

28 February 2021

### Writings: Trust

*“Take your son, your only son Isaac, who you love, and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there as a burnt offering (Gen. 22:2).*

When I was young, I saw my faith as the sum of things I believed about God. I believed Jesus was the Son of God. I believed he died on the Cross for my sins. I believed he was present in the Eucharist. If you had asked me about my relationship with God, it was pretty simple: God was everywhere, all-knowing and all powerful and I was none of those things. As I got older, I began to see my faith differently. Although the propositions I believed about God were still very important, my relationship with God became the core of my faith. As time passed, I realized trust was an essential part of any relationship, including the one I had with God. I learned it was easy to trust God when things were going well. When things were going badly, it was harder to trust God. In a few situations, I found it almost impossible to trust God, but there seemed to be no alternative. After all, he was God.

In today’s First Reading, we encounter one of the most difficult stories to understand in the entire Bible: Abraham is asked to offer his son as a human sacrifice. It raises many disturbing questions about the nature of God. However, the story also teaches us something about the limits of trusting God and human understanding.

Abraham would have found God’s request especially troubling. Besides the revulsion he might have had towards the idea of human sacrifice (the Jewish people never practiced it and regarded neighbours who did as barbaric), Abraham would have had to deal with the paternal love he felt towards his Son. In addition, God had promised that Abraham would have many descendants through Issac (**Gen. 15:4-5**). Was God now breaking His promise? Could Abraham still trust God? Yet, Abraham and Sarah were supposed to be too old to have a child when Issac was born. Did God have a way out of this seemingly impossible situation? Clearly, God was testing the limits of Abraham’s trust in God and the limits of his understanding. So what was God doing?

When I studied this story in a Scripture course I took while in the Seminary, a lay student shared with me how this story had undermined her faith in a loving God. God’s request was unreasonable. However, was that the message of the story? Despite all his discomfort, Abraham was prepared to consent to God’s request. Once God knows Abraham fears Him (**Gen. 22:12**) (trusts God that much), Isaac’s life is spared and a ram is offered up instead. Some have argued God never intended Issac to be sacrificed and had simply staged an elaborate test of faith. Yet, human reason is incapable of fully understanding how God thinks. It is impossible to know why God made the request. What the story revealed was that trusting God in impossible situations has yielded results which were unexpected and favorable.

During this Covid 19 pandemic, a number of factors have contributed to a decline in trust among people. Medical experts have made predictions about the effectiveness of certain actions in preventing the spread of the virus which proved incorrect. Government leaders have reversed their thinking on public policy matters which has undermined their credibility. Individuals and businesses have publicly flouted public health regulations and gone unpunished which has caused those who obeyed the rules wonder if their sacrifices were in vain. This decline in trust has weakened our common effort against Covid 19.

On the spiritual level, trust in God has also been severely tested. Besides asking how a loving God could allow this pandemic to occur, others question why those who flout the rules go unpunished and how much longer God expects us to endure it. These are reasonable questions. Many religious people are trying to provide satisfactory answers. Yet, the reality is we just don’t know. Perhaps, in hindsight it will make sense but now we are just trying to make it through another day. We may feel a little like Abraham, trapped in an impossible situation.

At that point, it might be wise to remember what Abraham did; he trusted. The results speak for themselves.

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