



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We are now into our second week of Lent. How are you doing with your Lenten observances? All too often, we can fall early on and think that we have failed. In our discouragement, we might then stop trying for the rest of Lent. Remember, though, that we are on a Lenten *journey*! We're working our way to the Cross and the Resurrection. We are not there yet. So, if you have fallen: get up again! Try again! A saint is not someone who is perfect, who never sins or fails (just read the lives of any saints ... they all struggled!). A saint is someone who keeps going back to God for mercy – trusting in His infinite mercy! Confidence, nothing but confidence in God's love and mercy!

I want to look at the first reading for this weekend. It is a rather harrowing reading as we hear about how God asks Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son, Isaac. Before we freak out about this, we need to know that the culture of the ancient near east often believed in gods that required human sacrifice (as did many other cultures, including the Aztecs). This desire for human blood makes sense if we understand, as St. Paul did, that the other "gods" weren't gods at all, but demons (see I Corinthians 10:19-21). Demons hate humanity and so would rejoice in human sacrifice and in murder (for information about this in modern times, see Fr. Michael Gaitley's book *The Second Greatest Story Ever Told* in his discussion on "*Santa Muerte*" in Mexico today). Knowing the end of the story, we can see that God is not only *testing* Abraham, He is also *showing* Abraham that He is NOT like the other "gods" of the land – He is the LORD of life.

God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mt. Moriah. It is significant that Isaac carries the wood for the sacrifice. This indicates that Isaac is not a child at this time, but a strong young man... while Abraham is well over 100. This seems to indicate that Isaac went willingly to sacrifice... that it is not just the faith of Abraham, but of Isaac as well. God shows Himself as the God of life as He sends the Angel to stay the knife so that Isaac is spared.

This incredible act of faith of Abraham and Isaac makes ripples down the centuries. It is here that Abraham shows that He has faith that God can even raise men from the dead (see Hebrews 11:19), since He knew that God had promised descendants as numerous as the stars through Isaac. Of course, Isaac would not be able to bear children if he were not alive. They trust God, they have faith in God even in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances. They have come to believe that God is a God of the impossible!

The sacrifice of Isaac is seen as a key moment for the people of Israel as they understand that the sacrifices that they offer in the Temple are only efficacious because they somehow, in a mystical way, participate in the faith of Abraham and Isaac. In fact, the place where the Temple was built was Mt. Moriah (see 2 Chronicles 3:1). This is significant, as well, since this is the same mountain range on which Jesus was crucified. You see, Isaac is a foreshadowing of Jesus. If the sacrifices of the Temple had meaning because they looked back to the sacrifice of Isaac, the sacrifice of Isaac had meaning because it looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus! Jesus carried the wood for sacrifice up the hill. Jesus was the beloved Son of the Father. Jesus died willingly, trusting with faith in His Father that He would raise Him from the dead. And He was vindicated!

It is so important to realize that in the midst of everything, God has a tremendous plan. Even when it seems all is lost, God has a way out. God invites us to have faith in Him, to trust His love, to have confidence in His incredible plan for our lives, and that He is a God of the impossible!