



The Holy See

EUCCHARISTIC CELEBRATION at the Roman parish
of the Holy Cross on Via Flaminia

HOMILY OF POPE JOHN PAUL II

*Second Sunday of Lent
Sunday, 23 February 1997*

1. *“This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (Mk 9:7).*

In the context of the Lord's Transfiguration, today once again we listen to the words that echoed at the moment of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan (cf. Mt 3:17). “Jesus took with him Peter and James and John ... and he was transfigured before them And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses; and they were talking to Jesus. And Peter said to Jesus, ‘Master, it is well that we are here; let us make three booths, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah’” (Mk 9:2-5). At that very moment a voice was heard: “This is my beloved Son; listen to him” (Mk 9:7).

This extraordinary manifestation of Jesus' divine sonship did not last long. When the Apostles looked up again, they saw no one else but Jesus, who “as they were coming down the mountain”, the Evangelist continues, “charged them to tell no one what they had seen, until the Son of Man should have risen from the dead” (Mk 9:9).

Thus on this Second Sunday of Lent, together with the Apostles we hear the announcement of the Resurrection. We hear it as we set out with them on the way to Jerusalem, where we will relive the mystery of the Lord's Passion and Death. The fasting and penance of this sacred season are oriented precisely to this event which is the key to the whole economy of salvation.

2. The Transfiguration of the Lord, which tradition claims took place on Mount Tabor, gives prominence to the person and work of God the Father, who is really and invisibly present beside his Son. This explains why that important Old Testament episode, which gives special emphasis to

fatherhood, is used as a backdrop of the Gospel for the Transfiguration.

In fact, the first reading taken from the Book of Genesis, recalls Abraham's sacrifice. He had a son, Isaac, born to him in his old age. He was the son who had been promised. But one day Abraham receives from God the order to offer him in sacrifice. The elderly patriarch finds himself facing the prospect of a sacrifice that for him, a father, is certainly the greatest imaginable. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate even for an instant, and after making the necessary preparations, sets out with Isaac for the appointed place. He builds an altar, sets the wood on it and, binding the boy, takes the knife to sacrifice him. Only then is he prevented by an order from on high: "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me" (Gn 22:12).

There is something disturbing about this event in which a father's faith and trust in God reach their apex. Rightly St Paul calls Abraham the "father of all believers" (cf. Rom 4:11, 17). The Jewish and Christian religions refer to his faith. The Koran also recognizes the figure of Abraham. The faith of the father of believers is a mirror in which the mystery of God is reflected, a mystery of love that unites the Father and the Son.

3. Dear brothers and sisters of Holy Cross Parish on Via Flaminia! It is a great joy for me to celebrate Mass here today in this lovely church, built at the wish of my venerable predecessor St Pius X, and visited in 1964 by the Servant of God Pope Paul VI and raised by him to the rank of a minor basilica. I greet the Cardinal Vicar. I greet Cardinal Baum, titular of the basilica, the Auxiliary Bishop in charge of this area, the parish priest, Fr Carlo Zanini, the parochial vicars and the Stigmatine Fathers, who have been entrusted with the pastoral care of your community from the beginning. In carrying out their ministry here, many of them have had a profound influence on parish life. Among the many who deserve particular mention, I would like to name, in addition to Fr Emilio Recchia, your community's parish priest for many years, Fr Cornelio Fabro, the well-known philosopher and theologian, who died two years ago.

4. Dear brothers and sisters, I know that the recently begun *city mission* has also found ready and generous support in your parish. I express my appreciation for your availability and I urge you to be witnesses to the Gospel in this neighbourhood which, like other areas of Rome, is undergoing rapid social change.

However, for the proclamation to be effective, believers must be deeply united and work together. Therefore, with this in mind, make the most of the many different forms of apostolic zeal present here. I am thinking of the religious institutes of the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Sisters of St Elizabeth, the Daughters of Mercy and the Apostles of the Interior Life, as well as the numerous parish groups involved in the various areas of catechesis, the liturgy and charity.

I am thinking of the parish's recreational facilities which, once they have been remodeled, will be a

privileged place for formative meetings for the whole neighbourhood. May the Church and parish institutions increasingly become a reference point for all. May your community be ready to welcome every person, especially the many Filipino and Peruvian immigrants who often live here like “parishioners without a home in the parish”.

5. *“He [God] who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?”* (Rom 8:32). These words of St Paul in the Letter to the Romans bring us back to the basic theme of today’s liturgy: the mystery of divine love revealed in the sacrifice of the Cross.

The sacrifice of Isaac anticipates that of Christ: the Father did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for the world’s salvation. He who withheld Abraham’s arm when he was at the point of immolating Isaac, did not hesitate to sacrifice his own Son for our redemption. Abraham’s sacrifice thus emphasizes the fact that human sacrifices must never be performed anywhere, since the only true and perfect sacrifice is that of the only-begotten and eternal Son of the living God. Born of the Virgin Mary for us and for our salvation, Jesus voluntarily sacrificed himself once and for all, as a victim in expiation for our sins, thereby obtaining total and definitive salvation for us (cf. Heb 10:5-10). After the sacrifice of the Son of God, no further human expiation is necessary since his sacrifice on the Cross includes and surpasses all others that man could offer God. Here is the heart of the paschal mystery.

From Tabor, the mountain of the Transfiguration, our Lenten journey leads us to Golgotha, the mountain of the supreme sacrifice of the one Priest of the new and eternal Covenant. In that sacrifice is contained the greatest power for transforming man and history. Taking upon himself all the consequences of evil and sin, Jesus would rise on the third day and emerge from this dramatic experience as the conqueror of death, hell and Satan. Lent prepares us to participate personally in this great mystery of faith which we celebrate in the Triduum of Christ’s Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Let us ask the Lord that we might prepare ourselves suitably: “Jesus, beloved Son of the Father, grant that we may listen to you and follow you to Calvary, to the Cross, to share with you in the glory of the Resurrection”.

Amen!

© Copyright 1997 - Libreria Editrice Vaticana