

March 4, 2012 – Second Sunday of Lent
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Genesis 22:1-2, 9, 10-13, 15-18; Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19; Romans 8:31-34; Mark 9:2-10

Today's readings point to transformation, to becoming more, to becoming who God intends.

In Genesis, Abraham, who has already been given a new name – the first of many changes in his life – leaves the nomadic custom of offering human sacrifice in preference for animal sacrifice. Called by God, Abraham obeys and is drawn into a closer relationship with his God. God calls to him three times. The first is through the traditions of his people to offer human sacrifice. "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you." Abraham's willingness to obey, prompts God to call out to him again, "Abraham, Abraham ... Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God." God's third call is a reward to Abraham, who did not withhold his only son, so God promises him that he will become the father of many nations. This then is Abraham transformed, the man God created him to be.

In Romans we learn of God's faithfulness to those whom God knew before ever they existed, and whom the Holy One "conformed to the image of his Son." Through God's saving grace each of us is brought to the fullness of life. "He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for us all, will he not with him also give us everything else?" God, as Giver and Gift, continually invites us to become the one God created us to be. Through and in Christ, "who indeed intercedes for us," each of us is brought to wholeness.

Mark's Gospel account tells us of Jesus and three of his disciples as they go up the mountain, perhaps to pray. "And he was transfigured before them." Jesus, the man, is seen by his disciples as one glorified by God. The Holy Spirit appears in a cloud, as at the Baptism of Jesus, and declares him to be the beloved Son, one filled with the power and goodness of God. Both Jesus and the disciples are strengthened for the days ahead when the Master will be put to death by crucifixion. The Father, always full of loving kindness, teaches us that as man, Jesus, too, must be brought to wholeness, to the fullness of his humanity. In this transformative moment, God graces Jesus, his disciples and all of us, with a glimpse of the one who is both Lord and Christ that we may all know the life to which we are called.

As a missionary in South Korea I had many opportunities to witness to this transformative power of God, calling individuals to move beyond their present state, to become more the persons they are meant to be. As in many countries, the physically disabled are forced to the fringes of society, but adversity and challenge bring unexpected growth and wholeness.

As a young lad of 16, Dong-Su was seriously burned in a factory fire and had to spend the next four and a half years in the Maryknoll hospital. Because his mother had died some years earlier, it fell to his father to be at his bedside, keeping watch as his son hung between life and death. Their entire lives had changed. The hospital, the Catholic environment, the foreign Sisters, the uncertainty of each new day, all was new and, like the disciples on the mount, "they were terrified." Gradually, Dong-Su and his father grew in their ability to accept all the changes

in their lives and to find blessing and grace in it. When both were baptized at the hospital, they received the names of Abraham and Isaac, a father and son who gave their all to God. Dong-Su's joie de vivre (delight in being alive) witnessed to the wholeness that he had become.

Community living is said to be the best school for wholeness. The 17 young Korean women I lived with in Pusan will attest to that. All had some degree of physical disability which kept them out of the mainstream of society, limiting their opportunities for education, work experience and marriage. We came together in an effort to provide an atmosphere where they could live together, to learn life skills and work that would provide them with some small income. These were challenges enough, but the biggest learning came in adjusting to one another and to learning to live together. Most grew beyond their farthest dreams, moving into society as wives and mothers, or finding a job which provided them with the necessities of life. All of them grew in their personalities, in their ability to adjust to others, in growing toward the person they were meant to be.

Each day God calls us each to growth, toward that transformation that will make us into God's desire for ourselves. Like Abraham and Isaac, like the disciples and Jesus, their Master, we are the beloved sons and daughters of God.

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