

Personal Notes
060312 Second Sunday in Lent 26B
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Those Faithful fortunate enough to make it into old age, must then deal with the ravages thereof. When love enters into the equation, the teaching of Jesus challenges the infirm to be kind and considerate toward their caregivers. The readings for this Second Sunday of Lent counterpoise the promise implied with the Transfiguration and the reality of the passion and death of Jesus. The promise can enable the Faithful to maintain good cheer in the midst of debilitating physical, emotional, and psychological realities.

The readings begin with Abraham offering his son Isaac as a forerunner of God offering his son, Jesus. Faith is required. As Jon Levenson words it, a “great paradox ... lies at the heart of our inquiry: the son’s presence can be enjoyed and the family preserved only if the son is given up to death itself.”¹ Within this context, the Black Catholics of the Richmond Diocese have a sort of call and response that says, “God is good, all the time.” Answered by “All the time, God is good.” This does not mean that the Diocese is necessarily good or that the evil God permits is good. What it is, is a sophisticated act of Faith that God is ultimately in charge, after all.

Oftentimes the Faithful do not and cannot understand the Cross. These readings, at least, imply the Cross. For example, Hebrew marginalia in Genesis 22:10 refer to “hour of distress,”² thereby anticipating the hour of distress of the Triduum of Holy Week. The holocaust of old age and terminal sickness relates not only to individuals but also to groups.

The so-called Jewish Holocaust of World War II awakened the Church to the evils of anti-Semitism. The Church in the United States extended that awakening to the evils of racism. The Holocaust was crucial for Pope John XXIII calling the Second Vatican Council, which brought “a breath of fresh air” (to use the words of John XXIII) into the teachings and practices of the Church. *Nostra Aetate* is the Second Vatican document condemning anti-Semitism, the only condemnation among all of

¹ Jon Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 161 as cited in Richard J. Clifford, S.J., “Genesis 38: Its Contribution to the Jacob Story,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 4 (October 2004) 529, fn. 27.

² Craig E. Morrison, O.Carm., “The “Hour of Distress” in *Targum Neofiti* and the “Hour” in the Gospel of John,” *the Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 592.

the Council documents.³ Like anti-Semitism, racism debilitates the Faithful, like a sickness.

Appropriately, the Church uses Psalm 116 both at Funerals⁴ and in Pastoral Care of the Sick.⁵ Psalm 116:10, *I believed, even when I said, "I am greatly afflicted,"* suits the counterpoise of the readings. Romans 8:32, *He who did not spare his own son* begins with almost an exact quotation of Genesis 22:16, *in not withholding from me your beloved son*. Genesis makes a great deal of Abraham giving his son back to God and then receiving him back again. The motive is love as a function of Faith.⁶

Saint Paul makes the same point in the Epistle to the Romans 8:34, *Christ Jesus it is who died ... who is also at the right hand of God*. Romans 8:34 is difficult with five marks of critical apparatus referring to variations among the manuscripts. The reason for the differences among manuscripts may be that the antithesis between the Transfiguration and the Crucifixion of Romans 8:34 was widely used in early

³ Dr. Mario D. Mazzarella, "Catholic Church's role in Holocaust re-examined," The Catholic Virginian, February 13, 2006, page 2.

⁴ N.a., International Commission on English in the Liturgy: A Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences, The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by Authority of Pope Paul IV: Order of Christian Funerals: Including Appendix 2: Cremation: Approved for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See (New Jersey: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1998) 227, 274.

⁵ The Roman Ritual: Revised by Decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and Published by Authority of Pope Paul VI: Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum: Approved for use in the dioceses of the United States of America by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and Confirmed by the Apostolic See: Prepared by International Commission on English in the Liturgy: a Joint Commission of Catholic Bishops' Conferences (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co. 1983) 327.

⁶ Robert J. Daly, S.J., "The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac," the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 39, No. 1 (January 1977) 67-68.

Christian preaching.⁷ Paul is so struck by the antithesis that he insists that nothing can separate the Faithful from the unfathomable love of God.⁸

The Transfiguration in the Gospel of Mark leaves out the part about how the face of Jesus shone.⁹ Mark 9:7 is teaching the Faithful about the Cross, when he writes, *Listen to him* [Jesus], though he is destined for crucifixion. The mutual love of the Father for the Son and the love of the Son for his Father overcome the human difficulties of the Cross. Comparing Mark 9:7 with Luke 9:36, Richard J. Dillon observes that the *listen* is a form of announcement from God.¹⁰

Another Scripture scholar, George Keerankeri, S.J., wrote a 2003 study of Mark, titled The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28-34. Keerankeri became so carried away with his description of love in Mark, that his book reviewer suggested “that a systematician’s [the reviewer means dogmatic theology, rather than scripture study] cap has replaced the exegete’s [scripture study].”¹¹ The reviewer would have liked greater reflection on taking what Jesus said as a divine commandment, Mark 9:7, and of the correlation with Moses. The reviewer complains that Keerankeri confines to a footnote mention of Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses prophecies *your God will raise up a prophet like me*. The marginalia eclectic Greek text also calls attention to Deuteronomy 18:15.

