

Mother Teresa of Calcutta was born in 1910 in Macedonia, and joined the Sisters of Loreto in 1927. Two years later, she was sent to teach Geography at St. Mary's girls school in Calcutta. Eight years later, she took her final vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Seven years after that, she contracted tuberculosis, and was sent to the city of Darjeeling to recuperate.

It was on that train that she heard what she referred to as a "call within the call." She was to leave the convent and help the poorest of the poor by living among them.

This was a violent time in India – the British were on the way out, and India tottered on the brink of violent civil war. It would have been insanity to leave the safety of a walled convent to live in the slums of Calcutta.

Yet following this "call," that is exactly what Mother Teresa did. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Mother Teresa once said:

A SACRIFICE TO BE REAL MUST COST, MUST HURT, MUST EMPTY OURSELVES.

In this time of Lent, we often speak of "giving something up." In fact, just prior to Ash Wednesday, the fifth graders sent me a sheet of questions asking "If the Sundays of Lent aren't part of Lent ... can we have whatever it was that we gave up?"

My response was "it all depends on how tough you are." I could have just as easily used the quote from Mother Teresa:

A SACRIFICE TO BE REAL MUST COST, MUST HURT, MUST EMPTY OURSELVES.

In the first reading, we hear about Abraham and the Sacrifice of Isaac.

Already, Abraham has left his homeland and gone off at the direction of God to a new land. So Abraham has already given up his home. And this was when he was in his 70s or 80s. In reward for this, he was visited by angels who told him his wife would have a child – and she was about the same age as he was. Despite the ridiculous nature of the promise, Isaac was born to Abraham's wife Sarah. And now roughly 20 years later, God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on Mount Moriah.

Abraham, who had already given up home, and his old age ... who had sent away his wife's maid and his son Ishmael, was now asked to give up his beloved son.

A SACRIFICE TO BE REAL MUST COST, MUST HURT, MUST EMPTY OURSELVES.

In the Gospel, we hear about the Transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of Peter, James, and John. They had lived with him and seen Jesus "the man." Now in the vision on Mount Tabor, they see Jesus "the Son of God." They even hear the voice of God say "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

In Mark's Gospel, the voice of God comes first at the Baptism of Jesus, saying "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased." This first occasion of God's revelation is addressed to Jesus. And right after this, he goes into the desert for 40 days and after that begins his ministry for three years.

In today's revelation, God's voice is addressed to the disciples. And in Mark's Gospel narrative, this marks the ending of Jesus' ministry and the beginning of his journey to Jerusalem and the culmination of his mission through his suffering, death, and resurrection.

A SACRIFICE TO BE REAL MUST COST, MUST HURT, MUST EMPTY OURSELVES.

So, how are we doing at the beginning of this second week of Lent?

Have we given up something? How is that going? Do we crave it? Does it bother us not to have it?

Or have we taken on prayer, or service, or almsgiving? Are we struggling to maintain it?

Hang in there.

We can take the words of Saint Paul as an encouragement, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" and "It is God who acquits us, who will condemn?"

Not only that, but we can also take the words of God to Jesus "You are my beloved..." as a consolation. Because we are the beloved children of God.

And God desires to receive our sacrifices as the small tokens of love that they are ... the signs of our gratitude for his generous outpouring of love upon us every moment of every day.

A SACRIFICE TO BE REAL MUST COST, MUST HURT, MUST EMPTY OURSELVES.

And as much as I have repeated the beginning of that quote from Mother Teresa, I may as well complete it:

THE FRUIT OF SILENCE IS PRAYER.

THE FRUIT OF PRAYER IS FAITH,

THE FRUIT OF FAITH IS LOVE,

THE FRUIT OF LOVE IS SERVICE,

THE FRUIT OF SERVICE IS PEACE.

TOMORROW HAS NOT YET COME.

WE HAVE ONLY TODAY.

LET US BEGIN.

Let us move forward with Jesus toward Jerusalem – not counting the cost, but rather surrendering everything in love ... to the Father ... through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit.