
WORD MADE FLESH

Bound to the Presence of the Holy*

Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-2,9-13,15-18; Romans 8:31-35,37; Mark 9:2-10

The Sacrifice of Isaac, the Akeda ("the binding" of Isaac) as it is called in Hebrew, and the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ speak to us out of their silence. They are haunting texts. As a child, they fascinated me. How inexplicable are the details in these stories! Could the God of love require such an unimaginable act of his beloved servant Abraham? Surely, Isaac was also God's child, loved with that divine love that only wants life to be full and complete. And Sarah, beloved of God, loving her son, where was she in all this? Sarah, silent ... silent as Abraham earlier in the story. So much silence flows through this story. 'God said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."'

The Transfiguration, today's Gospel, is also a journey tale: "Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves." These three disciples glimpsed the wonder and light of the Transfiguration, experienced a revelation they would not understand until after the resurrection. Even as a child I sensed that this text was somehow preparing me for the Passion of Our Lord as it did Peter, James, and John. What was haunting to me was knowing that this glimpse on the Mount of Transfiguration "would not prevent them from abandoning their Master when he was arrested, or Peter from denying that he knew him." W.H. Auden reminds us that "Christ did not enchant men and women; He demanded that they believe in Him." In ecstasy one has no need of faith. But when the vision vanishes ... "sooner or later we must walk alone in faith."

The Akeda, "the binding of Isaac," is the quintessential story of faith and fear. It is, for us, a Lenten tale. At some point in our life all of us perhaps, play a part in it. Abraham followed his inkling when he left Ur of the Chaldees and set out on the journey to live in communion with the one Lord of all Creation. He left the local deities behind, searching for a relationship with the God beyond the gods. And the promise, the promise of the God beyond the gods, was that he and Sarah would give birth to a people, that their future would unfold as chosen. There are many turns along this path but none in all Hebrew scripture can match the Akeda.

We are also called to see our experience in Abraham journey including his terrible journey to Moriah, "the high place", the "land of vision." On this, the Second Sunday in Lent, we glimpse our life in the light of faith and, like Abraham, hear the call to offer up, what for many of us is, the final idolater. Recall the struggle of Abraham and Sarah over their sense of future, their sense of God's covenant with them. This is the burden of Isaac, what he carried on his back, the fuel of sacrifice. It needs to be offered, redeemed. One cannot walk in faith, open toward the future, until, even the idolatry of future is offered, bound to the altar, bound to the presence of the Holy.

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