

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT, FEBRUARY 27 & 28 2021.

LISTENING TO THE TRANSFIGURED SON OF THE LIVING GOD

"This is my beloved Son. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7).

Dear brothers and sisters,

Last Sunday's first reading presents Noah as a prototype of Christ. Like Christ, he remained faithful to his vocation as a son of God when his contemporaries failed woefully. Because of God's mercy and Noah's integrity the Lord said to him, "I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all bodily creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth" (Genesis 9:11-12). This foreshadows the redemption that Christ Jesus brought for the whole of creation.

Today's first reading presents Abraham as an image of God the Father and Isaac, his son, as an image of Christ the Son of the living God. While on their way to Mt. Moriah where Isaac would be offered up to God as a holocaust offering. Not knowing this, Isaac asked Abraham, his father, where was the sacrificial Lamb? Abraham responded, "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8). Though he prophesied that God would provide the Lamb Abraham was ready to offer his only son as a sacrificial offering if God required it. Abraham's readiness to offer his only son calls to mind this verse, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:15).

God had promised Abraham an awesome future, saying, "No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I am making you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fertile; I will make nations of you; kings will stem from you" (Genesis 17:5-6). At that time, Sarah Abraham's wife had had no child and was ninety years old. So that Abraham might know that God was not joking, God said, "Your wife Sarah is to bear you a son and you shall call him Isaac. It is with him that I will maintain my covenant as an everlasting covenant and with his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:19). God sealed this promise with a covenant requiring circumcision of Abraham and all the members of his household. This is known as the covenant of circumcision and is binding upon all Jews. Our circumcision is baptism and makes us members of the new Israel, worldwide family of God.

When Isaac was conceived Abraham was promised generations untold but not told that his son would be a holocaust offering. When God asked Abraham to offer Isaac up as holocaust offering, Abraham did not object. "He reasoned that God was able to raise even from the dead, and he received Isaac back as a symbol" (Hebrews 11:19). In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told" (Romans 4:18). God came through in his promise; he stopped Abraham from slaughtering Isaac as the burnt offering and provided a ram instead. The lamb Abraham prophesied had still not yet appeared until that day when, speaking of Christ, John the Baptist said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Being offered up in his father's

intention and in his willingness to be bound by a hundred-year-old-father, Isaac was a distant mirror of Christ, the beloved Son of God.

The transfiguration of Christ in today's gospel, like the baptism before it, points to Jesus as the beloved Son of God destined for the sacrifice for our redemption. The Transfiguration was a prelude and a preparation for the crucifixion and death of our Lord. Moses and Elijah, the two men who appeared during the transfiguration representing the law and the prophets, spoke about the passing [Exodus] our Lord was to accomplish in Jerusalem (Luke 9:31). "Transfiguration is a prayer event. It visibly displays what happens when Jesus talks with his Father: the profound interpenetration of his being with God which then becomes pure light. In his oneness with the Father, Jesus is himself "light from light." Reflecting on the Transfiguration, St. Leo the Great, remarked. "By changing his appearance in this way, Christ chiefly wished to prevent his disciples from feeling scandalized in their hearts by the cross. He did not want the disgrace of the passion, which he freely accepted, to break their faith. This is why he revealed to them the excellence of his hidden dignity." The pontiff further maintained, "With the same foresight the foundation of his holy churches hope was laid, so that the whole Body of Christ should realize the nature of the change which it must undergo, and that the members might promise themselves a share in that honor which had already shone around the head."

The event preceding the Transfiguration gives insight to the why and meaning of it. Six days earlier, the Lord had spoken about his coming suffering, crucifixion and death. This was right after, on behalf of the rest of the Apostles, Peter had confessed the divinity of Christ, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16). The prediction of his suffering and crucifixion and the transfiguration were to help the Apostles understand the kind of Messiah Jesus was. He was the Messiah who loves unto the end - to the cross. He was the suffering Messiah whose death brings salvation to the whole world. He fulfilled the prophecy of the Suffering Servant. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). Another important piece of information is that the Transfiguration happened six days after the feast of *Yom ha Kippurim*, the great Day of Atonement when the name of *YHWH* is mentioned once in a year. It is a salient statement that the transfigured one is God. "The Divinity of Jesus is the issue in both the Confession of Peter and the Transfiguration. In both cases, the appearance of Jesus' glory is connected with the Passion motif. Jesus's divinity belongs with the Cross - only when we put the two together do we recognize Jesus correctly."

The beloved Son of God, who died our death and restored our life, deserves our wholehearted attention. The voice of the Father commands us, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him" (Mark 9:7). How can we listen to him? It is simple - by following the vivid example he gave us when he defeated the tempter in resisting the unholy alternative to the truth, the way and life which the adversary, the world and flesh propose to us. What are the examples of this in your everyday life? One is when tempted to make up your own rules rather than accept the doctrines of the Church on the sacredness of life in order to win a political gain. Another is when tempted to slacken in your Lenten observance in order to satisfy your cravings. Yet

another is when tempted to cut corners in business dealings to make more money. The commonest one is when you are tempted to receive the holy Eucharist when you know that you have not been to confession in ten years or more! In all these and more, listening to the beloved Son of God saves us from a downward spiral to misery and points of no return.