

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT
February 28, 2021 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God, our Father, you have chosen us to be your sons and daughters. You love us even more than Abraham loved Isaac. You cherish us as you cherish your beloved Son. Though we do not deserve it, we rejoice in your love. Help us to trust in that love and to find more ways to share your love with others. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.]
Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.

Facilitator reads focus statement: Today's first reading and Gospel speaks to us about the relationship between two fathers and their sons. In the first reading, Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved son prefigures the sacrifice of Jesus, God's beloved Son. In the second reading, Paul reminds us that with God on our side we cannot lose. From another viewpoint, we can say that all three readings give us a glimpse of what it was like for Abraham, Peter, James, John and Paul to "walk in the presence of the Lord."

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the First Reading, the Psalm, and the Second Reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

God put Abraham to the test.

He called to him, "Abraham!"

"Here I am!" he replied.

Then God said:

"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah.

There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."

When they came to the place of which God had told him,
Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it.
Then he reached out and took the knife to slaughter his son.
But the LORD's messenger called to him from heaven,
"Abraham, Abraham!"
"Here I am!" he answered.
"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the messenger.
"Do not do the least thing to him.
I know now how devoted you are to God,
since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."
As Abraham looked about,
he spied a ram caught by its horns in the thicket.
So he went and took the ram
and offered it up as a holocaust in place of his son.

Again the LORD's messenger called to Abraham from heaven and said:
"I swear by myself, declares the LORD,
that because you acted as you did
in not withholding from me your beloved son,
I will bless you abundantly
and make your descendants as countless
as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore;
your descendants shall take possession
of the gates of their enemies,
and in your descendants all the nations of the earth
shall find blessing—
all this because you obeyed my command."

COMMENTARY

The story of Abraham is about a man who listens to God and responds with faith and obedience. When he hears God's call to leave his homeland, he obeys. When God promises him and his wife Sarah a child, he believes even though Sarah is advanced in years. When God asks him to sacrifice his only son, he does not question God. This is a story of a man trusting God even when it makes no sense to trust him. Being a man of great faith, *Abraham presumes God knows what he is doing*. Abraham's response to God is not "Why, God?" or "Why me?" but one of obedience, trust and action. In the context of our Lenten liturgy, this reading points to the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross. This story is also intended to teach the Israelites about the immorality of human sacrifice—something that was normal during Abraham's time.

As beloved sons and daughters of God, we are called to faithfulness and obedience especially in times of trials.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 116

R. (116:9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

I believed, even when I said,

“I am greatly afflicted.”

Precious in the eyes of the LORD

is the death of his faithful ones.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

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.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

My vows to the LORD I will pay

in the presence of all his people,

In the courts of the house of the LORD,

in your midst, O Jerusalem.

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

COMMENTARY

This is a song of thanksgiving sung in the temple by the Israelites in gratitude to God for helping them in their time of distress. One could easily imagine Abraham and Isaac singing this psalm after the Lord delivers them from their ordeal.

SECOND READING: Romans 8:31-34

Brothers and sisters:

If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son

but handed him over for us all,

how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones?

It is God who acquits us, who will condemn?

Christ Jesus it is who died—or, rather, was raised—

who also is at the right hand of God,

who indeed intercedes for us.

COMMENTARY

These verses may have been written by Paul to encourage people whose faith is being tested because of suffering. Paul's contention, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" is intended to elicit a response of faith. Who can defeat those who have God on their side? God's willingness to sacrifice his only Son on our behalf should surely prove, without doubt, his love for and interest in us.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Mark 9:2-10

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Mark 9:2-10

Jesus took Peter, James, and John
and led them up a high mountain apart by themselves.
And he was transfigured before them,
and his clothes became dazzling white,
such as no fuller on earth could bleach them.
Then Elijah appeared to them along with Moses,
and they were conversing with Jesus.
Then Peter said to Jesus in reply,
"Rabbi, it is good that we are here!
Let us make three tents:
one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."
He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified.
Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them;
from the cloud came a voice,
"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."
Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone
but Jesus alone with them.

As they were coming down from the mountain,
he charged them not to relate what they had seen to anyone,
except when the Son of Man had risen from the dead.
So they kept the matter to themselves,
questioning what rising from the dead meant.

COMMENTARY

In this mystical and awe-filled event, Jesus and his three apostles experience the glory of God. They are, as it were, transported into another reality. The references to Jesus' face "*dazzling as the sun*" and his clothes "*radiant as light*" are reminiscent of Old Testament theophanies (appearances of God). The presence of Moses and Elijah symbolizes "the Law" (given to Moses) and "the Prophets." In Jesus, both converge and are brought to fulfillment. The response of the apostles is one of incredible *joy* and *holy terror*. They are so over-awed that they do not want to leave: "*Let us make three tents.*" But they are also overcome with fear. Spiritual theologians tell us that the "*experience of the holy*" can cause us to be overjoyed and terrified at the same time. Sometimes that which we most deeply desire, e.g., intimacy with God or another, may also be most terrifying to us. We are afraid of losing ourselves to another. The heavenly voice tells the apostles to *listen* to Jesus for he is God's anointed Messiah. In the dark days ahead, this mountaintop experience will sustain both Jesus and the apostles. Remember the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the night before he died: "*We have some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter now. Because I have been to the mountaintop ... mine eyes have seen the glory of the Lord.*"

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Share with the group or person next to you what spoke to you most in the Gospel. With this first question, try to refrain from commenting on what others said. Just share what spoke to you and then move on to the next person.
2. What was the toughest thing God ever asked of you? Abraham would have answered, "When God asked me to sacrifice my only son." What would your answer be?
3. Who/what are our Isaacs that we may find very hard to surrender to God if asked?
4. In the second reading, Paul says, "*If God is for us, who can be against us?*" To what extent have you felt God's providential care down through the years? Was there ever a time you felt God had abandoned you?
5. Spiritually, have you ever had a "mountaintop" experience? If so, what was that like for you? How did it change your life?
6. Name one thing today's Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God's Word and listened to others' reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Dear Lord, you call me to have faith in you in all times – especially those times of crisis, help me to have the faith of Abraham in all things.*

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: This week, pray frequently for a transformation of a difficult relationship.

CONCLUDING PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Include all those who feel abandoned by God and Church, those who have recently lost a child, and couples who desire to have a child. Pray for the grace to persevere in your Lenten practices.

CLOSING PRAYER (Together)

Blessed are you, God of Abraham.

You called him to serve you obediently.

Give us the courage to respond

as wholeheartedly as he did.

May we always listen to your beloved Son

and be obedient to your will.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Note on scrutinies. During the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent, the ‘elect’ (those preparing for baptism at the Easter Vigil) will participate in three ritual celebrations called the scrutinies. During these rituals we pray that the elect may be strengthened where they are still weak, that darkness in their lives may be illuminated by Christ and that any influence of the Evil One may be broken. When a scrutiny is celebrated, the readings from Cycle A may be read because of their strong baptismal character: water, light and death/resurrection.

If your parish celebrates the scrutinies for the next three Sundays, the readings for one of the masses will probably be from Cycle A, rather than Cycle B.