

2nd Sunday of Lent - B
Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18;
Romans 8:31b-34;
Mark 2:9-10
Little Flower - 3/1/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the book of Genesis, God established a covenant with Abraham as he had with Noah. As part of his covenant with Abraham, God had promised to make Abraham's descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sands on the seashore. However, in today's reading from Genesis, God tested Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac. As he had done when he asked Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees, God was asking Abraham to entrust his life and his future to God and to God's word of promise. When Abraham was willing to do as God asked, God renewed his covenant with him. Lent challenges us to deepen our faith and our trust in God. As St. Paul wrote to the Romans, "*If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?*"

Every year on the Second of Lent, we hear the Gospel story of the Transfiguration. The appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus proclaimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament law and the prophets. Speaking from the clouds, God authenticated Jesus as his Son. Jesus' transfiguration helped prepare his disciples for his passion and death by giving them a glimpse of the glory that would be his when he rose from the dead. His transfiguration gives us a glimpse of the glory that will be ours when we rise from the dead, the glory that can begin to be ours even now if we die to selfishness and sin and rise to new life with him. One of the ways we die to selfishness and sin and rise to new life is through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Our Lenten Penance Service in conjunction with Our Lady of Lourdes will be this Thursday, March 5, at 7 p.m. Because of Fr. Noah's illness, the Penance Service will be here at Little Flower rather than at Our Lady of Lourdes. Also, this Wednesday, March 4, from 6:30 to 8 p.m., I will hear confessions as part of *The Light Is on for You*. From 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. on March 4 & 18, priests will be available in churches throughout the Archdiocese to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Today the Sacrament of Reconciliation can be called the forgotten sacrament. As you are aware, in recent years, many, if not most Catholics, have stopped receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

My guess is most of us view the Sacrament of Reconciliation or confession as a burden rather than a gift. Most of us find it difficult to admit sin and accept responsibility for it. However, Jesus intended the sacrament to be a gift rather than a burden. The truth is that whenever people came to Jesus, no matter what they had done, he never criticized or condemned them. He forgave them and loved them. The only people Jesus ever criticized were the self-righteous.

To appreciate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is important to have a Catholic understanding of sacraments. We believe that in every sacrament Jesus is dynamically present during the celebration of the sacrament. In other words, we believe that it is Jesus whom we meet and who forgives our sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, not the priest. The priest is only the minister.

My brothers and sisters, someone once said that Jesus was the greatest psychologist who ever lived. Guilt is a cancer. When we keep it inside ourselves, it eats away at us. When we confess our sins, we are able to let go of them. People often ask, "Why can't I simply ask God for forgiveness without going to confession?" We can. However, we also need to hear the words of forgiveness. When we hear the words of forgiveness from the mouth of the priest, we know in faith that we are forgiven. Asking for forgiveness and being forgiven are among our greatest needs. Therefore, I invite and encourage you to participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation at our Lenten Penance Service this Thursday evening.