

Second Sunday of Lent – Ben Frie SJ

Two great moments in the history of our faith: Abraham ending the sacrifice of his own children, and Jesus reaching the climax of his earthly life. Deeply impressed, Paul writes to the Roman Christians: if God is so in favor of us, who will be against us? God who gives everything for us - what else can our response be but also to give Him everything in return? The sacrifice that Abraham is prepared to make goes beyond anything we can imagine. We have to put ourselves in the shoes of people from the time of Micah, who asked themselves: "What can we give to the Lord? How can we honor the mighty God? Shall we offer sacrifices to Him? Shall we offer our best calves to Him? Would He be satisfied with a thousand rams? Or with ten thousand liters of olive oil? Or should we give Him our eldest child for all that we have done wrong? Micah quickly goes on to say, 'He asks only this: be honest, righteous and faithful. And do not think only of yourself, but live close to God.

Live close to God. Do not think only of yourself. How can you do that? Then the next question is: what place does God have in your life? How much space can He occupy, what are you prepared to give Him? Is He really present in your life, do you believe in this very personal God who turns to you and who cares about you? And what is there from your side in return? Your best things, what you love, or even your own child, would you give it up?

The story of Abraham is a saga that followed the awareness that grew among the Jewish people, in contrast to surrounding cultures and other religions: no, it cannot be true that God asks for child sacrifices. It cannot be true that God demands your first-born son, the proof of your fertility and your guarantee to stay alive. That is a profound break with a cultural tradition of fear of God, and Abraham had the courage to make that choice: God, was his conviction, chooses people and their well-being, God chooses social commitment. In the words of Micah: 'Be honest, just and faithful. And do not think only of yourself, but live close to God'. Abraham testifies that God does not think only of himself either, but is very concerned that man should live well. That is a much more beautiful image of God than the old one.

It must have been a profound encounter with God for Abraham. God intervened in his life and changed it completely. It is not without reason that he is called an patriarch of our faith. His faithfulness and availability to his God are still held up to us today as a model of identification when we ask ourselves questions about God in our lives. Can God also play such a significant role for us?

Peter, James and John had an equally profound encounter with God at that moment when, at the top of the mountain, the place where God reveals himself, they saw Jesus in his true shape. A peak experience, for a moment, he becomes as white as no man can make it. The cloud is there, in which Moses also met God, and that voice which reveals Jesus' true nature: He is my beloved, the man after my own heart. Listen to Him.

How close can you get to God? Sometimes it is given to people that they experience something of God, just for a moment, words fail them. Peter's naivety shows the inability to deal properly with this divine reality, especially when it comes so close. And that is exactly what is said to us today: He comes close to us in a human way, in a confidential way, in an impressive way. He changes us, breaks our patterns and makes us lovable.

How do you make people lovable? By doing everything for them. And that is exactly what God does: He gives everything. His only son, his whole life, the proof of his fertility and his guarantee to stay alive. God gives everything. When man sacrificed his son, God said it was not necessary. When God sacrificed His son, man laid full claim upon Him, took possession of

Him. We want, as it were, everything from God, but are we prepared to do what He did? Can we reciprocate the divine gift of life? We ourselves are Peter, James and John, the incomprehensible observers who wonder what this rising from the dead might mean. Mark forbids Jesus to tell anyone what had happened. The disciples would only understand the divine secret of Jesus' life when he had finally given everything, including his life. Well, what is a better life worth to you, what will you do? And like Jesus, will you give everything for the lives of others? What can you give?