

Second Sunday of Lent

“ ... I have regarded for some years now the story of Abraham and Isaac a strange story, a grim tale of how a father would sacrifice his son to his own faith ... What kind of a starting point is this for ... all the Western faiths? ... Why do we re-tell this story? Is it to remind us that every parent since has been better?”

“ ... One of the thousand morals of the story of Abraham and Isaac is that ... it is also a tale of survival and of mercy. In the end Abraham heard his God instruct him not to set his hand against his son ... Isaac survived ... He became a parent, blind to Jacob’s defects, but one who, pointedly, attempted no sacrifices of his own ... ”

“So let us think of Isaac ... the first son of the Western faiths – and think about the story that is told again and again. We hear it first as children, and repeat it throughout our lives. We tell it by way of apology. And warning. We tell it with some measure of hope. We tell it because we have all been the child, we have all been Isaac, and we know the part of the story that is never mentioned. For the Bible does not record Isaac’s responses. We do not know if he, like Jesus, asked, ‘Father, why have you forsaken me?’ We do not know if he begged the way most of us would, for his life. We know only this: that he obeyed ... That because he knew nothing else, he did as his father required. We know he allowed himself to be bound in rope. We know that he let his father lay him on the altar of pyramided firewood which together they had raised to God. We know he watched his father on the mountaintop raise the gleaming knife above his breastbone. We know ... he was a child, the son of a man with a Big Idea, who in his longing and confusion, even in his final instant, could only look to his father with that eternal if foundering hope for love.”

May this story and our Eucharist give us hope that no matter what altar of sacrifice we feel sometimes laid upon, God does not abandon us in our need, and never wants us to sacrifice ourselves, or anyone else. Lent is about mercy and survival because true obedience to God, even in its demands for a hard love, ALWAYS leads to life.

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