



the disaffected high school teen Lady Bird (not her real name) speaks to the headmistress about a piece she wrote on Sacramento:

“You clearly love Sacramento,” Sister Sarah Joan tells her.

Lady Bird, surprised, says, “I do?”

“You write about Sacramento so affectionately,” the nun says, “and with such care.”

“Well,” Lady Bird replies, “I was just describing it.”

“Well, it comes across as love,” Sister Sarah Joan says.

“Sure,” Lady Bird says unconvincingly. “I guess I pay attention.”

Sister Sarah Joan then asks, “Don’t you think maybe they are the same thing – love and attention?”

Reflect on what you pay attention to, and you’ll discover what you love. God asks us to return his loving gaze. Yes, at times, this can seem like a sacrifice of all the other more entertaining things I might be doing, but the sacrifices of God lead to life; the only thing that dies with the sacrifice of God is sin. Jesus comes so that we might have life in abundance. Yes, there are times when we might struggle to trust, but we can be reassured that God asks nothing of us that he has not, in his humanity, already done for us.

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Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

Of you my heart has spoken: Seek his face. It is your face, O Lord, that I seek; hide not your face from me.

Or

Remember your compassion, O Lord, and your merciful love, for they are from of old.

Let not our enemies exult over us. Redeem us, O God of Israel, from all our distress.

FIRST READING **Genesis 22:1-2. 9-13. 15-18**

PSALM **Psalms 115**

RESPONSE **I will walk in the presence of the Lord in the land of the living.**

1. I trusted, even when I said: “I am sorely afflicted.” O precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his faithful. **R.**
2. Your servant, Lord, your servant am I; you have loosened my bonds. A thanksgiving sacrifice I make: I will call on the Lord’s name. **R.**

3. My vows to the Lord I will fulfil before all his people, in the courts of the house of the Lord, in your midst, O Jerusalem. **R.**

SECOND READING **Romans 8:31-34**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Glory and praise to you, O Christ! From the bright cloud the Father’s voice was heard:

“This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him!”

Glory and praise to you, O Christ!

GOSPEL **Mark 9:2-10**

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.

Next Sunday’s Readings:

Exodus 20:1-17
1 Corinthians 1:22-25
John 2:13-25



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PAYING ATTENTION

Last week, we looked at the temptation or testing of Jesus in the wilderness. This week we have the rather alarming testing of Abraham. It’s a radical testing of Abraham’s trust in the goodness of God. In our shock at what Abraham was asked to be willing to do in principle, we sometimes forget about the willingness of Isaac.

All the ancient rabbis agreed that Isaac was an adult by now, evidenced by his carrying the pile of wood necessary for the sacrificial fire, whilst his father carried just a torch for the fire and a knife. Isaac would have been stronger than his elderly father and, presumably, is going up the mountain of his own free will. He must be willing to give up his life, too, perhaps even with some belief in a resurrection.

But, as we know, God supplies a ram and does not ask for the life of Isaac in this way. However, the willingness of Isaac with the wood on his back might prompt us to think of the willingness of Christ to carry the Cross on his back up the hill of Golgotha. But, on Golgotha, no additional ram is supplied, for Christ is the sacrifice that Isaac could not be; he is the true Passover Lamb of the Exodus.

There are other features of the story of Abraham and Isaac which might make us think of Jesus and his Transfiguration on Mount Tabor in our Gospel. The Hebrew word *yahid*, which refers to Isaac and is often translated as “only begotten”, might make us think of “For God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son.” But *yahid* can also be translated as “beloved”, the way that God the Father refers to his Son at the Transfiguration, that moment in which the deepest reality of Jesus’ being is made visible to his disciples, and they witness his radiance, his bliss and his glory. And, as God calls Jesus his Beloved Son, he tells us to “Listen to him!”

Listening to Jesus is also another way of saying “Pray to him.” We looked last week at fasting, which is not unrelated to prayer. To pray requires a certain fast from all the other things that we might give our attention to, a sacrifice of what might be entertaining, and, instead, trust that God will give us something more. Giving our attention to God carries a cost; in fact, we talk of “paying attention”, but the ability to be attentive is, I think, the condition of loving. This is fact brought out in a beautiful piece of dialogue in the wonderful film *Lady Bird*, where

Lenten Reflections



Fr Toby Lees OP continues this series of reflections for the season of Lent.



25 FEBRUARY 2024

2ND SUNDAY OF LENT

YEAR B

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK II