

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT (2024 - B)

Obedience to the will of God is emphasized in our readings today. We see the obedience of Abraham who responded "Here I am!" when called by the Lord. Even when the Lord ordered him to sacrifice his son, Abraham was still prepared to obey.

Here I think there is a parallel with parents who have lost a child. Children are gifts from God, and parents rightly assume that their children will outlive them. However, that does not always happen. It's not uncommon for a mother to suffer a miscarriage. It also happens that children die early from various causes, from some illness or accident. Sometimes too in wars.

In these difficult cases, it seems clear that God is asking parents to sacrifice their child. What a hard and difficult request. Yet, when parents are called in this way to give their children back to God, and they do so willingly, like Abraham, they will be blessed for their obedience.

We also see the call to obedience in our Holy Gospel. There standing on Mount Tabor, Peter, James and John heard clearly and distinctly the Father's voice coming from a cloud. The Father said to them, **"This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him."**

Certainly, these words were meant for us too. So what does the Son have to say to us?

Before addressing that question, "What does the Son have to say?" I might add another, "Why should we listen to Jesus, and why should we obey the Father?"

One answer is simple. God is our Creator, and it never goes well for people who disobey God. He has all the face cards, and we don't have any. He has all the first-round draft picks, and we are at the end of the list. He always has the winning ticket, and all we have is the ticket stub.

God is all-powerful and all-knowing. He has no beginning and no end, and He depends on no one for His existence. We on the other hand have limited power and knowledge, and we depend totally upon God for our existence. We did not get to decide when we would be born, and we will not get to decide when our lives will end.

So for us to defy God and to disobey Him really makes no sense. It's foolishness. We cannot defy God and win.

That said, there is a much better reason to obey God than because of His great power, and that reason is because God is good and He loves us. What God wants for us is our happiness, and all that God wants from us in return is our love.

Furthermore, to prove this, to prove His love for us, He sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him (Jn 3:17). From this we can see that God wants our happiness and desires our love.

So, when God asks of us hard things, when He asks us to fast and pray, when He asks us to care for the poor, or when He asks us to give Him our loved ones, it is not to cause us pain. It is not to show us who is in charge. Rather, it is for some other reason. It is so that by giving up something we clearly love, we can gain something even more loveable.

To gain something greater, we have to let go of what we already have. We cannot experience the greater gifts God has prepared for us unless we are willing to set aside the things we already have. Just like a child holding on to a toy can't have something else unless he lets go of the toy, so too with us. We can't grow closer to God unless we let go of our earthly loves.

God has a plan for each of us, and His plan is what's best for us, better than any plan we could come up with on our own. That is why it make sense to listen to Jesus and to do what He tells us.

So, what does our Lord have to say? Many things. For example:

"Begone, Satan (Mt 4:10)."

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand Mt 4:17)."

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Mt 5:3)."

"You are the light of the world ... Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:14, 16)."

"If you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift (Mt 5:23)."

"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Mt 5:44-45)."

"You must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (Mt 5:48)."

"When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt 6:3-4)."

"When you pray, go into you room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you (Mt 6:6)."

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mt 6:19-21)."

“Do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ... But seek first God’s kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Mt 6:25-33).”

“Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened for you (Mt 7:7).”

“Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that lead to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that lead to life, and those who find it are few (Mt 7:13-14).”

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits (Mt 7:15).”

“Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21).”

“Why are you afraid, O men of little faith? (Mt 8:26).”

“Follow me (Mt 9:9).”

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners (Mt 9:13).”

“Take heart daughter; your faith has made you well (Mt 9:22).”

“The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest (Mt 9:37-38).”

“He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt 10:37-39).”

Jesus has told us all these things and more. He speaks to us of forgiveness and mercy and faith. He urges us to trust in Him. He also instructs us to repent and to put our faith into action. He warns us that the way to eternal life is hard, and that only those who take up their cross and follow Him are worthy of Him. So this Lent, let us do our best to put our Lord’s words into practice. Amen.