

## Homily for 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent (28<sup>th</sup> February 2021)

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Readings: Gen 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18; Ps 115 (116); Rom 8:31-34; Mk 9:2-10

Theme: The Transfiguration and the Real Identity of the Son of God.

On the first Sunday of Lent, the liturgy presented us with the temptation of Jesus and how he conquered Satan and invited us to repent and follow God. On this second Sunday, our focus is on the transfiguration, a preparation for the passion and death of Jesus. On the mountain of transfiguration, God revealed the identity of his Son. This experience will erase any doubt in the disciples' minds after his death and resurrection, whether he is indeed the divine Son of God (cf. 2 Pet 1:16-20).

One immediately wonders how the transfiguration relates to the first reading from the book of Genesis, which gives us the narrative of the so-called 'Sacrifice of Isaac.' Isaac was never sacrificed. Thus, the Jews correctly call this story *Aqedah*, from the verb, *aqad*, which means 'to bind' or 'to tie up.' Abraham bound Isaac but did not get to the point of sacrificing him. The story of Isaac can only be understood in the light of the paschal mystery of Christ. The narrative emphasises Abraham's faith, and many scholars focus on that theme and downplay the role of Isaac. A typological reading of the text will reveal how Isaac is a type of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, especially in his passion and death on the Cross. A few points will help to draw some parallels. First, the binding or supposed sacrifice takes place on a mountain, Mount Moriah. Some scholars have seen a connection between Mount Moriah and the Temple Mount area in Jerusalem, including Mount Calvary. But our interest today is that the transfiguration takes place on a mountain as well. Mountains are places of divine revelation. As God made Mount Moriah a place of encounter between him and Abraham, the mountain of transfiguration is a place of encounter between the Trinity and humanity. There is also an encounter between the Old and New covenants in Moses and Elijah coming to Jesus.

Second, three times in the narrative, God refers to Isaac as *binkha asher ahabtha* (Hebrew) or *tou huiou sou tou agapetou* (Greek) – your beloved Son. Who is called the beloved Son in the gospel? God declares Jesus as his Beloved Son. Third, Isaac took the wood of his own sacrifice up the mountain and following his father's voice. The son made no resistance even when the father laid him on the wood on the mountain. In the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah were talking to Jesus. The gospel of Luke has a little detail missing in Matthew and Mark. 'And behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to about to accomplish at Jerusalem' (Lk 9:30-31). The transfiguration was a preparation for the imminent suffering and death of Jesus. Finally, God called out to Abraham not to lay a hand on his beloved son because God knows that he fears Him and 'You have not refused me your son, your only son.' God is the one who did not refuse to give the world his only Son to die for the sins of the world.

In the gospel, Jesus wanted the core group of his disciples, Peter, James and John, to witness the transfiguration. The Greek verb, *metamorphoo*, 'to change into another form, transform or transfigure' means a complete alteration of appearance. The cloths of Jesus became radiant, intensely white, as no one on earth could bleach them. It must have been a spectacular experience for Jesus' disciples that they wanted to remain on the mountain. The transfiguration reveals the identity of Jesus to them as the divine Son of God and God. A first-century Jew would immediately connect the description of the radiance of Jesus clothes to Daniel's prophecy in the vision of the Ancient of Days. 'As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair on his head was pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire.' (Dan 7:9). Just as Daniel described the Ancient of Days, whose clothing was white as snow, so Jesus is presented as one whose clothes became radiant and intensely white. The transfiguration, therefore, reveals Jesus

as one equal to the Ancient of Days, seated on the throne. He is the Messiah-God to whom Moses and Elijah bore witness. Another powerful symbolism in the narrative is the cloud, which covered them on the mountain. In the Old Testament, the glory cloud, *kabod Adonai*, was the manifestation of God's presence, which sometimes also symbolises the presence of the Spirit of God. The glory cloud is collaborated by the Father's voice, which declared Jesus as his beloved Son. The Father and the Spirit are all present on the mountain to witness to and strengthen Jesus as he prepares for his final mission of going to the Cross.

God did not spare his own Son, the Cross. He gave him up for our salvation. Hence, St. Paul says, God 'gave him up to benefit us all.' The disciples were the first beneficiaries of the death and resurrection, and the transfiguration will become a life-changing experience for them. We, too, are beneficiaries of the saving death of Jesus. Today, Jesus invites us to an experience on the mountain like the three disciples. There we can listen to Father's voice, discover for ourselves and have an experience of Jesus Christ as our Lord and Son of God. God calls out to each one of us as his beloved children. But can we listen and respond in obedience like Abraham, like Isaac, like Jesus?