

Homily by Canon Philip Dyson: Sunday 28th February 2021

2nd Sunday in Lent

Readings (Year B): 1st: Genesis 22:1-2. 9-13. 15-18. Psalm: 115. 2nd:
Romans 8:31-34. Gospel: Mark 9:2-10

Mountains or hills are great places for offering a wider view of the surrounding countryside. The experience invites the mind to take on a broader perspective on everyday life. Many people especially those facing testing times, stressful situations, either go for a walk or climb a mountain or hill. They have always been places for human beings to seek the transcendent.

From antiquity they were considered the realm of the gods. The ancient Greeks and Mount Olympus, the home of Zeus. In the Bible Mountains are associated with divine encounters and with visions that inspire life.

We know of Mount Sinai and Moses encounter with God: Mount Carmel where Elijah defeats the prophets of Baal. Always on this Sunday of Lent we are taken up the Mount of Transfiguration: another encounter with the divine; but also on this occasion to strengthen faith for what lay ahead.

This encounter, not in front of the crowds, the disciples or even the Twelve, it is just between Jesus and Peter, James and John: the three whom Jesus takes on other occasions, and especially into the Garden of Gethsemane. The language of this encounter is steeped in symbolism. The mountain itself: but also the white garments, dazzlingly whiter than anything, **Jesus is pure.**

Moses and Elijah appearing with Jesus representing the Law and the Prophets which Jesus continues and **fulfils both** in his ministry. The voice from heaven, heard only by Jesus at the Baptism is now heard by the three, and this time with the addition of '**listen to him.**'

Our 1st reading also takes place on a mountain; Mount Moriah, which is located as the place of the Temple in Jerusalem, where sacrifice was offered; and where today stands the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock.

The blessing of Abraham was in the birth of a son, Isaac, many years after his wife Sarah had passed the years of child bearing. The promise of God he would be the Father of many nations and generations.

Today's reading picks up the story at the harrowing test of Abraham's faith. He was asked to offer in sacrifice his little son, the very smile of God in his life. The distraught Abraham is doing what was expected of him by his time and culture. The greatness of Abraham is seen in his unquestioning acceptance of God's will. To give back the smile of God, Isaac, was the most severe sacrifice possible, but he did not question God's right to ask for it. He was willing to take God on his terms. Again the voice, which tells him not to kill his son.

This reading we always hear as the second reading at the Easter Vigil, for it parallels the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. While God's demand of Abraham seems cruel, it is important to understand that human sacrifice was common in the desert religions of Abraham's time.

You can almost hear the relieved Abraham offering today's Psalm. Even in the midst of his anguish and suffering at a time when his faith was so tested to the limit. The Psalmist recommits to the service of God, who the 2nd reading from Romans celebrates the great love of God who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up to benefit us all. With the risen Christ as our intercessor at God's right hand, Paul says who do we need to fear? No one.

In the midst of lockdown, pandemic, very many threatening situations across the globe, as ever, what we do need to do is **listen to him**. Lent is always about drawing closer to Jesus, in his passion, death and resurrection.

The mission of Jesus the Messiah is to proclaim the kingdom of God through the cross and resurrection. Blessed Charles de Foucauld said: 'Read and re-read ceaselessly the Holy Gospel so as always to have before one's mind the actions and thoughts of JESUS in order to think, speak and act like JESUS.'

The mystery of faith. Save us, Saviour of the world; for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.