

## Second Sunday of Lent

**My father saw to it that, when I turned 18, I registered for the draft. He knew I was going to apply for conscientious objector status. But he also knew - as I did - that I might not get it. Dad had served in World War II. He never spoke much about those days. I think the memories were hard on him. Dad died over 12 years ago, and in the meantime I've realized more that my father faced the possibility of capture, torture and death every day. He served the army because he loved our country, and he knew it was his duty. It was also his duty, in spite of his fears, to put his son's life at risk in the same way.**

**This is the closest I can come to grasping the psychological horror of today's first reading when Abraham, for the love of God, binds his son and unsheathes his knife in order personally to kill him. Earlier, when Abram was 75, he left his homeland at the Lord's command. He had a wife but no children, yet God had just promised them descendants. Twenty-five years later, Sara finally conceived. Abraham was 100 years old when Isaac was born; Sara was 90. This is the son - maybe 15 years later - that God told Abraham to kill: the source of his descendants. We have no record of what Abraham thought or felt. We just know what he did: He rose up, saddled his animal, took what he needed, grabbed his son, and went to Mount Moriah. It took three days to get there - three days of traveling with his son in the saddle. What did they talk about? The only conversation the bible records is when Isaac starts to wonder what is going on. "Where is the sheep? We've got fire and wood," he says. He doesn't mention the scariest thing they've brought along - the naked knife in the hand of his father.**

**We know how this story ends. An angel stops Abraham just before the knife slices Isaac's throat. A ram caught in the thicket replaces him. But the story is horrible no matter how you think about it. How could God ask a father to sacrifice his son - even if God never intended to have him go through with it?**

**Parents put their children at risk in many ways. They let them do things that are foolish, dangerous or embarrassing. They bring them to church even when their peers think it's not cool. They choose medical treatment that may help or harm. Sometimes parents send children off to war. Parents do these things because of some greater good - the importance of education and religious formation, the hope of health, or the safety of the country. Still, the story of God asking Abraham to kill his son remains troubling.**

**For Christians this story foreshadows the sacrifice of Christ. He is like Isaac, the only Son, who carries the wood of his sacrifice up a hill and then is saved. We'll hear Isaac's story again at the Easter Vigil for this reason.**

**If nothing else, the story teaches that God creates life and God owns life. Whether a life is spared or lost, it belongs to God. For our part, we should be ready to obey God's will at all times, even when we fear bad results. Thankfully, when Abraham got the second message, he listened a second time and stopped the slaughter. If he had disobeyed, his sin would have killed his son. The real sacrifice was always inside Abraham; he sacrificed his will. Sometimes we discern God's difficult will properly, only to find out we need to discern it properly a second time. If we don't, our own will could hurt the very people we love.**