

## SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT 2006/B.

Lent is a time of battle as Jesus did in the desert; but it is also a time of choice. All the readings of this day are all about the possible choices to do in favor of God. The 1<sup>st</sup> reading of Genesis recounts the difficult choice, almost inhuman one would say, Abraham has done by accepting to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as God asked him. As a matter of fact, we all know how it was in his old age that God blessed Abraham with Isaac as the fulfillment of the promise done to him. Isaac was the most precious gift Abraham has ever had; he was not only his only son, but also the unique heir of his of his house, the only one on whom he could count to perpetuate his blood. How could God ask him to sacrifice such a son? Was not God contradicting himself with such a demand? Abraham must have felt stripped of every support, of every hope. He now seemed to have lost God's support. But he kept his faith in the love and fidelity of God even when confronted with this tragic situation. He knew that God who has made the impossible possible by giving him Isaac is also able to protect him even when he was asked to sacrifice him.

Abraham is the symbol of everyone who does not cling to his own privilege, who does not care only for his own interests, but who looks at what he can do for God even if he does not understand clearly God's demand. By renouncing what God has given him, Abraham chooses God alone. By renouncing the gift received through Promise, he keeps only the Promise. In that complete stripping where God ultimately is chosen, everything is given back, the blessing as well as the descendants and the land. In other words, any sacrifice we accept for the sake of God's Kingdom, any suffering we accept because of our discipleship, will never remain without a reward. We can be tested and tempted, but if we stand at God's side, if we accept him instead of denying him, he will give us beyond our merit and expectations.

The faith of Abraham gives us strength and courage when we are weak anxious to know that God is with us in spite of our situation. Abraham believed in God blindly; he left his country, gave up the security of his house and the protection that came from his family and tribe. He severed all his links with his past, because he was sure that God would keep his promise. We need the same trust and faithfulness in our time of trouble and trial. It is the same faith that leads him in the important and decisive moment of choice. Without faith we will never come to decisive choice in our relationship with God.

Abraham is the symbol of God, our Father, who did not spare his only Son, but handed him over for us all, as we heard in the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading. All those who choose Jesus and are obedient to him, the Father will give them everything with him. Jesus, on his part, cannot condemn his best friends, the sinners for whom he laid down his life. Perhaps, some would be tempted to say that their sins would testify against them. But this too will be impossible, because Jesus died to destroy the sins of all humans. How could God accuse and Christ condemn those for whom he died? Moreover, God is the only one who could witness against us, since he alone knows how things really stand. But, he cannot accuse us because he loves us so much that he gave his own son for our salvation. If there is

condemnation, it is only for those who refuse to choose Christ and his Father. Think about it this time of Lent and make a good choice.

Let me say also that Isaac is the symbol of Christ. He prefigured Christ who will be transfigured by God's glory on the mountain. Like Isaac, Christ is God's utterly free gift to us and so is the salvation he brought to us. It comes to us utterly free and we need always to be aware of this. Like Isaac, Jesus is the promise of God. He is the one on whom salvation depends. However, unlike Isaac, Jesus will be the sacrifice which brings about our salvation. Unlike Isaac, Christ does go on mountain to be sacrificed, but to reveal his true nature.

To better understand the scene of the transfiguration, we have to bear in mind the particular place the Messiah occupied in Jewish popular expectation as the one who will save Israel from his enemies. The disciples, from the very beginning, had begun asking themselves who Jesus was, and at a certain point they began to realize that he might be the Messiah. Their ideas were, however, still very confused. Like the rest of people, they expected a glorious messiah, rich and powerful ruler, capably of rapidly changing the condition of humankind and of restoring the kingdom of God on earth.

The disciples will discover the true identity of Jesus little by little. The event of the Resurrection in particular will throw a new light on his word and deeds so that they come to the true vision of who he is truly is. But, before the resurrection, Christ has to be seized, to suffer and to be put to death. This idea of suffering was very difficult for them to understand and to accept. That is why Jesus who was used to go alone to pray on the mountain takes, this time, with him Peter, James and John, so that they may witness the glory to which is his and to which they are prepared if they remain faithful until the end. In other words, even they too may have to go through suffering and persecution, they called to an immense glory with Jesus in heaven.

If Jesus speaks with Moses and Elijah, it is to show them that in him are united the Law and the prophets. They should not reject him and accept him even if he is not a messiah in the line of popular expectation. He is in the true line with them, that is, he is the fulfillment of everything they stand for. In this context, what else to do, then, than to listen to him!

The transfiguration of Jesus is a strong reminder to each of us that we have to choose Christ whatever it may cost us. What comes at the end of this choice be difficult it may be is not the prolongation of suffering, but the glory will shine upon us. If we want to rise one day with him, we must follow him along the way of the cross. Let us ask the grace of courage to follow Christ along the same paths. God bless you all!



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