

## **February 28, 2021**

### **Second Sunday of Lent**

*Genesis 22:1.2, 9a, 1-13.15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10*

If you were listening carefully to the first reading from Genesis today, you probably feel somewhat disturbed and confused. Why would God, who is good, as Abraham, his faithful servant, to offer his only son as a sacrifice? It would be normal you find yourself disturbed and confused by this reading. God gave us the scriptures to speak to the events of our lives. Sometimes life is disturbing and confusing. It can feel like God at times is putting us to the test. We have in Genesis, how Abraham handled being put to the test.

I wrote in the bulletin this week a thank you for the kind cards, Facebook messages, and promise of prayerful support after the death of my cousin, Don's wife, Linda Zender. Her name was in the prayer list for the sick for nearly five years. She suffered from Multiple Systems Atrophy, which is much like Lou Gehrig's disease. Little by little, Linda lost her ability to drive, to dress and care for herself, to speak clearly, walk on her own, to be independent. Although we all knew that this disease would take her life, no one expected that she would die so soon at 59 years of age. My cousin said on the day of her death that the disease broke her heart and she often said, "You don't know how hard this is for me." Her kids said that the only reason that she fought as hard as she did, was for them. They were all put to the test. Everything was going right for them until this happened. Why?

The best of scripture scholars and the early Church Fathers have tried to help us to understand this troubling passage to explain why God would have put Abraham to such an extreme test. Abraham's story is important for us because it can help us to sort out the meaning and purpose of times when we or when those that we love are put to the test.

Some of the Church Fathers and scripture scholars have said that God never intended for Abraham actually to sacrifice his only Son that the purpose of the story was to prefigure the ultimate sacrifice that God would make by the Son freely offering his life to the Father for our sakes. Some even point out that this was an important passage to help ancient people to abandon the practice of offering human sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. That ancient practice existed

in many cultures, and with the Aztecs for instance, died out after the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. This passage was a major step in trusting that God would provide; God would provide for the sacrifice necessary for the forgiveness of sins. God would give us his only Son, and he would not hold back at all. The Son too would make a free offering of his life for our sakes. To use the words of St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, *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?*

Even with all of that, it can be difficult to feel like God is with us when something horrible happens. My cousin Don shared with me that he was angry with God for allowing his wife to have this terrible disease. When he told his wife how angry he was at God, she said to him. “Do not be angry at God; do not blame God for this.” Linda had the preaching of St. Paul in her heart and she taught Don to believe in the same way. Don shared at her funeral, “I was wrong.”

Any one of us can be wrong. Conversion is much more than just an experience of our heads, our way of thinking. True conversion involves every part of who we are: our minds, our hearts, our bodies, our souls, our emotions. Jesus took Peter, James and John up high on the mountain to teach them that he was going to rise from the dead. None of them could fully grasp even with the experience of the Transfiguration what Jesus was trying to communicate to him. Notice that Peter in particular got it wrong, he wanted to build three tents. He thought that this was as good as it gets. He wanted to jump over the cross, to forget the suffering and to bask in the glory. Notice what Abbot Jeremy Driscoll observes about the transfiguration, that when Jesus takes them to the mountain to prepare them for the scandal of the cross, *that* is when his entire body, his clothes become dazzling white! The way St. Paul expresses this great teaching of Jesus is, *Jesus Christ it is who died—or, rather, was raised—who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.* Linda got it right. *If God is for us, who can be against us?* Abraham, our father in faith, believed that God was with him, even when things did not seem to make sense.

Our Lenten penances of giving more time to prayer, of fasting, not eating meat on the Fridays of Lent, of giving more to the poor are ways to draw us more deeply into the meaning of the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ is our peace, our salvation and our glory. Give Jesus everything. He alone is our life.

