

Take your son, ..., your only one, whom you love ... you shall offer him up as a holocaust....

Does this shock you? Does this inspire awe in you?

Both the first reading and the gospel are familiar stories which we have heard many times throughout our lives. Both contain elements of shock and awe just as many experienced this Ash Wednesday. Abraham received a shock when God asked Abraham to "Take your son, your only one, whom you love" and kill him as a sacrifice to me. Aren't we surprised that God would ask this of one who had been so faithful and had even received his son as a gift from God? This sudden request would surely surprise and upset any of us who were asked to do the same. Yet, Abraham obeys in awe, defined in the Merriam Webster Dictionary as an emotion variously combining dread, veneration and wonder that is inspired by authority or by the sacred or the sublime. It seems at first glance that God is taking advantage of Abraham; however, if we listen to the words and actions of the creator and his creature, we see reverential respect displayed by each toward the other as well as an ultimate blessing. Just as God did not withhold the gift of Isaac to Abraham, neither did Abraham withhold what was most beloved from God which sealed the covenant between them and created a legacy for Abraham.

As for the gospel, can you imagine the shock that Peter, James and John felt on witnessing first the transfiguration of Jesus and then the appearance of Moses and Elijah? It certainly rendered James and John speechless! Immediately before this scene in the gospel of Mark, Jesus asks his disciples about how others identify him. He explains to them that he will be rejected, killed and raised on the third day. Peter, James and John by being present for the transfiguration, seeing Jesus

with Elijah and one of the prophets, Moses, can now have no doubt of who he is. Not to mention, that the Lord himself declares, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him." God is affirming what Jesus had told them. God is offering his son, his only one, that he loves. That is a shock! Why would he do that? How could he do that? He remembered Abraham's example. He would not withhold from us the only thing that could reconcile us with him because each of us is a beloved child of God.

Listen to him. This is a command to us too. Moreover, we need to listen not only with our ears but with our eyes and hearts. Listen to what God is telling us through the actions of others as well as their words. Listen, be attentive. If we listen as Abraham and the disciples did, we will not withhold anything from God so that the world might be transfigured by HIM.