

March 8, 2009

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent - Year B

Fr. Larry Richards

Good morning. I am always so excited when I get to start Mass off with a high note. As we listen to the First Reading, it is one of the most famous readings everybody should know. I would imagine you would have heard it since you were a child. Dr. Scott Peck, who later became a Catholic and he wrote years ago, I guess it is not as popular as it used to be. When we were in college everybody had to read the book, *The Road Less Traveled*. Anybody here ever read the book, *The Road Less Traveled*? The older ones, of course and like me. Anyways, so we all had to read the book. Well, when Dr. Scott Peck was a teenager or grade school, when he was in religious education class or Protestant or he heard the story in the Bible, the First Reading today, he decided that he would never be a God follower or he would never be a believer in this God because he thought any god that would ask you to sacrifice your son would not be a real god. And I would 1,000% agree with him.

He is now Catholic, but that is all beside the point, but I would 1,000% agree with him if that was the end of the story. If this was all that the God of the Universe did as He says, ok you have to sit there like all the... , you know, this was something all the other "gods" did in the thing to prove to God you loved him you had to give your first born son. This is all the pagan gods that did this. And so Abraham was in the midst of all these pagan gods, and yet he was told by God, "I want you to give your son." And so he thought ok You are just like all these other gods. But Paul interprets it in a different way. He says that Abraham believed that the God of life could bring Isaac back to life. So if he was going to take the promise that God would bring that promise back to life. Abraham trusted God.

But can you even imagine what would happen if someone... you know you have a kid here and the kid comes to me and says, "Father?" "Yes son?" "My dad told me that God told him to kill me." What do you think I would do? I would have the guy arrested. I would have that father.... "You nut case, get out of here. What is the matter with you? God told you to kill your son?" Same with then and yet, that is not the end of the story. You do realize that if you go next door to the chapel, those of you who have been in our chapel and hopefully everybody has been in the chapel at least once. As you walk over there, as soon as you come in on the right hand side, which you really don't go to too often, there is a picture there. And that picture shows the significance of the Old Testament and the New Testament and this sacrifice of Isaac because again Isaac probably was not a child. He could have been as old as 33 years old and when he sat there and he is walking up the hill for the sacrifice, he has the wood of the sacrifice on his back, correct? And he sits there and he has the fire. And he looks at his dad and he says, "Hey, Dad, here is the wood for the sacrifice and here is the fire for the sacrifice but where is the lamb?" And how does Abraham answer Isaac? "God, himself will provide the lamb."

So he takes the wood of the sacrifice up the hill. Again we should all know the significance during Lent. He takes the wood of the sacrifice up the hill and when he gets there his father ties him up and he willingly, willingly is going to lay down his life because he trusts his father, who trusted God. And then we all know the story. Abraham goes to kill his son and God the Father stops him and says, "Don't you

dare lay a hand on that boy. I know you would withhold nothing from me.” And think about just that. Stop right there for a second. Would we withhold anything from God? Is there anything in our life that we would withhold from Him? Because again everyday we are called to do the same thing spiritually, are we not? We are called to offer God our family, spiritually. We are called to offer God ourselves, spiritually. We are called to offer God our money, spiritually. We are called to offer God our dreams, spiritually. We are called every day of our lives to offer to God all of our dreams, all of our life. And trust Him that even when things get dark, even when we don’t understand what is happening, that He will make it right as He did with Isaac.

And then of course, when you go into the New Testament, the very first thing that John proclaims is Jesus is what? “Behold the Lamb of God.” So again God himself provides the lamb. The very first thing to show significance between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New that God Himself provides the lamb. Now what that means of course is here is God the Father looking at Abraham, spiritually if you will, and says, “Abraham, stop! Don’t you dare offer your son to Me to prove your love for Me. Abraham, I will offer My son for you to prove My love for you.” That means that God the Father of the Universe gives everything for us. He offers everything for us. You know again, if we sit there and go back, I was in Wellington this week and I was talking to these people and at every parish mission I ask the same thing. The very first night as I go through this thing and I talk about Isaac and different things, I say, “So, God so love the world that He gave His only son. He gave Him up for you.” So if we were to look at that, who does God the Father love more, Jesus or us? Us, He gives His Son for you. He says, “I love you so much that I will uphold nothing. I will give you everything that I love,” and He gives us His Son.

And again with a beautiful image we have here in our church, where here is God the Father sitting there offering His Son on the cross for you and me - giving you and me everything to prove love. There He goes. “I have nothing left to give you. I am giving you everything I have. I am giving you my heart. I am giving you My Son.” And so this Lent as we are sitting there doing all of our things and we are complaining already because already I had to give up beer for Lent and it is only a week and a half into Lent and I want my beer. Or, already I am doing.... And we are going through all of our stuff because I gave up all this hard stuff and oh... it is all about me and what I gave up for God for Lent. Lent is so hard. Or this can be a time of gratitude. And our Lenten sacrifices aren’t sacrifices that focus on ourselves but are sacrifices of love. God, You who loved me and gave Your Son for me; God, I want to prove I love You by giving these things for love of You. And then our sacrifices become an act of love and the focus then is on God and not on us and that is the point. We are to forget about ourselves.

You know again this week I said every day I said to the people at the poor, poor mission, I also told them I am not sure how many more missions I am going to do I am going to cut them down drastically. It is too much. But anyway, I sat there and say, “Christianity is not about you. If you get this in your mind, if you finally get it you are going to grow significantly. Christianity is not the focus on one’s self but the forgetfulness of self. That we forget about ourselves and we start focusing on God and we start focusing on others.” So Lent is the time we learn to sacrifice ourselves so that we learn to forget about ourselves but if it’s not an act of love then it means nothing. So whatever you are doing this Lent, when you are getting tired of it, when you are thinking oh this is so hard stop just for a moment and say, God I do this

because I love You. I do this because I love You. This is my loving sacrifice for You and watch how easy that sacrifice becomes because it is no longer about you. it is about love for Him. Got it? Get it? Going to do it? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.