Mario D. Mazzarella points to a continuing Holocaust problem associated with the offering of Isaac. Mazzarella writes,

⁷ John Kloppenborg, “An Analysis of the Pre-Pauline Formula 1 Cor 15:3b-5 In Light of Some Recent Literature,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 40, No. 3 (July 1978) 363.

⁸ Joseph Plevnik, S.J., “The Understanding of God at the Basis of Pauline Theology,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 65, No. 4 (October 2003) 566.

⁹ Gregory E. Sterling, “Jesus as Exorcist: An Analysis of Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a,” the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No 1 (January 2005) 487, fn 88.

¹⁰ Richard J. Dillon, “Previewing Luke’s Project from His Prologue (Luke 1:1-4), the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 43, No. 2 (April 1981) 209. Dillon has Mark 9:9 where he means Mark 9:7.

¹¹ C. Clifton Black, review of George Keerankeri, S.J., The Love Commandment in Mark: An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 12:28-34 in the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 4 (October 2005) 717.

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Recently Cardinal Avery Dulles argued that *Nostra Aetate* did not establish the validity of the Jewish covenant, a view seconded by some neo-conservative Jewish voices.

Father [John] Pawlikowski [president of the International Council of Christian and Jews] deplores these developments. Rather, he calls for a continuation of that attitude of mutual respect and acceptance which has been so fruitful so far. Mr. [James] Carroll [author of Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews] warned that, in the past, Christian triumphalist theology led to pressure on outsiders to accept Christ that has ended in violence; it could happen again.

In secular society, the Jews are among the best friends Blacks have. The Faithful in the United States need to be careful about not interrupting the love relationship with Jesus. Saint Paul regards the promises to Abraham as only fulfilled in Jesus. Scripture scholar Scott W. Hahn writes:¹²

... refocusing the interpretation of Galatians 15:18 on the concept of "covenant" may facilitate the identification of a specific covenant-making narrative underlying Paul's argument in these verses, which I will suggest is Gen 22:15-18, the covenant with Abraham ratified by divine oath after the Aqedah [the binding of Isaac]....The sacrifice is incomplete, and the divine promises (Gen 22:16-18) are not actualized in Isaac.

When and through whom was Isaac's abortive sacrifice completed and the promises actualized? In Paul's view, through Christ at Golgotha. There, the "only beloved son" (cf. Rom 8:32; John 3:16) bore the wood of his death up the mountain, was affixed to it, and died in obedience to the command of the Father. Now through him the promised blessing of the Gentiles (Gen 22:18)—that is, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Gal 3:2, 5, 14)—had come to pass. For Paul, Abraham's binding of Isaac not only merited the blessing of the Gentiles through Abraham's "seed" (Gen 22:18), but in fact *prefigures* and *pre-enacted* the sacrifice of the only beloved Son, which would release that same blessing.

In the name of a Holocaust apology, to back away from Jesus backs away from the source of Christian love. For Christians the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfill Genesis 22:15-18, the only explicit divine oath to Abraham in

¹² Scott W. Hahn, "Covenant, Oath, and the Aqedah: Διαθηκη in Galatians 3:15-18" the Catholic Biblical Quarterly, Vol. 67, No. 1 (December 2005) 79, 97.

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Scripture. As deplorable as it may be that Avery Cardinal Dulles is proclaiming that the Second Vatican Council document, *Nostra Aetate*, condemning anti-Semitism, did not establish the validity of the Jewish covenant,¹³ there is also a wonderful Gentile side to that covenant. As the Lectionary reading for March 12, the Second Sunday in Lent, points out, “in your [Jewish] descendants all the nations of earth [namely the Gentiles] shall find blessing (Genesis 22:18).” Without apology, Jesus belongs in the mix of Jewish-Christian relations.

Love can make many otherwise difficult things easy not only for groups but also for individuals in groups. Personal involvement with the Jewish Holocaust, racism, and hierarchical abuse is relatively rare for the Faithful. Individual involvement with sickness and old age, however, is not so rare. That is suited to a practical everyday application of these readings

The burden of being nice to those caring for one through the ravages of old age or terminal illness, can be lightened by Faith that the God of Abraham is also the God of the Faithful, able to care for the afflicted through his son, transfigured in the Gospel. This same transfiguration of living through the difficulties of old age or any age with grace is possible through the love of Jesus Christ.

For more on sources see the Appendix file. Personal Notes are on the web site at www.western-civilization.com/CBQ/Personal%20Notes.

¹³ Dr. Mario D. Mazzarella, “Catholic Church’s role in Holocaust re-examined,” The Catholic Virginian, February 13, 2006, page 2.