



THE COLLECT

Almighty God,
you have broken the tyranny of sin
and have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts
whereby we call you Father:
Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service,
that we and all creation may be brought
to the glorious liberty of the children of God;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

THE FIRST READING

Genesis 22: 1-14

22After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ²He said, '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 shall show you.' ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' ⁸Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.



⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill* his

son. ¹¹But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ¹²He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.' ¹³And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. ¹⁴So Abraham called that place 'The Lord will provide';* as it is said to this day, 'On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.'

The above image depicts a rather different scenario when it comes to Abraham and Isaac. Most paintings depicting the scene of this week's Old Testament reading show Abraham as an old man and Isaac as a young boy. The demands put upon Abraham by God in this instance very much echo last week's reading where Jesus says in no uncertain terms that we must love him more than family! Whether Isaac was a young child or a man the prospective loss and tragedy of God's initial request seems beyond consideration in today's world. Perhaps if we step back out of the immediate picture and see God's wider plan we may be able to understand a little better that God was testing Abraham's heart and intentions. After all, if responsibility for the people of God lies in one man's hands, the heart of that man must be tested for loyalty.

It is not God's intent to destroy but to build; this can come about if we truly dedicate ourselves to his will in our lives. To what degree do you place time with God and observation of what he might be saying/doing in your life as a top priority?

THE EPISTLE

Romans 6: 12-23

12 Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments* of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments* of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.* For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Obedience runs throughout the scriptures this week, particularly in the first two readings. We have been given grace through the death and resurrection of Christ but, as in the case of Abraham, the decision to respond to that grace lies in our own hands. The writer of Romans sees clearly the gift of eternal life as having the power to transform an individual completely. Each day we are challenged by the pull of the world and the various activities and draws within it. What are the changes within yourself that God's grace has brought about? Identifying them is not only reinforcing them but giving thanks to God for them!

THE GOSPEL READING

Matthew 10: 40-42

40 'Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous

person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.’

Jesus spoke about unity between the Father and himself and between himself and us. This is a three way stream of unity. Today, this is reinforced. Jesus makes it clear that our relationship with the Trinity is ongoing and that there are those within this world who will welcome God through us! This week, I think a lot about those within our own community who have worked solidly through the pandemic; particularly shopkeepers in the village. There has been an astounding response to their kindness; a gratitude for the home-deliveries and assistance given to those who were tucked safely away. Through the actions of other people we catch glimpses of God. We are mistaken to think that God is limited to church services or rituals; he is alive and well in the faces of those who step forward on behalf of others. ‘Whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple...none of these will lose their reward. Who do you give thanks for today in your life through whom you see the face of God? Have you be blessed by the gentle presence of a Godly person at some stage in your life? In what ways do you bring the face of God to another person?

THE PSALM

Psalm 13

- 1 How long will you forget me, O Lord; for ever?
How long will you hide your face from me?
- 2 How long shall I have anguish in my soul
and grief in my heart, day after day?
How long shall my enemy triumph over me?
- 3 Look upon me and answer, O Lord my God;
lighten my eyes, lest I sleep in death;
- 4 Lest my enemy say, ‘I have prevailed against him,’
and my foes rejoice that I have fallen.
- 5 But I put my trust in your steadfast love;
my heart will rejoice in your salvation.
- 6 I will sing to the Lord,
for he has dealt so bountifully with me

Notice the three parts of this psalm (and many psalms)

The Psalmist moves through heartfelt frustration directly towards God.

Then there is an honest appeal for help

And finally a declaration of trust.

Often, what we are reading in the psalms is a three-part processing of pain towards faithful resolution. Isn't it worth noting that the writer has a sufficiently open relationship with God to be able to bring anger into the open, giving this to God. It seems that doing so eventually brings about a faithful response within the psalmist when the processing is done.

How does this encourage us to communicate with God?

Can you find this pattern in other psalms?