

ON THIS MOUNTAIN THE LORD WILL PROVIDE

Mount Moriah. Mount Sinai. Mount Horeb. Mount Nebo. Mount Carmel. Mount Zion. Mount Tabor. Mount Calvary. You have heard of all these mounts from the various readings in the Scriptures throughout the liturgical year. Today's readings speak of Mount Moriah and Mount Tabor. The reading from Genesis and the Gospel account of the Transfiguration are both difficult readings but in different ways. Let me try to unwrap the inner meaning of these readings.

I always recoil when today's reading from Genesis occurs. God calling on Abraham as a very old man who has waited all his life for a son and he now has been given one. His beloved Isaac. And now God is telling Abraham to go to a Mount that the Lord will point out to him and there offer his beloved son as a sacrifice. How barbaric is that? What kind of a God does that? The author of Genesis says that God was putting Abraham to the test. Again, what kind of God does that?

What is going on? Where is Mount Moriah anyway? Well, it turns out that it is in Jerusalem which is itself elevated about 1800 feet above sea level. There is, to this day, a humongous rock there. The tradition is that the rock was the place where Abraham was to sacrifice his only son whom he loved. You know that the Lord sends an angel with a message: Do not lay a hand on the boy. Do no harm to the child. Abraham was listening for God's word when he heard the terrible mandate to go and sacrifice his son. But he is also listening when the Lord thanks him for revealing his heart and the depth of Abraham's love for the God of Israel. This is why we call Abraham our father in faith.

His son is not to be sacrificed but a male lamb, a ram, is captured and offered instead as an acceptable sacrifice to God. And Isaac is restored to Abraham in a more enhanced fashion truly the son of the promise that Abraham had been given. Abraham renamed Mount Moriah as the mountain where the Lord provides. It is from Isaac that Jacob will come. Jacob will have twelve sons and after wrestling with God's angel will have his name changed from Jacob to Israel So the twelve sons of Jacob become the twelve sons of Israel. Each will become the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Some eight hundred years later King David will buy the land where this huge rock is and he will make that site available for his son Solomon to build a Temple to the living God of Israel. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The heart of the holy of holies of the Temple will be precisely over the rock on which Isaac was to have been sacrificed. Four hundred years later the Babylonians destroy Solomon's Temple and carry away all the golden and bejeweled vessels including the Ark of the Covenant with the Ten Commandments. They will never resurface.

The Temple will be rebuilt however seventy years later in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah. It will be there until King Herod who will upgrade and expand lavishly the Temple. This is the same Herod who will try to snuff out the life of the newborn King of the Jews, It is this Temple where Jesus will do some of his teaching and this Temple that he will cleanse by driving out the money changers and overturning their tables. Yes. On Mount Moriah.

This Jesus teaches and heals, he casts out demons and performs miraculous deeds. He raises the dead and feeds the five thousand. And from today's gospel we hear of Jesus on another Mount, Mount Tabor with Peter, James and John. And he is transfigured before them. The interior grace of the man Jesus is brilliantly revealed on that mount. Why? Why is that happening? Because less than a week before Jesus had revealed to his closest apostles what awaited him in Jerusalem to which they were now journeying. He would be handed over to the religious authorities, falsely accused, tried, convicted and put to death. And then he would rise from the dead. They who walked with him and loved him had no idea what he was talking about although they had begun to sense a sinister viciousness aimed at him by some. The inner Jesus, the only Son of God in human flesh, is revealed and with him Moses and Elijah. Moses receives the Commandments on Mount Sinai. Elijah defeats the false prophets on Queen Jezebel on Mount Carmel. They are the two giants of the Old Testament representing the law and God's powerful prophetic word. Two thousand years is about to culminate in Jesus.

Jesus' prophecy before Mount Tabor will be fulfilled on that first Good Friday. He will be led out carrying the wood of his own cross as Isaac carried the wood for his own sacrifice. And Jesus will be crucified on a Mount too. Mount Calvary--which is very close geographically to the original Mount Moriah. From that huge rock in the Temple to the rocky crag called Golgotha, the place of the skull, is not very far at all. Less than a ten-minute walk. And now everything begins to come together. On Calvary another Father will be faced with the reality of sacrificing his own son, his only begotten son, his beloved in whom he is well pleased. And while God tested the heart of Abraham on this site so many years ago and then granted the reprieve that saved the life of Isaac, God will show once and for all time the depth of his love for all of us by allowing his own son's life to be forfeit as a sacrifice on this high place. The whole Abraham story was not really about Abraham and Isaac. It was about the Father in heaven and the gift of his Son to us to end the estrangement caused by our sin., nearly two thousand years later. Thus fulfilling Abraham's prophecy: on this mount the Lord will provide.

It is as if we can hear God the Father saying: "I want you to know that I, the Father of all creation, will make the very sacrifice I asked Abraham to make, in order to repair the breach, to heal the estrangement, to restore lost innocence, and so be reconciled with all humans once again. That is what his Son came to accomplish, to do whatever it would take to accomplish this. He would die our death after he had lived our life so as to reconnect us to God and restore the intimate friendship.

Today we have a spouse of one our parishioners and mother of some of our parish children who is present for the Rite of Election. She has already been baptized into Jesus Christ in another Christian denomination. But in another six weeks she will make her profession of faith as a Catholic, be confirmed, receive Eucharist and enter into full communion. What began with Abraham so many years ago continues to this very day. It is real and it continues to unfold day by day. And we have others who are under instruction who will be baptized later this year. God is so good. And the Spirit of the living God has been unleashed everywhere in our world. We will invoke the Spirit in this Eucharist to change unleavened bread and natural wine into the Body and Blood of the same Jesus Christ. That is the faith we live and celebrate for thousands of years. On this little hill. Mount Ambler.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.