



February 25, 2024 Second Sunday of Lent

If God is for us, who can be against us. Romans 8:31b



Dear Friends;

The first reading about Abraham and his proposed sacrifice of his only son Isaac is troubling. It makes me angry in the way it is presented. Genesis 22:1 says, “*God put Abraham to the test.*” Have you ever heard someone say, “God is testing you?” What kind of sadistic God calls us to a contest of wits, knowing full well that we can never win? Yet many are captivated by the idea of a testing and punishing God. In its extreme there are theologies that tell us this punishing God demanded the sacrificial death of his Son to satisfy his anger against humanity.

Maybe Abraham got it wrong. The ancient Canaanite gods demanded the sacrifice of children. In imitation of the religions around him, Abraham may have wanted to please God by offering his all. In a culture that did not believe in eternal life, Isaac represented the only future Abraham had beyond the grave. Maybe he thought God demanded human sacrifice to placate the divine ego. What he did not understand is that sacrifice smacks of manipulation. This sacrifice can be an attempt to manipulate God. Maybe Abraham made a tragic mistake.

Many Jewish theologians interpret the story of Abraham’s test not as a demand for sacrifice. Rather they see it as a call for a change of heart. It is a divine declaration that the God of Life never requires human sacrifice. God undermines the whole idea of sacrifice and the belief that we can earn God’s favor. Sacrifice impedes us from freely receiving God’s love as gift. The way of God is the way of non-violent compassion.

In the Gospel of Mark, the experience of the Transfiguration comes after the healing of the blind man, and Peter’s confession of Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus teaches that the Messiah would not be a victorious conquering warrior. No, the Messiah would face suffering and death on the cross. This teaching they reject. They wanted to control the outcome of Jesus’ mission. Taken out of this context the Transfiguration would beautifully into the apostles’ dreams of glory.

Instead in context the Transfiguration reaffirms the teachings of Jesus about serving, being the least and lowest, giving fully ourselves in love, to trust in nonviolence and to repudiate retaliation, to embrace suffering and transform it by love. Jesus quoted the prophets who tell us that, “*I (God) desire mercy, and not sacrifice.*” God chooses to shine through our humanity. It is a gift not a prize for our achievements.

As humans we tend to erect all kinds of altars to our many differing ideologies, economics, social theories, arms possession, militarism, and retaliatory justice. And we build altars for them. On these altars we sacrifice, children, the poor, people of color, immigrants, refugees, LGBTQ folk, and women. We are mistaken. God does not ask for our sacrifices we do.

The path that leads to our transfiguration into God lies not in our efforts. It is a gift from the nonviolent, compassionate mercy of God. All that is ask from us is to give thanks and to do the same as God has done for us. “*If God is for us who can be against us.*”

Peace,

Fr Ron

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