

Saturday, February 25th

2nd Sunday of Lent

By Deacon Bill Pitocco

Our first job during Lent is to think more often than usual about God. This is exactly what the devil doesn't want us to do. Instead, he wants us to become obsessed with our problems, the evils in the world, our self-centered ambitions, the difficulties other people cause us... The devil knows that the less we think of God, the less we will trust God. And if we trust God less, we are more likely to walk away from him, to reject his commandments, teachings, and inspirations. That's what sin is - a walking away from God, a breakdown in our trust of God. And sin is what the devil uses to enslave us, to poison our hearts, darken our minds, and bury time bombs in the soil of our lives. But in today's Second Reading, St Paul foils the devil's plan. He gives us a shield against discouragement, frustration, and cynicism. Paul writes to the Romans one of his most famous sentences: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And then he points out that the whole message of Christ's death and resurrection is, simply put, that God is, without any doubt, entirely for us. Jesus Christ, the Son of God made man, suffered and died on the cross not because he had sinned, but because we had sinned. He put himself into the power of the devil, giving himself as a ransom for us. This is how much God loves us.

And then, by his resurrection, he proved that this love is more powerful than evil and death. When we remember that God, with his infinite power and mercy, is on our side, that he is for us, all our problems and difficulties look entirely different.

With that in mind, it becomes much easier to trust him and follow wherever he leads, avoiding the devil's seductive traps. The story of Abraham and Isaac

illustrates God's trustworthiness in more ways than one. First, it gives us an example of someone (Abraham) who trusted God even though he didn't fully understand what God was doing - and his trust was not disappointed. Next, it shows that the true God is different from all the other false gods.

At the time of Abraham, human sacrifice was common among the pagan religions of the Middle East. Children were offered to false gods in order to appease them and procure their blessings. So, when God commanded Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, it didn't seem out of place. But at the last minute the angel tells Abraham not to harm the child - deviating from the pagan norm. The false gods of paganism and of modern secularism enslave and destroy, but our God liberates and gives life. The devil, the leader of all false gods, destroyed Jesus on the cross, but God the Father raised him up from the dead: our God is different, better. lastly, the story also shows that God is the Lord of all history. Genesis says that God ordered Abraham to go to the Land of Moriah to offer the sacrifice. That is the place where, almost one thousand years later, Solomon would build the Temple, the official place of sacrifice. And it was close by there that Christ himself would be sacrificed on Calvary. Also, Christ is the only Son of the heavenly Father, as Isaac was of Abraham.

And it was the Father who offered him as a sacrifice for our sins, just as Abraham was ready to offer Isaac. Jesus carried his cross up Calvary, just as Isaac carried the wood for the sacrificial fire up Mount Moriah. All of these apparent coincidences prove that our God is trustworthy, that he holds the strings of history in his hands. This is such a critical point for all of us to understand!! God is able to fulfill his prophecies and accomplish his plan of salvation by guiding the tangled course of human events over thousands of years, without ever violating human freedom. My B and S's God has proven over and over again and through time that

he is for us; that we can trust him!! Why do we struggle with that trust? Why are we not fully committed to the knowledge that God is for us? The truth is we are weak. Our doubts, our fears, our anxieties overwhelm us, and we lose sight of the larger picture. We want fix things ourselves and in many ways that just makes Gods job all the more difficult. The the only way for us to get out of Gods way; the only way for us to develop the spiritual strength to trust him is to get to know him better. If Christ is the answer to life's mysteries, then the better we know Christ, the wiser and more joyful we will be, even amidst the storms and sufferings of life in this fallen world. So, the question is, how can we get to know Christ better? Today's Gospel tells us. It says that Jesus took his disciples "up a high mountain apart by themselves..." This is an image of Christian prayer. Every day each one of us needs to go up a high mountain and spend time alone with the Lord. We need to carve out of our busy, blogged-down schedules some quiet time to nourish our souls with more than just headlines, blogs, and advertisements. That's hard. It takes self-sacrifice and self-discipline, just like climbing up a high mountain. But it's worth it and what better time to challenge ourselves than during lent! Peter, James, and John knew Jesus better after this trip, and that helped them continue with their life-mission. The same thing will happen to us, though maybe not in such a dramatic way, if we consistently make time to be alone with the Lord. What should we do during those ten or fifteen minutes of daily personal prayer? The three R's: Read, Reflect, Respond.

Read a passage from the Bible or from another solid, spiritual book. Reflect on what it tells you about God and what it means for your life, respond to whatever you have seen or understood by speaking to Christ, your Lord and Savior, about it, in the silence of your heart, confident that he rejoices whenever we lift our minds and hearts to him in prayer. This is how we can learn to "listen to him" better, as

the Father longs for us to do. This is how we will learn to trust him even in the darkest times of our lives. He is always calling us to the light! Our first job during Lent is to think more often than usual about God. Renew your commitment to him and to personal prayer time on this second Sunday of lent, renew the commitment to spending quality time with him every single day to build that spiritual trust, to think without confusion, to be clear, God is with you!