

The Solemnity of The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi)
June 6, 2021
Year of the Eucharist and Parish (Reflection #21)

“He (God) said, ‘Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.’” (Genesis 22:2)

I chose to skip ahead a little in the Book of Genesis to this moment when God tests Abraham by requesting he offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham, by this time, has fathered two sons. His first son, Ishmael, was born of the Egyptian slave girl Hagar who was maid to Sarah. Sarah, after seeing Ishmael play with her son (the second son) Isaac, demanded that Abraham should expel Hagar and Ishmael. As cruel as this may seem, God would promise to bless Ishmael and his descendants. This action guarantees that Sarah’s son, Isaac, is the fulfillment of God’s covenant promise to bless Abraham making him the father of many peoples.

In the passage of Genesis, I have quoted above, God now asks Abraham to go and sacrifice Isaac, the promised son, as a holocaust to Him. I can only imagine Abraham’s thoughts as he journeyed those three days to the land of Moriah—“God fulfilled His promise, gave him a son in his old age, and now he wants me to kill him. To take the flint knife in my own hands and stab my son until he is dead. To burn his body upon an altar of wood; all the while giving praise to Him.” I must believe, the temptation to say “NO!” to God would have weighed heavily upon Abraham’s heart. Yet, he proceeds onward trusting God will provide. And so He does. Not only does God stop Abraham as he was about to complete this task, but He supplies an offering, a ram, to suffice. As interesting and disturbing as this story is to read, Dr. Scott Hahn presents a powerful explanation for us to reflect upon.

We begin by recalling that Abraham is requested to go to a hill in Moriah to offer his son. In the Second Book of Chronicles (2 Chronicles 3:1), King Solomon began building the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem which resides upon one of the hills in the land of Moriah. Abraham is sent to a hill outside of the city of Salem to sacrifice his son. Furthermore, the Hebrew word for “provide” is “*jira*”. *Jira* would be added to Salem changing the city’s name to Jerusalem. Abraham is sent to a hill outside of Jerusalem to offer his son as a sacrifice upon the wood of an altar. Let us go one step further, the hill of Calvary is located outside of Jerusalem. Now, placing this altogether, we can view this same moment in this way: A father (Abraham) is asked to offer his beloved son (Isaac) as a sacrifice upon an altar of wood on a hill outside of Jerusalem.

Have you made the connection yet? This story of Abraham and Isaac is fulfilled in the New Testament. God is the Father who sacrifices His beloved Son Jesus. As Isaac carried the wood up the hill to be used for the sacrifice, it is Jesus who carries the cross up the hill to be sacrificed upon. The wood of the altar is fulfilled in the wood of the Cross of Christ. Once the angel tells Abraham not to kill Isaac, a ram is offered in his place. In the New Testament, our Heavenly Father does not stop the sacrifice and substitute a ram for His Son. Jesus is the Lamb. He is the only Lamb who could be offered for all of the combined sins of mankind. Finally, as Abraham’s sacrifice occurred upon a hill outside the city of Salem, so does the sacrifice of Lamb upon the wood of the cross occur on Calvary, a hill outside of Jerusalem in the land of Moriah.

My dear people, allow me to conclude with one further idea for us to reflect upon from this event which is pertinent for us today. Was God’s promise to Abraham, after this most obedient act of being fully willing to sacrifice his son, fulfilled? Did God provide Abraham with descendants more numerous than he could have imagined? Yes, He did! We are the fulfillment of God’s promise. This is why we profess our Catholic Church, established by Jesus through the Apostles, is the very real, historical fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham that day upon a hill far away.