

February 25, 2018 Second Sunday in Lent

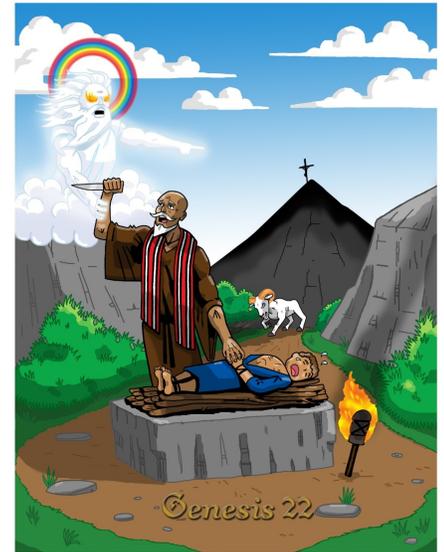
Readings can be obtained from: <http://usccb.org/bible/readings/022518.cfm>

Blessed Sebastian of Aparicio: <https://www.franciscanmedia.org/blessed-sebastian-of-aparicio/>

Readings: Genesis 22: 1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18; Psalm 116: 10, 15, 16-17, 18-19;
Romans 8: 31b-34; Mark 9: 2-10

Sacrifice, covenant promises, and redemption are “covenant-relationship” themes which run through our readings today. In the first reading, Abraham, in complete obedience to GOD, is willing to sacrifice his son. Because of Abraham’s willingness to obey, the covenant promise to make him the father of many nations is renewed. The psalm is a response of offering a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to GOD. Saint Paul writes to the people of Rome proclaiming the redemption which has been achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel relates Jesus’ transfiguration on a mountain top, where He converses with Moses and Elijah, and GOD the *Abba*-Father voices the divine pleasure in Jesus and His ministry.

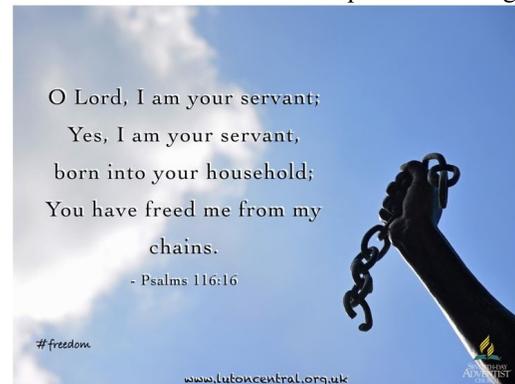
The story of Abraham’s willingness to obey GOD’s request (to offer his son as a sacrifice to GOD) has many powerful ideas for us to ponder. It must have been very challenging for Abraham to be requested to sacrifice the very offspring through whom the covenant promise of a future nation would come. Abraham had placed hope in Isaac as the child of the promise which GOD made to Abraham, a promise to raise a nation as Abraham’s descendants. In verses that were omitted, Abraham’s son carries the wood of sacrifice up the hill to the place where the offering will be made. This foretells the time when another Son will carry the wood of the cross up the hill of sacrifice called Golgotha (Calvary). The fact that GOD stops the human sacrifice and provides an animal sacrifice in place of the human sacrifice reminds us that GOD does not want the descendants of Abraham to make human sacrifices as many of the surrounding nations did. It is also important that the place is called “*YHWH Yireh*” – which is sometimes translated as “GOD provides” or “GOD sees to it.” This reminds us that although we may be willing to make sacrifices, it is GOD who provides the perfect sacrificial offering in the death (and resurrection) of the Son of GOD, thus fulfilling the New Covenant Relationship in and through Jesus.



<http://goodtreasures.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Genesis-22-Abraham-and-Isaac.jpg>

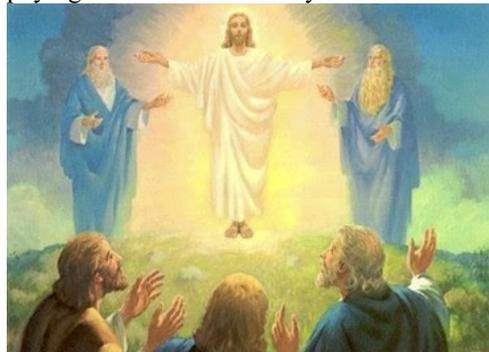
The key phrases for me in today’s psalm are verses 16 and 17. I see in them Jesus’ prayer to His *Abba*: “O LORD, I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid; You have loosed my bonds. To You will I offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.” Jesus sees His covenant relationship with His *Abba* as one of being an obedient servant. In His complete obedience to His *Abba*, He offers the perfect sacrifice of praise, thanksgiving, and redemption.

