

The Whole Picture

2nd Sunday of Lent (Year B)

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Each of us sees the world in a slightly different way. Some of us feel with the heart and some of us think with the brain. Some of us look for instant gratification, some hold out for delayed gratification. Some of us focus on people, some of us focus on principles. Some of us look at society from below, some of us look at it from above. Together, all of these diverse perspectives can help us see the bigger picture of reality. The more perspectives we can get, the better off we are.

One of the major problems in society today is that many people think they are seeing the whole picture when in fact they are only seeing a piece of the picture, particularly their own piece. This is not meant to blame anyone because no one can see the whole of reality. Reality is too big and complex for one set of eyes. The real issue is whenever someone actually mistakes their part for the whole; whenever their perspective is believed to be the only way of seeing the world; whenever they keep dismissing others as wrong. That is not being intelligent; that is being arrogant.

Our Old Testament story of Abraham and his son Isaac is a good example of having to see the whole picture to understand its significance. Looking at the pieces of the story does not make sense, especially the part where God tells Abraham to sacrifice his own son Isaac. Wouldn't God be violating God's own Ten Commandments by approving of murder? Wouldn't God be ruining Abraham's chances of having descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky or sands on the

shore if he took his son's life? Yet, it is only when we know the full story that all of the pieces begin to make sense. Right after Abraham "reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son," the messenger from heaven stopped him and said, "Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do the least thing to him. I know now how devoted you are to God." As it turns out, the whole story is a lesson about obedience to God. How far are we willing to go in our obedience to God?

In his document *The Joy of the Gospel*, speaking about the common good and peace in society, Pope Francis calls attention to four basic principles in life. The fourth principle is 'the whole is greater than the part.' (234ff) For him, wholeness, completeness, and well-roundedness are always healthier than merely having a bunch of fragmented pieces. In isolation, the pieces lose their significance and distort reality.

Only God sees the whole picture of reality at all times.

As humans, the most we get of the whole picture are momentary glimpses, like the glimpses that Peter, James, and John got in today's Gospel of the glory of God shining through Jesus Christ at the Transfiguration. As the reading suggests, however, these are indeed momentary. Peter, James, and John could not setup tents and stay there forever. Jesus told them that they had to go back down the mountain to their normal everyday lives. Apart from these glimpses, we must be humble enough to know that the piece of reality that we see are simply pieces. Am I humble enough to acknowledge to others that I do not always see the whole picture and that I need their perspective to help me?