

## **2nd Sunday of Lent (B)**

As we continue our Lenten journey, we hear the Transfiguration in the Gospel, as we always do on the 2nd Sunday of Lent. It is always good motivation to know what we are striving for, so that we can continue to persevere in the present. We need to know why we are continuing through the pain, suffering, and sacrifice.

Look at Olympic athletes, for example. They sacrifice so much of themselves: time, friends, and family. Why? So they can represent their countries on the biggest stage. Standing on the podium with a medal around their neck is the ultimate payout. All the pain and suffering seems like nothing at that moment when they are hearing their countries anthem. There is a lot behind those tears running down their faces, but part of it is achieving their dream, validating all of their blood, sweat, and tears.

But like St. Paul, we are not striving to win a perishable crown, like athletes do, but an imperishable one. We are seeking to win the crown of eternal life, the crown of heaven, the crown of victory. On this topic St. Thomas Becket says, “Without real effort no one wins the crown.” In other words, without sacrifice no one gets to Heaven. Because this is hard Jesus became transfigured for us on the mountain.

So how much does God want us to sacrifice? How much effort do we need to put into this? This is a natural reaction for any endeavor we are pursuing, but we

naturally only want to put in just enough effort to cross the line. Students only want to put in the minimum amount of time to get a passing grade. We only want to make some sacrifices during Lent. We only give our spouse just enough of ourselves. We only want to give God some effort. Whether it is out of self preservation or out of fear we tend to hold back a little. We rarely give 100%.

God asks for our whole self. He knows our weaknesses and accepts the effort that we do give, as long as it is sincere. But He still wants us to give our whole self. What spouse deserves only a little effort? The spouse of our soul is the same, Jesus wants us to give Him our whole self just like He did for us on the Cross.

How much did God demand of Abraham? He asked for his son Isaac. Isaac was his life, his everything. Abraham, after many years of waiting, finally received a son in his old age. And now God is asking him to give everything he held near and dear. Yet Abraham was faithful to what God asked of him. He was willing to even give up his son. He was faithful to God, to the death of his son. He asks the same of us. Are we willing to give God our all? Our everything? Our life?

If we can't say "yes" to this just yet it is ok. We are shown how to do this. And it is simple, that is taking up our cross. We all have crosses in our lives. We tend to reject them, but they are God's gifts to us. May we willingly and joyfully pick them up.

The cross is present in the event of Isaac's sacrifice. We didn't read this detail in the first reading, but we are told that Abraham placed the wood for the holocaust upon Isaac's shoulders as they climbed up the mountain. Holocausts in the Old Testament were those burnt sacrifices, set upon a large pile of wood the size of an altar. I think we tend to think Isaac was still a boy, but he most likely was a young adult, as he needed to be strong enough to carry the wood. Also, he most likely consented to carrying this wood. All parents will agree that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to get teenaged or young adult children to do something they do not want to do. Point is, Isaac was an adult and was willingly obedient to his father Abraham in carrying the wood.

Jesus, too, willingly carried the wood of the cross for us. He was willing to be the lamb of sacrifice offered in our place, just like one was sacrificed in place of Isaac.

Let us imitate Isaac and Jesus by taking up our cross. In doing so we learn how to give our all, to give our whole self to God, to give a real effort. May the transfiguration moment we are having right now in the Mass, this mountaintop experience of the Eucharistic Liturgy, help to encourage our hearts and motivate our wills to be willing to sacrifice ourselves for God, like Abraham's sacrifice, like Jesus' sacrifice. Let us love Him back by making a gift of ourselves, giving our lives to Him who gave His life for us.