

## THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT – B

On the second Sunday of Lent we always have the account of the Transfiguration this year we read Mark's account. The Transfiguration is tied in with Peter's profession of faith and the first prophecy of the passion. For the three disciples and we who follow them the Transfiguration teaches us that Jesus speaks with the Father's authority and it gives a glimpse of what Christ will achieve by his death and resurrection. The first reading is the story of Abraham who, in obedience to God's command, leads his son off to be sacrificed. The second reading could be seen as a meditation on the major theme of Lent Christ's death and resurrection.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Genesis the first book in the Bible and the first book of the Pentateuch, the five books of the Jewish Law. The book's origins are still uncertain, it speaks of mankind's beginnings, 1-11, and then the history of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob until their arrival in Egypt. The book is a composite of three documents, the Yahwist, (J), the Elohist, (E) and the Priestly, (P), that go to make up the book of Genesis whose authorship, although attributed to Moses, is unknown. The Yahwistic tradition has a lively and vivid style and although God is described in human terms the author has a deep sense of the divine. The Elohist tradition (*elohim* means God) is more sober in style with an exacting moral code and an insistence on the distance separating human beings from God. The Priestly tradition contributes laws and is particularly concerned with the organization of the sanctuary, with sacrifices and festivals and with the person of Aaron, the priest, and his descendants. This is the tradition of the priests of the Temple of Jerusalem. The Yahwist and Elohist were possibly written down in the reign of Solomon c.950 BC, whereas the Priestly was not codified until the Exile, 587-538, and added to the Pentateuch after the return from exile.

The reading, Gen.22.1-2,9-13,15-18, begins with the statement, 'God put Abraham to the test.' The reading may originally have been written to teach that although the Canaanites practice child-sacrifice the Israelites do not. What does God want? As one writer put it Abraham loves Isaac too much, he loves him as a possession and Abraham must allow Isaac to be Isaac. Abraham shows by following God's wishes that he is prepared to give up his possessive love of Isaac so it is Abraham that has to make the sacrifice out of love for God and his son. In the following chapters Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for Isaac and in obedience to God's wishes Abraham's sacrifice is not something negative but very fruitful for it will be the means by which God's promise to Abraham will be fulfilled: 'I will shower blessings on you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven and the grains of sand on the seashore.' The Fathers of the Church saw in this story a prefiguring of the Passion of Jesus, the only-begotten Son. Read chapter 22 down to verse 18 if you have time.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 115.10,15-19, is a good reflection on the first reading one could imagine Abraham making this psalm his prayer after fulfilling God's command.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. Paul had not founded the Church in Rome but he intended to visit the Christians there on his way to Spain. This huge letter, with much detailed teaching, is difficult to summarize. The community in Rome was a mixture of Jewish and non-Jewish converts and there was a danger that they would look down on each other. Some of the converts from Judaism wanted pagan converts to be circumcised to ensure their salvation. Paul maintained this made nonsense of Christ's redemptive work. The Law was good and holy but made those who kept the Law aware of their need of God's help. This help has now been given in Christ Jesus which is explained in some detail.

The reading, 8.31-34, comes from the section of the letter which deals with the Christian's spiritual life. Paul has taught about the life of the Spirit that we are children of God destined to share his glory and he concludes with a hymn of confidence and the reading begins: 'If God is for us, who can be against us?' Then Paul goes on to proclaim that since God sent his own Son can we not expect that 'he will freely give us all his gifts?' With all confidence Paul continues, 'Who can bring any accusation against those God has chosen? When God grants saving justice who can condemn?' Christ not only died, he rose again and is now at God's right hand 'and who is adding his plea for us.' Paul wants us to be absolutely certain about all Christ has done for us and that nothing can cut us off from the love of Christ.