

## 2nd Sunday of Lent

Some parents fret over the career choices of their children, especially if kids want a position that puts their own lives at risk: firefighter, police officer, soldier, pilot, construction worker, road crew laborer—to name a few. Yet each of these contributes to the betterment of society. Parents love their children, and they love when their children pledge loyalty to a greater good, even if it puts them in harm's way—so some of these parents hand their kids over for us all.

Remembering this helps us wrap our heads around St. Paul's description of God's love. The Letter to the Romans covers a lot of territory, but the middle chapters are especially deep. Paul reflects on sin and grace, and counts himself among the sinners who need grace. Then he marvels at the love that God has for us even though we sin. Today's excerpt from Romans Chapter 8 brings these reflections to a climax. Paul uses a courtroom analogy. Imagine yourself at the last judgment, put on trial because of your sins and awaiting a punishment you hope will be light. To our relief, here is how Paul describes our judge: The judge loves us. Paul writes, "If God is for us, who can be against us? ...Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us."

We are seldom this kind toward people who offend us. We hold grudges. We enact punishments. We demand retribution for those who caused harm. But we rejoice when our own offenses receive forgiveness.

These verses appear early in Lent to reveal the import of the end of Lent: the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Paul says, if you have any doubt about how much God loves you, think about this: God "did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all." God is a parent who lets his child go into harm's way. Paul then asks, "how will [God] not also give us everything else along with [his own Son]?" God will also give mercy, forgiveness, a second chance—whatever we need.

These verses reverberate after our first reading narrated the astonishing account of Abraham, willing to give up his own son—personally to slaughter his own son—if God asked him. Abraham and Isaac prefigured God the Father and God the Son, ready to give up everything out of loyalty to a greater good.

God seems to expect nothing in return, and what on earth could we give either to elicit such a gift or repay it? Still, God's action prompts us to follow its example of sacrifice. When we think about our specific sins, forgiveness seems ever more amazing. It may inspire us to offer the same gift. When you think of people who have offended you, can you imagine forgiving them? Can you imagine sacrificing yourself for their benefit, going out of your way, spending your own resources, putting your own life at risk because you love them more than they repulse you? Jesus is a hard act for us humans to follow.

Forgiving others does not mean approving what they did. It may just mean praying for their conversion of heart, praying that they may also turn from sin and advance in grace. When firefighters see two houses ablaze, they do not discriminate between sinners in one and saints in the other. They risk their lives for all. Lent invites us to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of others, as Jesus himself did, whether or not we think they deserve it.