

Homily, 25 February 2018

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-2,9a,10-13,15-18; Psalms 116:10,15,16-17,18-19; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10



If God is for us, who can be against us?



In the first reading, God spoke to Abraham about his son Isaac. He said "*Take your son ... whom you love [and] offer him up as a holocaust.*"

In the Gospel reading, the voice of God the Father spoke to Peter, James, and John, saying "*This is my beloved son.*"

No sacrifice is mentioned -- perhaps because earlier Jesus had told them of his coming passion. He just gives them a gentle reminder as they come down the mountain.

It seems that being a beloved son and being sacrificed go together – at least in these two readings.

The Church, in selecting today's readings, is encouraging us to see in Isaac, the son of Abraham, a foreshadowing of Jesus, the Son of God. They make for a very somber reflection., a very Lenten reflection.

Yet right between them we hear another voice.
Paul exclaims to his readers in Rome,

*"If God is for us, who can be against us?
He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all,
how will he not also give us everything else along with him?"*

It's as though Paul, considering these same two readings, is saying to us, "these aren't just somber readings, they are hopeful readings as well! This is very good news indeed!"



Sometimes I like to think about our faith from the perspective of a non-believer, even someone who knows nothing about Christianity. It must seem weird to such a person that a part of our spirituality is focused on the cross and the crucifixion.

In a world with so much suffering and brutality – from school shootings, to the carnage in Syria, to the abuse of young athletes – why put the crucifix front and center?

Maybe that's precisely the point, we live in a world plagued by sin, plagued by the mystery of evil. There is no hiding from it.



How should we live in such a world?

How can we have hope and not fall into the deepest despair?

A few years ago, I heard a convert to the faith, a former atheist, say that she realized that when she was without faith, she couldn't figure out the ultimate meaning of human life. "Whatever you do in life," she mused, "whether for good or ill, what did it matter?"

She finally had to admit, that for an atheist – at least for her, when she was honest with herself – death is like multiplying your life by zero.

It didn't matter if your life was positive or negative, with death it's all the same in the end.



Jesus Christ died *for* us. But he also died *with* us.

Let me explain:

Intellectually we can tell ourselves that God knows and understands our suffering, but sometimes purely intellectual knowledge seems sterile and of little comfort.

So, in the death of Jesus on the cross, God gives us undeniable evidence that he is with us in our suffering – that he understands.

And in the resurrection of Jesus, he gives us undeniable evidence that death is not the end. Death does not multiply our lives by zero. Our lives matter. What we do, how we live, it all has meaning.

Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness.

Jesus who said: "*I came so that you might have life and have it more abundantly.*"

The suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus does not solve for us the mystery of evil in this life, but it does give hope even in the darkest times.

As Pope Benedict said, Christian faith, Christian hope, pulls the future into the present and changes how we live here and now.

Our hope for eternal life gives us the courage to live the life we have. It gives us the strength to be merciful to others, to try and lessen the suffering of others, and to work for the common good of all.

Hope helps to see that even in a fallen world, we are surrounded by beauty. With hope, *love* matters – not death, not evil.

No wonder Paul sounds so excited!

Maybe that's something to work on this Lent: to be like Paul, exuberant with the hope of the resurrection, to really trust that *if God is for us, who can be against us?* ... and then to live like we mean it.