

2nd Sunday Lent
Gen 22 / Mark 9:2-10

Sacrifice of Isaac – Transfiguration

The Sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and the Transfiguration of Jesus on mount Tabor at first it seems like two different stories.

Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only son as a **Holocaust** or burnt offering on the mountain Moriah in Jerusalem. There were two types of sacrifice in Abraham's time. A **holocaust** is where the whole *animal* or *cereal* is burnt completely up. The other sacrifice was where part of the animal was burnt, and the other part of the animal was partaken in a meal between the person offering the sacrifice and the priest or sometimes just the priests alone, a Eucharist.

Animal sacrifice to God was quite common in the time of Abraham, but so was the **sacrifice of humans**, usually children, and specifically the first-born son by their Canaanite neighbors. How does all this fit in with the Transfiguration? Let me pull out some key words or phrases from the Sacrifice of Isaac: **Human sacrifice, first-born male, holocaust, on a mountain top, the request by God** to Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering.

Now let me pull some key words or phrases from the Transfiguration beginning with **God's response** to the scene, "This is **my beloved Son!**", on **a high mountain, Moses and Elijah**, three tents or booths used in the Feast of Tabernacles **of Canaanite origin, Jesus' prediction of his own passion and death** that he shares with his disciples in the passage right before his Transfiguration, "I will suffer and die and on the third day rise from the dead."

After Peter had confessed Jesus as the Christ, Jesus spoke openly to his disciples for the first time in Mark **about his coming suffering** and the rigorous demands of discipleship. This doctrine they found very difficult. The vision of the Transfigured Jesus was to encourage them for the trying times ahead.

Three select disciples saw Jesus as if he were already glorified, wearing clothes dazzlingly white like those from the book of Daniel. They saw with Jesus, as if authenticating his message, **Elijah, the prophet**, who had been taken up to heaven

before he died and **Moses, the Law-Giver**, whose grave had never been found. Peter reacted as if he had forgotten Jesus' warnings about future trials. He wanted to build tents to celebrate a perpetual feast of Booths, as if heaven had come already and the way of the cross had been cancelled. But his words came from fear and not understanding. The vision failed to enlighten the disciples and terrified them instead. It was the Storm on the Lake all over again, when Jesus, using the authority of God, had calmed the storm, but the disciples had failed to recognize who he was.

Then God himself broke the silence from a cloud, the place of divine presence. He repeated the words which had identified Jesus for the reader at the Baptism. But for the disciples, he added "Listen to him." God had added his voice to those of Elijah and Moses. Then they saw only Jesus. The only way open to the disciples was **the way of the cross** which they had to follow behind Jesus.

The difference between the two passages is not a perfect fit, but it does point out significant similarities. First, God's request to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved first-born son and Jesus, the first-born son and the only Son of God, the Beloved. Abraham obeyed out of fear of God, even though he loved his son. Jesus obedient to God out of love for God, as the first part of his prayer, the Our Father, tells us, "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done!"

Historically, Mount Moriah was thought to be the mount in Jerusalem where Jesus died and on which the temple was build. It is also the site where **Melchizedec** offered bread and wine with Abraham in thanksgiving for their victory. This historical site of Jewish worship would be replaced, as Jesus tells the woman at the well, "The hour is coming, and is now here, when true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth!"

Jesus, as God the Son, continues to suffer and die for us each day out of love for us. "Paul, Paul, why do you persecute me?" or "Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." **A religion with only laws** will lead to human sacrifice, but **a religion with love** can lead us to sacrifice for others. Maybe what Jesus discussed with Elijah and Moses on Mount Tabor was on a level even greater than love, to be with us until the end of the world in our suffering and pain for love of us. Christ suffers in us until the end of time, until the last human on the planet breathes his last breath.