

2nd Sunday in Lent, Cycle B March 8, 2009

Readings: Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10

Today, Hear the Voice of the Lord

Last week I made a connection between our gospel reading and the one we read on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. And today I would like to also start by making a connection to the events at our Lord's baptism. We heard back in January these words from the Gospel of Mark: *"And a voice came from the heavens, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'"* Listen to the similarities in what we heard in the gospel reading this morning: *"Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; from the cloud came a voice. 'This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.'"*

Once again God the Father speaks from the heavens, but this time He is speaking to us, not to Jesus. And He instructs us to listen to His Son. One of the antiphons we use during Lent to start our Liturgy of the Hours, our daily Christian prayer, is: *"Today if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts."* It's taken from the psalms and I think it sums up one of this morning's message, a call to obedience. And, as we see in our first reading, obedience will often require us to be willing to make great sacrifices.

Our first reading is the story of the test of Abraham and is one of the most dramatic in the Old Testament. It is also chocked full with symbolism and history that makes the story even more interesting and instructive for us. Let me digress a little and share a bit of what I have found regarding this story. First we can look at some geography. Abraham and Isaac traveled to the land of Moriah. The second book of Chronicles in the Old Testament tells us that Solomon built the Temple on Mt. Moriah, the height in the land of Moriah. And we know that the Temple location is in what we now call Jerusalem. There is a Jewish legend that says that after Noah's ark settled onto dry land, that he and his sons made sacrifices on an altar in nearby Moriah, the same altar where Adam and Cain and Abel had made sacrifices. And the legend goes on to say that Noah's son Shem had brought with him on the ark the skull of Adam, and he interred it in a location close by. And this location near the Temple became known as Golgotha, the place of the skull; we will refer to Golgotha when we read the story of the passion in a few weeks. And there are the parallels between God the Father and Abraham, and between Jesus and Isaac. Like the Father, Abraham was willing to sacrifice his only beloved son. Abraham and Isaac travel to Jerusalem with a donkey; sounds similar to Jesus traveling on a donkey to Jerusalem that we celebrate on Palm Sunday. Isaac then he carries wood for the sacrificial fire on his back as he goes up Mt. Moriah to be sacrificed. And we assume that he was willing to be sacrificed because he was a strong young man while Abraham was over 100 years old. It's hard to believe that Abraham could have tied Isaac up to place him on the altar without some level of cooperation. Abraham was willing to offer his only beloved son for God, and his son was willing to obediently participate. About 2000 years later, in the same location, God the Father was willing to offer his only beloved Son for us, and His Son willingly cooperated with the will of His Father. If the legend is true, Jesus, the new Adam, gave up His life to put an end to death at the same location that the first Adam, who brought death into the world, was buried.

And so another 2000 years have passed, and we find ourselves in another Lenten Season; a time when we can reflect on our obedience and our willingness to offer sacrifices. We may sometimes have trouble relating to God the Father and even Jesus, but we can instead try to put ourselves in Abraham's place or in Isaac's place, and reflect on the strength of their faith, and how ours compares. We can use them as examples. Abraham was holy and heard God speaking to him clearly; it must have been a very clear message for him to act the way he did. He listened and obeyed. The Father spoke from a cloud and told us to listen, as well, to Jesus.

“Today if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.”

So Lent can be a time to grow in holiness so that we improve our relationship with God. In our prayers we will be able to listen better and hear God speaking to us more clearly. We fast and make sacrifices to practice our ability to be obedient so that when we hear God speak to us, we can have the strength to carry out His will; to not only hear, but to listen and to act. We give alms to practice charity and to remind us that we are just stewards of God's gifts; we should do with them what God wants us to do, not what we want to do.

Remember we are dust and to dust we shall return. We are only here on earth for a short time. Make your time count. Be willing to make sacrifices; they will be very temporary. The afterlife is eternal. In faith, we know that there is not anything that we shouldn't be willing to sacrifice? But still we hold back, because our faith is weak. Pray that it be strengthened.

In faith do what the Father said from the cloud; listen to His Son, Jesus. And then in faith do what Mary said to the servants at the wedding feast at Cana; and that is “do whatever He tells you.”

“Today if you hear the voice of the Lord, harden not your hearts.”

Deacon Joe Hulway