

Lent II
2/25/2024

IN A NEW LIGHT

The first reading today is disturbing and challenging to understand. In the ancient Mideast some religions practiced child sacrifice. Arguably at least, the story of Abraham and Isaac can be seen as a condemnation and not an approval of this evil practice. Child sacrifice is an evil that continues today in different forms today: Children who are trafficked and abused, innocent young people who face deportation and, of course, we think of the unborn and the lack of legal protection given to them in so many places.

No matter what, this remains a disturbing story and yet it's also a story of deep trust and faith. We see this deep faith of Abraham but it's also seen possibly by Isaac. We don't know how old Isaac was but he can carry wood and perhaps he also acted in faith. Abraham is ready to make a gift to God out of faith although God stops him in the process. God however, would make a greater gift of his beloved son who in fact, offered himself for us on the wood of the cross.

In broader terms there's a connection we have to both Abraham and Isaac. It's not in the sense of sacrificing someone, but rather each of us, like Abraham, will have to face the inevitable reality of handing over those people we love in death, as well as our accomplishments, our hopes, our joys, our property, our financial assets and just about anything else. Like Isaac, each of us will have to face the reality of death, making an offering of ourselves, striving to make a gift of ourselves out of love for God.

Last week we found Jesus in the wilderness, a place apart. This week we find him in a different place apart, a mountain. Mountains are places of encounter with God. Last week temptation was revealed in the wilderness. This week glory is found on the mountaintop, the glory of God in the person of Jesus.

Atop this high mountain, Peter, James and John saw Jesus. They had seen him before but now they saw him in a new light. They saw him transfigured in glory, the glory that is to come. You could say the transfiguration was a sneak preview of coming attractions. They saw him with Moses the lawgiver and Elijah, the greatest

of the prophets. Jesus fulfills the law and the prophets and like both Moses and Elijah, he spent forty days fasting. In this new light, these three apostles saw a deeper reality of who Jesus was.

Shortly before this, Peter made his confession that Jesus is the Christ, now this is confirmed for them. Peter envisioned a messiah of worldly glory while Jesus spoke of a suffering messiah and yet the suffering, Jesus' death, wasn't to be the end of it all. The suffering messiah would lead not to worldly glory but heavenly glory.

But it's not just a matter of what they saw. There's what they heard. *This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.* At the beginning of Mark's gospel, at his baptism, Jesus hears, *You are my beloved Son.* Now that message is shared with Peter, James and John, this reaffirms who Jesus is. Jesus comes to reveal himself as the Son and that in him we're all to become sons and daughters of God. And after Jesus' death the centurion will say, *Truly, this man was the Son of God.*

Jesus, the Son of the Father, comes to give new life and new light. Elsewhere he will say, *I am the light of the world* and every Sunday we profess him, God from God, light from light, true God from true God. Jesus comes to show forth a deeper reality in a new light. Faith is about seeing things in a new light. Lent is about seeing things in a new light. —Our practices of prayer, sacrifice and good works are meant to widen our hearts and allow us to see things in a new light. To pray is to ground ourselves more deeply in God's love. Pope Francis has called prayer, *the breath of faith.* To pray is to breathe our faith.

Our sacrifices, whether they be fasting or something else, can help us see things in a new light; that perhaps we don't need as much as we think we do or to have a deeper understanding for the sufferings of those who have so little. Almsgiving, whether of our money or time, can be freeing and open us up to others rather than close us in on ourselves as in some small way we seek to mirror the generous love of God. Another name for the Sacrament of Baptism is enlightenment and Lent is like a forty day retreat in which we prepare to renew our baptismal promises. You could say that the whole Christian life is to see things in a new light, the light of Christ and to follow in the light of Christ.

The voice from heaven not only reveals who Jesus is but also tells us what to do. If you're looking for a voice from heaven, here it is: *Listen to him.* In this new

light we listen to him. Listening requires time and work. At times we find ourselves pretending to listen to others when in fact we are tuning them out. We may be hearing but not listening. Sometimes that's even been known to happen in church.

To listen to Jesus means not only do we give him some time, but that we also pay attention to what he is saying to us. It means we think about it, pray about it, ponder it. We pay attention to Jesus in his word, the Bible and through his Church that acts as a sacrament constantly seeking to make him present in the world. We pay attention to Jesus through the seven sacraments as he continues to baptize and to forgive and especially as he continues to make a gift of himself out of love to us in the Eucharist. We pay attention to him in the silence of our hearts. This attention means that we keep the antennas of our heart up to how God may be present and at work in those we meet, in the ordinary events of life, in big ways and in every *little way*.

We listen and then we act. At the transfiguration, Jesus' heavenly Father tells us to listen to him while at the Wedding at Cana, his earthly mother, teaches us to do what he tells us. Put the two together and you have some good advice on Christian living: Listen and do. Listen to him and do what he tells you.

The transfiguration isn't just a sneak preview of Christ in glory. We're called to share in that glory as well and so that glory is a sneak preview of who we are called to be in Christ. But to do that, we are called to realize that this is God's beloved Son and with lives of intentional faith, in the new light of Christ, we strive to listen to him and to do what he tells us.