

LENT 2-2021

Gen 22:1-12;9-13;15-18

Rom 8:31-34

Mk 9:2-10

I think that it might be easier to handle suffering when we know that everything will turn out well in the end than when we don't know. Abraham was tested by God who had promised that his descendants would be like the stars of heaven, and now told him to sacrifice his son. I wonder if Abraham's test was whether he was willing to obey God or to trust the God to keep his promise which he seemed to be breaking.

Today's gospel reading indicates that Jesus understood he would likely be crucified if the religious leaders continued to reject him and the good news he preached. But does that mean he knew in the sense of absolute certainty that he would be crucified, and if so, what the outcome would be? We humans don't always know, and Jesus became one of us. His absolute trust in his father is what makes him different from us.

There is a very clear gear change half-way through St Mark's gospel and both halves begin with God's affirmation and blessing on Jesus. God blessed Jesus after his baptism endorsing his ministry of announcing the Kingdom. The second half begins with Peter acknowledging that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God. Jesus begins to spell out the cost of this both for him and those who follow him along the Way of the Cross. This way was one of spiritual as well as physical and mental suffering. It is the way of letting go of self-focus and becoming more God focussed. Abraham was able to do this and God's promise was fulfilled. So was Jesus, and salvation was achieved. So should we, even if we don't know what the outcome will be other than believing in God's promise.

Like Moses who took 3 disciples with him up the mountain when he went to receive the 10 Commandments from God, Jesus took Peter, James and John. As in Moses' encounter with God, the cloud of God's glory covered Jesus and from the cloud God said, "This is my beloved Son, listen to him." God had promised Moses that he would raise up a prophet like him and the people should listen to him. Furthermore, Elijah would announce his coming.

Peter wanted to erect three tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah just as Moses has erected a Tent of Meeting in which he met with God. Jews build little holy places during the Feast of Tabernacles to remind them of struggles of the Exodus from Egypt and the fruits of the Promised Land. Jesus was to achieve a greater exodus than this. It was to be a deliverance from the grip of Satan and his evil vassals. The next time God's voice was heard was the thunderclap heard at the point of Jesus' death on the Cross.

The Way of Jesus is the Way of the Cross. The one who announced his coming and countless numbers of those who follow him have, and still do suffer when they speak God's truth. The Scribes and Pharisees held on to what they knew and refused to recognise that Jesus is the visible presence of God who is bringing to reality his promise that Gentiles as well as Jews, are his people and have been so since the beginning.

Travelling the Way of the Cross is the second baptism of fire for disciples who form the faithful remnant of God's people ensuring that God's work of salvation can move forward.

We are part of that remnant in today's world. It would be easier if we knew for certain what God's future for his Church will be. We don't, but neither did Abraham, the prophets nor the saints. If like Jesus we listen to God, trust him and respond positively to his will, we can in confidence say that, "All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well" (Julian of Norwich).

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Feb 2021