, which Abraham sacrificed instead of his son Isaac (Genesis 22:13). For this reason, "Abraham named that place Yahweh-yireh" meaning, "God-the-Provider" (Genesis 22:14). For being obedient to his command, God promised numerous blessings to Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 22:18). God's providence and blessings accompany obedience to him and faith in him.

Abraham, also, made a prophetic utterance to his servants who accompanied him. When they neared the place of the sacrifice, he said to them, "Stay here with the donkey. The boy and I will go over there to worship, and then we will come back to you" (Genesis 22:5). How did Abraham know that God was going to provide the animal for the sacrifice and that Isaac and he were only going to worship and come back? It came to pass as Abraham had foretold. After Abraham sacrificed the ram, he and Isaac came back to the servants, and they returned home. What a display of obedience and faith!

Because Abraham was obedient to God and had faith in God, all his utterances on the journey became prophetic. There is power and reward in obedience and faith. James 2:23 says about Abraham, "Abraham believed in

God, so he was considered a righteous person and was called a friend of God." Obedience to God and faith in God make us friends of God. Abraham's relationship with God is an encouragement to us in our faith journey and in our relationship with God. Our reward is great if we obey God and have faith in him. We will be his friends; he will bless us; he will provide for us.

Abraham's words, "God himself will provide the lamb for the sacrifice," was, also, a prophecy about Jesus Christ. John the Baptist revealed him, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). St. Paul says in the second reading, "He did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all..." (Romans 8:32). The ram was sacrificed in order to spare Isaac. In the same way, Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed in order to spare us. Abraham sacrificed the ram. Jesus sacrificed himself. What is our sacrifice during this Lenten season?

When Jesus transfigured, as we read in today's gospel, his clothes became dazzling white. The Lenten season is a season of grace and a season of transfiguration. We pray that as we journey through the Lenten season, we may transfigure from disobedience to obedience, from hate to love, from weak faith or lack of faith to strong faith, from heart of stone to heart of flesh, from indifference to the word of God to listening, from being far from God to being close to him, from sin to repentance, and from gloom and despair to dazzling beauty. God instructs us today, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7). His words "are spirit and they are life" (John 6:64). He is the One who takes away our sins and sorrows and helps us to transfigure.

Let us present to God all dark clouds that hide our beauty. May God's light with its dazzling effect shine upon us and dispel every dark cloud. Through the graces of the Lenten season, may we experience physical and spiritual transfiguration. Amen.

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP