

# Our Sunday Readings

GENESIS 22:1-2,9a, 10-13,15-18  
 PSALM 116:10,15-19  
 ROMANS 8:31b-34  
 MARK 9:2-10

## Upon a Mountain

### GENESIS 22:1-2,9a,10-13,15-18

#### **Reading closely**

1. What is God's relationship with Abraham?
2. What all might Abraham believe about God?
3. Why do you think God tests Abraham?
4. What might Abraham expect when God first calls out to him in this story?
5. How does God refer to Isaac?
6. What might Abraham think about as he and Isaac make their journey?
7. What might Abraham expect when God/the messenger calls out the second time?
8. Why does Abraham offer the ram?
9. What all might Abraham be thinking and feeling by the end of this story?
10. What might Isaac be thinking and feeling?

#### **Living the word**

11. What meaning does this story have for Christians?
12. Did you ever let something go that was important to you? How did you do it?

### THE FIRST READING

#### **Child sacrifice**

This story might first have been told as a statement against child sacrifice, which was sometimes practiced by the people of Canaan (the Promised Land) and the surrounding area. Abraham probably knew of the practice.

The story may horrify us, but Abraham would have been troubled for another reason: God promised to bless him with many descendants, and this promise was to be fulfilled through Isaac. If there was no Isaac, there could be no fulfillment of this promise.

#### **Undeserved**

God had promised Abraham many descendants without requiring anything in return, sort of like the promise God made after the flood: the promise is unconditional. When God tells Abraham to kill Isaac, Abraham must show that he knows both Isaac and the promise are gifts. Abraham has no real claim on either.

*“I know now how devoted you are to God,  
 since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son.”*

**MARK 9:2-10**

**Reading closely**

1. Why might Jesus have chosen Peter, James, and John to accompany him?
2. How do you envision the change to Jesus' appearance?
3. Who are Elijah and Moses?
4. What might Jesus, Elijah, and Moses have talked about?
5. Why are the three disciples *terrified*?
6. Why do you think Peter says what he does?
7. How do you envision the cloud?
8. What does the voice sound like?
9. What does the voice tell the disciples to do?
10. How easily do you think the disciples kept quiet about what they witnessed?
11. What might these three disciples have talked about with each other?
12. How might this experience have shaped these disciples' expectations of what would happen?

**Living the word**

13. a) Have you had an especially powerful experience of God?  
 b) Why do you think you had this experience?  
 c) How has this experience affected you?
14. How do you find strength to persevere in your Lenten practices?

**THE GOSPEL READING**

**Shedding some light**

Jesus' disciples recognize him as the Messiah, but they don't yet understand that he is also God's Son who will willingly endure crucifixion and death (8:27-33). Jesus thus takes his closest followers aside for an encounter with God that will help them understand who he is, though they won't fully understand until after his death and resurrection.

This story recalls Exodus 24 in which Moses and a select group ascend Mount Sinai. Both passages contain some of the same symbols.

- Mountains were traditional places of revelation because they were close to the heavens
- Dazzling whiteness is a sign of glory and divinity
- Because clouds bring life-giving water they often represented God's presence

**Struggling to see**

Peter's offer to make a permanent shelter for the three men shows that the disciples don't understand the revelation. Peter speaks as if Jesus were on equal footing with Elijah and Moses, two of the most important figures in Israel's history. God speaks of the superior status of Jesus, who then becomes the only person still standing there.

**Rising from the dead**

Although some Jews had come to believe in a resurrection of the just, they didn't believe that one individual would be raised and appear on earth separate from this collective resurrection. That's why Peter, James, and John are perplexed (v. 10).

**The suffering Son**

Jesus didn't meet everyone's expectations of the Messiah. He didn't instigate a rebellion against Rome, for example. While some people struggled to accept that Jesus was the Messiah, everyone struggled to believe that he was God's Son. Nothing in the Jewish scriptures or tradition clearly anticipated the arrival of such a person.

Moreover, no one would have expected God's Son to undergo such suffering. Although Mark makes Jesus' identity clear to us, we also struggle to believe. We question whether those who lose their lives for the sake of Jesus and the gospel really will save their lives in the end (8:35; 9:35).

**PRAYER**

*Alternate Collect for the Second Sunday of Lent  
 (Roman Missal, 1985)*

Father of light,  
 in you is found no shadow of change  
 but only the fullness of life and limitless truth.

Open our hearts to the voice of your Word  
 and free us from the original darkness that  
 shadows our vision.

Restore our sight  
 that we may look upon your Son,  
 who calls us to repentance and a change of heart,  
 for he lives and reigns with you for ever and ever.  
 Amen.