

The story about the Sacrifice of Isaac in our First Reading is difficult for us to hear. Part of the problem is we're hearing the story with 21st Century ears. But this happens in 2000 B.C. Human sacrifice is practiced throughout the Mideast, often with first born sons. So when God tells Abraham to sacrifice his son, Abraham doesn't question it, because it's going on around him.

But then, in a dramatic way, God stops Abraham's sacrifice. He reveals he doesn't want human sacrifice from his people, the nation that's he's going to start through Abraham. He's not like these other gods and cultures in the totally pagan world. God has higher plans for human life, than to see our blood splashed on an altar. This is a major revelation to Abraham, and it will make the Israelites distinct from the peoples around them.

Seen this way, the story isn't about Abraham's character, but God's character. The God of Abraham reveals himself as love and generosity – not a god who has to be appeased. He's a God Abraham can trust with his life, a God Abraham can put his faith in. He doesn't question that God will somehow keep his promise to him that he will be the Father of a great nation through a son. Abraham comes to have that depth of faith and trust in God.

Have we arrived at that point yet? Do we really believe God is in charge, appearances to the contrary? That God will provide for us and take care of us, like he did for Abraham? Do we believe that God is for us, and wants the best for us, even while we suffer disappointments and life's problems? Do we trust that God has a plan for us, a bigger picture we don't always see?

This story is a call to check our faith. If we can't answer Yes to these questions from our hearts, let's ask God this Lent for his grace, his help, to get us there. Because if we don't believe God knows each one of us by name, we're wasting our time here!

Fr. John Ozella – Second of Lent, February 25, 2018
(Note: The audio includes the DMF talk.)