

**Second Sunday of Lent – Year B  
(Mar. 12, 2006)**

**Listen to Him**

The story of Abraham and Isaac has always been a source of puzzlement. As we read it or hear it proclaimed today in our liturgy we wonder how God could even ask such a thing – or even more how could Abraham agree to sacrifice his own son. Down through the ages people have agonized over these questions, and some have even used what seems to be the callousness of a cruel God to reject that God and all that such a deity stands for. This of course is mistaken and completely misses the point.

Abraham does not pose these question or indeed any questions. He trusted the promise of God: that he would be the Father of many people, the founder of the nation of Israel. Isaac was his son through whom this would happen. It would seem that the promise could not be fulfilled if he killed his son. But, once again, in the context of the story that is not the point. The point is that Abraham gave himself to God completely. As we know from the end of the story, it had never been God's intention that Isaac be killed. In a sense Abraham's willingness to do whatever God wanted was sacrifice enough.

In a different but similar way, the Father of Jesus surrenders *his* son. The transfiguration story speaks of two things: future glory and the pain of the cross, and in Mark's eyes, indeed in the eyes of all four evangelists, the two cannot be separated. John makes it more explicit than the others. In his gospel, the hour of Jesus exaltation, of his being lifted up on the cross, is also the hour of his glorification, of his being raised by the Father. Speaking in human terms – and we have no other way to talk – we witness the pain of God and the meaning of love.

And all this is done for us. The cards are stacked in our favor. We have more to be glad about than to fear. That's Paul's message today. "If God is for us who can be against us? Is it possible that he who did not spare his own son but handed him over for our sake will not grant us all things besides?"

Even though the Father loved his Son, as Abraham loved Isaac, he

was willing to surrender him for our sake. “God so loved the world that he gave his own Son.” Now that says a lot about God. But it also says a lot about us. As God keeps saying to the people in the Old Testament, “You are precious in my eyes.” And in the reproaches that we hear on Good Friday, “What more could I have done for you that I have not?”

Well the question we have to ponder this evening/morning is: how do we respond? In the words of the Psalmist, “What return shall I make to the Lord for all that he has done for me?”

A good place to begin is with God’s instruction in our Gospel reading: “This is my Son, my beloved. Listen to him.” Listen to him and do what he tells us to do. Basically, be loving, compassionate, understanding, forgiving people.

Listen to him. Open our minds and hearts. But of course opening our minds and hearts to God also means opening our minds and hearts to one another. Listen to him because Jesus is speaking to us all in many ways. Speaking to us whenever God’s word is proclaimed. It’s still true as Jesus says, “No one lives on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Speaking to us also in the events that TV broadcasts in our homes every day: continuing war in Iraq, struggles in Africa and Asia, Super-Bowls and Academy Awards, hunger and homelessness on the streets of Washington. Speaking to us all through our own experiences: a new-born baby or a child with Down’s syndrome, a wedding or a funeral, hostility at home or crisis in the Church, a job you love or a job you’ve lost, whatever. Countless other ways every single day.

Very simply, dear friends, as we journey with Jesus to our own Jerusalem, to our own Mount of Transfiguration, listen to him. It won’t always be fun and we won’t always enjoy it. But it will be exciting and it will help us to be the people we are meant to be and in the final analysis that will be very, very good. Just imagine what a wonderful world this would be if we all, *ALL*, listened to Him. Perhaps then we would all hear God say to us what God said to Jesus, “You, too are my beloved sons and daughters. I love you very, very much.”