The passage from the eighth chapter of St. Paul’s letter to the Romans uses an imagery that Paul frequently uses, that of a legal case. Paul reminds his readers (including us) that GOD does not want to condemn us. After all, GOD has sent the Son to die for us and to make the sacrificial

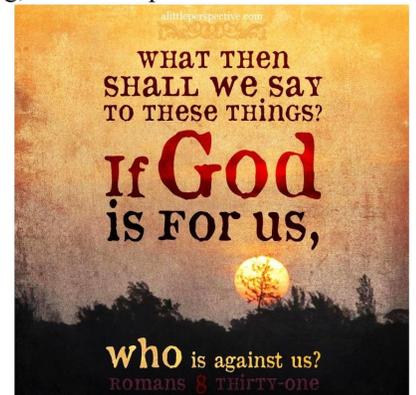


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offering which brings about our salvation. If GOD has been willing to sacrifice the Son, GOD does not want to condemn us. And Jesus will not be prosecuting attorney against us, because He has already shown His desire to be our advocate (defense attorney - *παράκλητος* (*paraklētos*), going so far as laying down His own life in order to free us from the crimes we have committed, paying all the costs not only of the case costs, but also of the sentence against us.



The Second Sunday of Lent in all three years of the reading cycles is always the account of the Transfiguration. Jesus takes His three trusted disciples (Peter, James, and John) up a mountain. There He is transfigured to His rightful state of glory, a state He will receive once again after His death and resurrection. He is pictured as radiating light. He is seen as being with Moses and Elijah, the key figures of the Old Covenant through the law and the prophets, thus Jesus is the fulfillment of all the covenants and promises which have been. The disciples are enamored by the manifestation. The voice of GOD the *Abba* resonates over the mountain top, showing the divine favor placed in Jesus. After the glorious happening, Jesus tells His chosen three not to tell others until after His death, thus linking His glorification to His sacrificial



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death, all of which are too incomprehensible to His disciples at this point in their relationship with Jesus.

I am once again left in awe. GOD continually manifests the divine relationship which is ours, if we but accept the covenant which GOD is offering to us. This special covenant which GOD is offering to us does demand sacrifice. Yet, the key sacrifice is not to be done by us, but has already been done by the Son of GOD through His life, ministry, death, and resurrection. The sacrifice we are called to offer is that of giving GOD glory and praise and thanks for the sacrifice which Jesus has performed. (Remember that word “sacrifice” literally means “to make holy.”) GOD is the initiator of the covenant relationship, and GOD is the end point of the covenant also. We are offered the invitation to accept and participate in the covenant which GOD has already established in Jesus. Thus we are made holy by the Holy One of GOD making the sacrifice for us.

The more I reflect on this, the more unbelievable it seems. I can understand how the disciples were overwhelmed and in awe. The Lord Jesus wants us to be in the covenant relationship with GOD more than we could ever imagine. Although GOD is the One Who is wronged by our sinfulness, it is GOD Who has brought about our forgiveness and *salus* (healing, wholeness, holiness, salvation) in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Because GOD is the One Who has been the “injured” party of our crimes, GOD should be the judge, the jury, and/or the prosecuting attorney. The Son of GOD in unity with the Holy Spirit, however, is acting as our defense attorney (*παράκλητος - paraklētos*), going so far as to pay the full cost of our being set free! No matter what sentence should be exacted on us, Jesus has accepted the sentence and taken care of all of it for us, He “sees to it.”

What should be our response? Nothing can measure up to what GOD has done for us in and through Jesus. The best response, but still insufficient in comparison to what Jesus has done, is to give GOD glory and thanks and to share with others the message of how loving GOD is. Since GOD has already gone to such great extent to reconcile us and draw us into the loving relationship, we should help others to “know” how much GOD has done to establish that connection between us. We should be missional disciples - those “sent out” to share what we have learned and experienced. Let us join the psalmist and proclaim: “O LORD, I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid; You have loosed my bonds. To You will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD.”

The personal question/action for today: When I think of the sacrifice Jesus endured in order to make me holy, how do I feel? Do I see GOD as the judge, the jury, the prosecuting attorney, or the defense attorney in reference to my being on trial for my offenses? How can I help others come to “know” the overwhelming love of GOD for them? What ways can I use to help others experience the covenant relationship which GOD is offering us?

Blessed are You, LORD GOD, ever loving. Through Your GOoDness, You want us to be in a covenant relationship with You. You have done what was necessary to remove the barriers which we have placed to that relations through our sins. You have sent Your Son, Jesus, to make the perfect sacrifice which restores and enhance the relationship with You. He was willing to carry the wood of the sacrifice up the hill and offer Himself as the sacrificial offering. He is the One Whom You have provided so that the perfect offering could be made. We are the beneficiaries of the sacrifice of Jesus. We, like Peter, James, and John, have been given a glimpse of the Transfiguring Love which comes from You, through Jesus. It is the bright, cleansing, and enlivening fulfillment of all the relational covenants which have ever been. We lift up our sacrifice of praise and thanks to You for all You have done, especially in and through Your Son. It is in His name and united with Him that we make this prayer, for He is Your Son, our Brother, our Master-Teacher and Savior, Who has redeemed us through His death and resurrection, and Who is now living and reigning with You and the Holy Spirit, our one and only GOD, forever and ever.

Song(s) of the Day: *Transfiguration/Listen to Him Well* by Bruce Hunt: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2C5uh0qhgTI>
Transfiguration by Sufjan Stevens: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeQlwc5FpEg>
Transfiguration by Care Landry: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3e8k3CN6iZ8>

Video of the Day: *Sebastian of Aparicio:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehEWcAxi0yQ>

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