

Fr. Curtis Miller February 27-28, 2021

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Lent

The story of Abraham being willing to sacrifice his own son, Isaac, at God's command is troubling, even though we know how it ends. God sends an angel to stop Abraham from harming the child and tells him that it was only a test of his faith.

One person who was fascinated with this story was Soren Kierkegaard, the 19th Century Danish philosopher. (That means he was from Denmark; he didn't philosophize about breakfast pastries). He wrote a book called *Fear and Trembling* reflecting upon this story about Abraham. More profoundly, he lived out his own version of this story in his own life. Kierkegaard was engaged to marry a young woman, named Regine Olsen, his rare equal in intelligence and depth of faith. He was deeply in love with her and looked forward to their life together. Yet he was troubled by the nagging sense that something wasn't right. He knew that he was sickly and likely to die at an early age. Furthermore, being a philosopher didn't pay any better back then than it does today. He didn't want to leave Regine as a young widow, unprovided for. Kierkegaard believed that God was calling him to break off the engagement, and so he did.

He remained completely devoted to her throughout the rest of his life, dedicating most of his books to her, but he remained more dedicated to God, willing to sacrifice his happiness with Regine when he believed that God commanded it, just like Abraham was willing to sacrifice Isaac. A few years later, Regine married a successful lawyer and politician, and she would go on to enjoy a long, happy life with him. When her husband was appointed the governor of the Danish West Indies (today's U.S. Virgin Islands), she paid her old friend, Kierkegaard, a final visit. They prayed for God's blessings upon each other and expressed their hope to see each other in heaven. Then she sailed away. A few months later, Kierkegaard succumbed to his poor health and died.

Why dwell on this sentimental love story of a Danish philosopher most of us have never heard of? Because he shows us how to be a person of faith who, like Abraham, listens attentively to God's voice and makes the sacrifices God asks for, no matter how difficult. Kierkegaard didn't just follow his own dreams; He trusted in God's plans. And he didn't try to possess or control Regine. Out of love, he was willing to let her go when he knew it would be better for her.

Above all this, there is an even greater love story: the story of God's love for us. Though Abraham ultimately didn't have to sacrifice his son, Isaac, God the Father did sacrifice His Son, Jesus, allowing Him to be handed over to wicked men and crucified. God was willing to make this supreme sacrifice because He loves us and knew that this act would save us from sin and death. God holds nothing back from us, not even His own Son. We should have enough confidence in Him to entrust our loved ones to His care. Let's hold nothing back from God, but be willing to make any sacrifice He asks, trusting

like Abraham did that we will receive back from God whatever or whoever we give up to Him.

God called Abraham to go up on the mountain to make this sacrifice because mountains are holy places of encounter with God, symbolically closer to heaven. Likewise, Jesus went up on a mountain to reveal His glory to His disciples in His Transfiguration. Later, Jesus would climb the hill of Calvary or Golgotha to offer the sacrifice of His life on the cross. Hence, the mountain is a place for offering sacrifice and encountering God. That's why the altar is raised up a step above us. Symbolically we ascend to it like a mountain. Here we encounter God and offer up our spiritual sacrifices. One of those sacrifices we can make is to offer up our loved ones to God, like Abraham did with Isaac, not literally sacrificing them, but spiritually placing them in God's hands, relinquishing the control we can be tempted to want to have over them.

This is a different way of seeing the people we love. We are more grateful to God for the time we get to share with these people, rather than resentful that we don't get to be with them as much as we would like. (In truth, if we really love someone, a hundred years wouldn't be enough time). We love them not with a possessive grasp, but with an open heart. We entrust them into God's loving hands, knowing that even if we are separated by time or distance or even death itself, we can look forward to being reunited with them forever in God's heavenly kingdom.

And when we place our loved ones spiritually upon this altar, offering them to God, God gives us a pledge to guarantee that He will take good care of them: God gives us His Son, Jesus. So let us have faith like Abraham and entrust our loved ones to God, confident that we will receive them back from God. We will be able to love them more truly and less selfishly in this life, and we can look forward to being with them forever in heaven.