

**Readings:** *Genesis 22:1 – 18; Ps. 115 (116): 10 – 16; Romans 8: 31 – 34; Mark 9:2 – 10.*

We do not know the historical background to the story of the events described in today's Old Testament reading. It may reflect a point at which human sacrifice was rejected by the people of God. We know that it was practised by neighbouring peoples, and that in later times Israelites were condemned for the sacrifice of children. The story assumes – as does the bible generally – that everything that happens is under the control of God. So we must take the story as we find it, and learn from what those who included it in scripture intended.

There is a clue to this intention in the letter to the Hebrews (11: 17f): *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only-begotten son. ...He considered that God was able to raise even from the dead. Hence, figuratively, he did receive him back.*

The central truth is Abraham's faith – his confidence in God, whatever might happen. Saint Paul (without referring to the incident in today's reading) expands on the idea of Abraham as the father of all who have the same confidence or faith (*see Romans chapter 4*).

A Jewish commentary on this passage (known as 'the binding of Isaac') goes further, and suggests that God, never intending the unthinkable act of human sacrifice, tested Abraham in this way because he wanted his faith to be widely known.

The story also demonstrates God's faithfulness to his promise: He has told Abraham *through Isaac shall your descendants be named*: and he is true to his word – his covenant.

Later Christian theology, art and devotion has developed the parallels and contrasts between today's story and the death of the Lord Jesus. Abraham's beloved son Isaac is spared from death: Jesus, who at his baptism is called *my beloved Son*, is not spared, but dies on the cross. Isaac was *figuratively raised*: Jesus was raised to life on Easter Day.

From today's reading we might pick out one or more of the following for thought and prayer:

God's total reliability – his faithfulness to his promise, his covenant with Abraham:

God's call to us to have faith in him, whatever the circumstances:

God's generosity: *he did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all* (see NT reading).