

THE EMMAUS SERIES

2nd Sunday of Lent, Year B

Genesis 22:1-2, 9-13, 15-18

Romans 8:31-34

Mark 9:2-10

God did not spare his own Son

The destination of our Lenten journey is clearly to be seen in today's readings: the mystery of the Cross, in which the father 'did not spare his own Son', and the glory which was to be the Risen Christ's in his final triumph, glimpsed on the mountain.

The testing of Abraham is one of the masterpieces of the Old Testament. The story echoes a brutal age in which the sacrifice of children was not uncommon – in fact, the people of the old Israel were taught to sacrifice an animal in place of their offspring, to turn them away from this horrendous temptation.

But the real point of the story, made so wonderfully, is the absolute trust that is asked of Abraham, making him the model of all true believers. To the people of Abraham's world there was nothing more important in life than descendants who would remember and honour them. Long after the age when he could expect a child, God gave Abraham a son. If he gives up Isaac, he has nothing left but his trust in God. That trust is rewarded – those who will call him their father will be countless; all the peoples of the earth will be blessed in his name – through the salvation brought by the Cross of Christ.

This heart-rending story of the testing of a father's love is linked in today's liturgy with the basic truth of our Christian faith, proclaimed by St Paul, in the second reading. The eternal Father, who for our sake 'did not spare his own Son', will not refuse anything to his people in their need.

The promise made to Abraham was to be fulfilled in the victory of the Saviour's resurrection. As he undertakes the journey towards the Cross and its glorious aftermath, he gives the chosen three among his followers a glimpse of the triumph in which he would fulfil the promise of the Law (Moses) and realise all the hopes of the prophets (Elijah). Again the Father's love shines through: 'This is my beloved Son – listen to him!'

It was a long journey from Abraham's testing to the final fulfilment of God's promises. We are privileged that the route our journey must take is so clearly marked out for us.

John Thornhill sm