

In today's readings we encounter the theme of "sacrifice."

Websters defines "sacrifice" as

*the act of giving up something that you want to keep especially in order to get or do something else or to help someone*

In that regard, we may sacrifice our time to help someone, or sacrifice our savings to get an education ... in a material sense.

The subordinate definition is

*the act of killing a person or animal in a religious ceremony as an offering to please a god*

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* tells us

*By sacrifice in the real sense is universally understood the offering of a sense-perceptible gift to the deity as an outward manifestation of our veneration for Him and with the object of attaining communion with Him. Strictly speaking however, this offering does not become a sacrifice until a real change has been effected in the visible gift (e.g. by slaying it, shedding its blood. burning it, or pouring it out).*

We see this in the First Reading, where Abraham takes his son up the mountain to sacrifice him to God. Various commentators argue over the age of Isaac at this time – some saying he is a young boy, others say he was a grown man. In addition, the question is debated regarding did God really ask for this? This would not be the first time that Abraham misunderstands what God is asking for, and applies a more human spin on God's request.

Whatever the details, the "Binding of Isaac," as it is historically known, is seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.

Indeed, in the full text, Isaac asks Abraham

*Here are the fire and the wood, but where is the [lamb] for the burnt offering?*

To which Abraham replies, *God will provide the [lamb].*

This is a foreshadowing of the "Lamb of God" ... again, Jesus Christ ... God's own Son ... provided as a sacrificial offering for our sins.

In the Gospel, just before this section we heard read, Jesus gives the first prediction of His own Passion, and then lays out the conditions for discipleship:

*Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me.*

Our Lord's sacrifice on the Cross did not change the world into a rosy Disney-esque place. Rather, Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection have instead changed us ... so that no matter what the circumstances ... we know that we are called to share God's glory.

That is why right after St. Mark has Jesus talk about the cross – not only His Cross, but the crosses that awaited His disciples – we hear about the Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration foreshadows the glory that comes through the Cross. So that no one might think that the Cross is an end in itself.

If we are to offer ourselves as a sacrifice and our lives as a living sacrifice to God, our gift is incomplete unless a real change has been effected in us. And thus the point of our Lenten disciplines.

In a few moments, we will bring to this altar bread and wine. And through the prayers of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, they will be changed ... transfigured ... transubstantiated ... into the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

If we truly desire communion with Him ... communion with the Father ... communion with the Holy Spirit ... through our partaking in Holy Communion at this altar ... then we must put away anything that stands as an obstacle to our own transformation in Christ, and step out in faith ... trusting that “[i]f God is for us, who can be against us?” ... and knowing that God will “*give us everything else along with*” Christ.

As we continue on our Lenten Journey, may we through our own spiritual sacrifices be transformed in Christ ... so that as we celebrate the Easter Sacraments in a few more weeks, we may share in the glory of Christ that awaits us.