

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT

MARCH 8, 2009

In the movie *Joe Versus the Volcano*, Joe Banks, played by Tom Hanks, discovers he has an incurable brain disease that will claim his life within a matter of months. A business man visits Joe looking for a volunteer to jump into a volcano so he can negotiate a mineral rights contract with the people of the island of Waponi Woo. With little to lose, Joe agrees to become a sacrifice to the island's volcano god. His life-threatening physical condition impels Joe to look at life differently. Joe becomes more honest and direct in his relationships with people: he feels free. On the trip to the island, Joe's boat sinks and he survives by using his luggage as a raft. In one very poignant scene, Joe stands on his luggage and prays "Dear God, whose name I do not know – thank you for my life." Joe discovers that self-sacrifice is liberating. He comes to see in the threat of death, the possibility of a new kind of life - a life free from the bondage of fear and selfishness - the kind of life worth dying for.

The Book of Genesis, in today's first reading, tells the familiar story of Abraham and Isaac. God calls Abraham and asks him to take his only son and go to Mount Moriah. Abraham listens to the voice of God, gathers his possessions and together with Isaac, sets out for the mountain. Once they arrive at Mt. Moriah, God puts Abraham to the test and asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, whom Abraham loves more than his own life. This is not the story of a man who knows everything will turn out alright. Abraham obeys and trusts God, even when he has no proof that all will end well. In the face of God's demand for total self-surrender, Abraham finds the courage to let go of that which is more precious to him than life itself. Self-surrender allows Abraham, like Joe Banks, to find freedom from fear and selfishness. In that moment of self-surrender Abraham, too, finds the kind of life worth dying for.

Mitch Lewis wrote a commentary on the theme of self-sacrifice entitled "Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac." His blog concludes with this important question. "Is there anything we should withhold from God?" Lewis then goes on to say, "That treasure which we would withhold is the one thing that most belongs on the altar. Those things to which we would cling must either be offered to the God who has called us, or they themselves will become idols that rule our lives." Willing to lay his precious son Isaac on the altar, Abraham faced his fear, doubt and desperation, and was led to the freedom of spirit which enabled him to surrender completely to God.

Part of our Lenten desert experience is the inner search for the treasures to which we cling that prevent us from growing in our relationship with God. What in my life prevents me from surrendering to God? Do I jealously guard the control I have over people or situations? Do things always have to be done my way, on my terms? Do I look for security in professional or financial success? Do I always think I am right? Treasures such as these limit our freedom and become idols in our lives. Lent is the perfect time to work on shattering such idols through prayer, penance and works of charity. Among the shattered ruins of these personal "idols", we will also find the remnants of the chains that bind us.



Take your son Isaac, your only one. Offer him up as a holocaust

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*Genesis 22: 1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18 Romans 8: 31-34
Mark 9: 2-10*

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