



Bringing Home the Word

Second Sunday of Lent | February 25, 2018

God's Test of Obedience

By Mary Katharine Deeley

The Apostle Paul was absolutely certain the love of God would find us no matter what happened and that if we had any role model and ancestor in faith, it was Abraham.

The stories are familiar. Abraham left his ancestral home to find a land promised him by a God who had only recently revealed himself. Abraham believed a child would come to him and Sarah, though both were old. Finally, he showed he would give everything in obedience to God when he was asked to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac.

This last story is troublesome to us. Would God require human sacrifice?

We can understand this as a story of faith in two ways. The traditional interpretation is that God requires everything from us and wants nothing to come between us and our love of God. God's "test" of Abraham is a test of obedience. Will we give our "all?"

The second way of seeing the story begins with our understanding that many of the surrounding nations practiced child sacrifice. It may not have been a surprise when God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son, since his neighbors were doing it, too. But at the critical moment, when the angel calls out to tell Abraham to stop, he does. The Lord wants a different relationship with his people.

Abraham's faith is shown as much in his obedience to the second order as to the first. God doesn't want us to be just like everyone else. Rather, God wants us as his own people, following the path he carves for us—even if it means going against the tide. +

We can understand the story of Abraham's faith in two ways.

Sunday Readings

Genesis 22:1–2, 9a, 10–13, 15–18

"Do not lay your hand on the boy," said the angel.

Romans 8:31b–34

He who did not spare his own Son...how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Mark 9:2–10

[God said,] "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

A Word From Pope Francis

Lent...is a special time for recalling the gift of our baptism, when we became children of God. The Church invites us to renew the gift she has given us, not to let this gift lie dormant as if it were something from the past or locked away in a memory chest.

—Homily, February 14, 2016



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Are we willing to stay peacefully within God's plan, even if it means sacrifice?
- Do we trust God's plans more than our own?
- Is there anything more beloved by us than God's loving plan for us?



Belonging to God

By Kathy Coffey

The First Commandment: “I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods beside me” (Exodus 20:2–3).

Newspapers carried the story of a father who was boating with his son and the boy’s friend. When a strong, unexpected current carried the children overboard, the dad rescued them both. But after dragging them to safety, he could not save himself and drowned.

We can speculate about the gratitude the son, his friend, and their families will carry throughout their lives. Every breath they take is, in some sense, a gift of and a tribute to the heroic father who saved them. When people do us a big favor, we can rarely repay them. We breathe gratitude and cannot say thanks enough.

The extreme thankfulness that recipients must feel gives us a clue about the First Commandment. When we read about God freeing the Hebrews from Egypt, it’s hard to relate. Few of us know slavery firsthand. Hearing about people who are slaves today, many of them children, we’re appalled. We can only imagine what it means when someone unlocks the prison door and says, “You’re free.” To forget such a liberator would be the worst ingratitude.

Whatever our circumstances, God has freed us.

Awareness, Gratitude

After a gift like the one the Hebrew people received, how could they ignore God? How could they even think of worshipping anyone or anything else?

Before we get too high and mighty, scorning those ungrateful Jews, we should look at the ways God has freed us. Our situation may not be as obvious as imprisonment, but there are other, subtler forms of slavery. Some are caught in addictions to gambling, smoking, drugs, or alcohol. Others are trapped in unhealthy habits, fears, or relationships. From all of these, God is the ultimate liberator, freeing us in ways that surpass what we can do for ourselves.

Whatever our particular circumstances, God has freed us from something. And how gratefully do we respond? We probably need a reminder to put God first as badly as the Hebrews did.

If we say we belong to God completely and wholeheartedly, how do we show it? Do we set aside time each day to reflect on God’s ongoing action in our lives? (For harried commuters this can be done at stop signs.) Do we fall asleep naming the ways God was present in our days and the blessings he brought? If we take this commandment seriously, it will be reflected in our calendars and checkbooks. How do we spend our time and money?

Learning From Jesus

If we really want to know what this commandment means, we should look at the way it operates in Jesus’ life. He is passionately caught up in the love of his Father; his primary goal is pleasing God. Inspired and heartened by God, he responds constantly to God’s initiatives. Prayer punctuates his life; he often withdraws to renew his delight in God and be strengthened by their time together. During this time, he must experience God’s love, listen for God’s guidance, imagine God’s face.

Jesus shows us what it means to belong to God. During his agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, every human instinct rebels against the course ahead, but he holds fast to whatever the Father asks. If we can share in his all-consuming love, it places us in the house of God at all times. As Jesus’ joy and compassion shows us, that’s a far better place to live than the house of slavery. +

WEEKDAY READINGS February 26-March 3

Mon. Lenten Weekday:
Dn 9:4b–10 / Lk 6:36–38
Tue. Lenten Weekday:
Is 1:10, 16–20 / Mt 23:1–12
Wed. Lenten Weekday:
Jer 18:18–20 / Mt 20:17–28

Thu. Lenten Weekday: Jer 17:5–10 / Lk 16:19–31
Fri. Lenten Weekday: Gn 37:3–4, 12–13a, 17b–28a / Mt 21:33–43, 45–46
Sat. Lenten Weekday: Mi 7:14–15, 18–20 / Lk 15:1–3, 11–32


Lord, you watch over me and love me as your child. Help me to see all people as your children and treat them with gentleness, love, and respect.
From *Mindful Meditations for Every Day of Lent and Easter*,
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann McSweeney