

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT – YEAR B

(Gen. 22:1-2, 9a, 10-3, 15-18; Rom. 8:31-35, 37; Mk. 9:2-10)

Excerpts from Benedict XVI's Homily 05 March 2012

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Friends, today's Gospel of the Transfiguration is not just about an encounter. In fact, it is more about preparing us both for the mystery of the Passion and for the joy of the Resurrection. Let's turn first to the first reading, where it seems that God tests Abraham's faith. Isaac is the child promised to Abraham, the son who is supposed to bring salvation to the nations. But one day Abraham received the command to offer him up as a sacrifice. What kind of God orders a parent to slay a child? Was Abraham hearing things? Perhaps he heard voices from his culture where human sacrifice was practiced, and he mistook them for the voice of God. We do know that we, at times, hear voices enticing us to do things, and trying to convince us of their goodness —things not pleasing to God.

Nevertheless, Abraham does not hesitate one moment and, after having made the necessary preparations, departs with Isaac for the place to which he had been ordered to travel. And we can imagine this journey to the top of the mountain, what must have been going on in his heart and in the heart of his son. Abraham trusts totally in God, to the point of being ready even to sacrifice his own son and, with his son, the future, for without a child, the promised land was as nothing, ends in nothing. And sacrificing his son, he sacrifices himself, his whole future, the whole promise. It really is the most radical act of faith. At that very moment he is restrained by an order from on high: God does not want death, but life, the true sacrifice does not bring death but life, and Abraham's obedience became the source of a great blessing to this day.

Let us move on to the second reading. St. Paul says that God himself made a sacrifice: he has given us his own Son, he gave him on the Cross to triumph over sin and death, to triumph over the Evil One and to overcome all the evil that exists in the world. And God's extraordinary mercy inspires the Apostle's admiration and profound trust in the power of God's love for us. In fact, St. Paul writes: "[God] who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:32).

If God gives himself in his Son, he gives us everything. And Paul insists on the power of Christ's redeeming sacrifice against every other force that can threaten our life. Paul asks himself: "Who will bring any charge against God's elect?" (8:33). We are in God's heart; this is our great trust. This creates love and in love we go towards God. If God has given his own Son for all of us, no one can accuse us, no one can condemn us, no one can separate us from his immense love. As Isaac is the promised child to Abraham, the father of our faith, Jesus is the child of the eternal promise. As Abraham accepted to sacrifice his only son Isaac, God the

Father sacrifices His Only Begotten Son, the true sacrifice that gives eternal life. The supreme sacrifice of love on the Cross, which the Son of God accepted and chose willingly, becomes the source of our justification, of our salvation. And let us remember that in the Holy Eucharist, this act of the Lord is ever present, it remains eternally in his heart, and this act of love attracts us, unites us with him.

Finally, we come to the episode of the Transfiguration. Jesus manifests himself in his glory before the sacrifice of the Cross and God the Father proclaims his beloved Son, and invites the disciples to listen to him. Jesus goes up a high mountain and takes three Apostles with him – Peter, James and John – who will be particularly close to him in his extreme agony, on another mountain, the Mount of Olives.

A little earlier, Jesus had announced his Passion and Peter had been unable to understand why the Lord, the Son of God, should speak of suffering, rejection, death, a Cross, indeed, he had opposed the prospect of all this with determination. Jesus now takes the three disciples with him to help them understand that the path to attaining glory, the path of [radiant] love that overcomes darkness, passes through the total gift of self, passes through the scandal of the Cross. And the Lord must take us with him too, at least to help us begin to understand that this is the route way.

The Transfiguration is moment of light that helps us to see Christ's Passion with the eyes of faith. Indeed, it is a mystery of suffering, but it is also the "blessed Passion" because – in essence – it is a mystery of God's extraordinary love. It is the definitive exodus that opens for us the door to the freedom and newness of the Resurrection, of salvation from evil. We need it on our daily journey, so often also marked by the darkness of evil.

Like the three Apostles of the Gospel, we also need to climb the mountain of the Transfiguration to receive God's light, so that his Face might shine upon ours. And it is in personal and community prayer that we encounter the Lord, not as an idea or a moral proposal, but, rather, as a Person who wants to enter into relationship with us, and wants to renew our life to make it like his.

This is the Good News, the Gospel we are to proclaim to all people wherever they live, work, study or just pass their leisure time. May they also come to know the One who took upon himself every consequence of evil and sin, conqueror of death and the Evil One by rising on the third day. Lent prepares us to personally participate in this great mystery of our faith, which we will celebrate with great joy in a few weeks. May we follow Jesus to the cross, be faithful disciples, and share together in the fullness of the Easter joy.