

Abraham and Isaac  
Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020



Over the last few months we have travelled a great distance with Abraham on our biblical journey. Hopefully he is no longer an obscure character from the Old Testament but a real companion of flesh and blood, of emotion and feeling, on the road of faith. Today as we read chapter 22 from the book of Genesis we encounter one of the most infamous episodes of Abraham's life (as depicted in the Icon above). So let's begin our reflection by turning to God the Holy Spirit in prayer and asking for his help and blessing to understand the Scriptures better.

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Come, O Holy Spirit,  
and fill us with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom.  
Strengthen us, we pray, with heavenly grace,  
so that we may grasp with our minds,  
treasure in our hearts,  
and carry out in our deeds,  
all the teachings of your Holy Book  
which lead to salvation.  
Amen.

Before we delve into today's chapter, a few weeks ago I promised to explain the change of spelling from *Abram* to *Abraham* and of *Sara* to *Sarah*. You will have probably noticed this already in your Bibles. If you read Genesis chapter 17 you will see that this name change is an outward expression of the patriarch's new faith in God. When a couple

marry they wear a ring to symbolise publicly that they are in an exclusive committed loving relationship. The ring is an outward sign of the new stage in the couples life together which has grown and deepened internally. In religious life a person is clothed in the habit of their Order after an initial period of formation. The new monk or nun by wearing the habit externally shows their maturing relationship with God and gives witness to their vocation. Abram is asked by God to change his name as a public witness of his internal deepening faith and exclusive worship of the true God.

***'You shall no longer be called Abram; your name shall be Abraham, for I make you father of a multitude of nations.'* (Gn. 17:5)**

Now back to today's biblical reflection...

One of the things that may have struck you when you were reading this chapter is the drama involved. We saw how God made a promise to Abraham to make his descendants as many as the stars in the sky (Gn. 15:5) and he ratified this by making a solemn covenant with His servant (Gn. 15:18). We witnessed the tension between Sara and Hagar after Ishmael was born and the uncertainty of Sara about God fulfilling His promise. Then Isaac is born, as promised! Miraculously, defying all sense of logic as well as transcending natural law. The high crescendo of the Genesis narrative is the realisation of the power and steadfastness of the Lord's love and mercy, the sure and certain knowledge that God never abandons or forgets but is faithful to His word. So when we read chapter 22 the joy and future that Abraham has so longed for seems to be taken away. What was all the waiting and heart ache for?

***'Take your son,' God said 'your only child Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him as a burnt offering, on a mountain I will point out to you.'* (Gn. 22:2)**

The text of this chapter does not describe how Abraham must have felt. He has been asked to sacrifice his only son! His only son! The son he has patiently waited for! The son whose birth strengthened his faith in God! Now that very same God who Abraham has left everything for asks for his gift of Isaac back. The editors of Genesis did not record in detail Abraham's emotional turmoil because they assumed that would be obvious to people. How could a man not be heart broken or overwhelmed by depression having to face such a command from the Almighty? The emphasis and stress the editors wanted to convey was not Abraham's emotion but his readiness to listen and obey God. As painful as God's decree is and as hopeless as it makes his servant feel, Abraham obeys without hesitation.

As the patriarch begins to ascend the mountain with his son, a conversation begins:

***'Isaac spoke to his father Abraham, 'Father' he said.  
'Yes, my son' he replied.***

*'Look,' he said 'here are the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'*

*Abraham answered, 'My son, God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering'. Then the two of them went on together.'* (Gn. 22:7-8)

The anguish that weighed down upon Abraham on that journey must have been suffocating. Yet he is ready to submit and give everything, EVERYTHING, to the Lord his God.



The drama now reaches another high point. Just at that moment when the old patriarch is about to plunge the knife into his son God intervenes.

*'Do not raise your hand against the boy' the angel said. 'Do not harm him, for now I know you fear God. You have not refused me your son, your only son.'*

(Gn. 22:12)

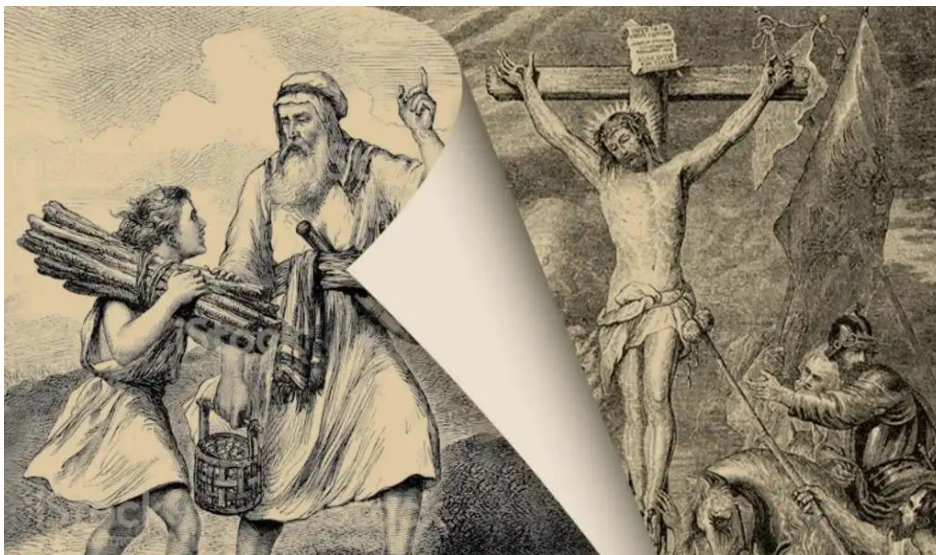
Isaac is saved and a ram, caught by its horns in a nearby bush is sacrificed instead. As a child at school once said to me, *'poor ram!'* It's at this juncture that I would like to make mention of that phrase the angel of the Lord says to Abraham. A phrase that we often hear repeated in the scriptures is: *'the fear of the Lord.'* Fear in this context does not mean that we live in terror of the heavenly Father. God does not want us to see Him as the cold angry parent who instils panic and worry every time we feel His Presence. Fear of

the Lord does not mean to be scared of God but instead to have a deep awesome reverent respect for Him. Abraham clearly shows that reverent respect by his response to God when asked to sacrifice his son. How truly ready and fully willing are we to listen and obey God? Do we hold back? Do we dictate how far we will go for God based on the judgements and opinions of others? Do we judge God Himself and personally decide what's correct and appropriate in our lives of faith? Fundamentally the real question is do we fully trust the Lord our God?

Finally as we end today's reflection it is important to mention 'biblical typology'. What is biblical typology? Quite simply it is how events and images of the Old Testament foreshadow what is to come in the future. In regards to Genesis 22 the early Church Fathers saw Abraham and Isaac as God's future plan of salvation.

***'Isaac is a type of Christ, for he was a son as Christ was a son, and he carried the wood of his sacrifice just as the Lord bore the wood of the Cross.'***

**Saint Clement of Alexandria.**



***'The Lord carried his Cross as Isaac carried the wood; and the ram, caught by its horns in the thicket, prefigures Jesus crowned with thorns and then slain in sacrifice.'***

**Saint Augustine of Hippo**

Next time we shall reflect on Sarah, who like Abraham is a person of real flesh and blood, of real emotion and feeling. She is often referred to as '***The Mother of the Promise***'.

God Bless and Keep praying

Fr. O'Brien