

God is providing his own and only son Jesus as the sacrifice that will take our sins away but this is just too terrifying and too extraordinary a statement for us to truly comprehend. What father would ever do this to his son? The full terror of it is missing from today's much abbreviated account from Genesis. The slow and seemingly inexorable build up to the point where God finally stays Abraham's knife. Dom Gregory, I think, found the whole passage inexplicable and better not said. But it is said, and in some way said to illuminate today's gospel of the Transfiguration. Perhaps the puzzle at the heart of both of them is their at least initial inexplicability – symbolic actions which say much more than we can fully understand. Abraham no more understood what he was being asked to do than does Peter on the mountain top confronted by a glorified Christ. As we so desperately would want that knife arrested in the first story so Peter wants this scene of glory arrested at its high point, at this moment of drama which fills him not with terror, as the translation misleadingly implies, but with awe. But terror could do just as well for what is to follow, as Jesus warns the disciples not to tell anyone yet of what they have seen; this side of his death and resurrection it would not be understood, as indeed it is not understood by these three specially chosen disciples. There may be something of this puzzle in all our lives which only makes sense as our lives evolve, as we experience the depths as well as the heights, the moments when God's loving kindness feels totally absent – as perhaps for Abraham – and the moments when God's loving kindness seems too much – as perhaps for Peter. Churchill supposedly once said that if you're in hell, keep going, meaning that unless you want to stay there you need to keep moving. Peter, in contrast, has a taste of heaven and wants to stay there but Jesus knows that this is not how life evolves. I've used that word "evolves" twice now with something of yesterday still in mind – a day on 'rewilding the soul' and what that means in the context of rewilding the world in which we live and "have our being". What it seems to mean is that our dominion over creation, that is in our unavoidable responsibility for its present state, good or bad, we have to choose at what stage we wish to arrest it's development if conservation is to have any meaning at all and that this is inevitably an arbitrary and ultimately an ineffective decision depending on what we might see as "heaven on earth" – because the world moves, develops, changes and the cycle of life and death continues whatever constraints we try to put on it. So you could see Peter's action as a moment of hubris, trying to avoid the fact of death, or simply as a moment of innocence- he has yet to learn that what God wants for all of us is to keep going, to pass through death to life again which is not something this world can offer, which God does offer in the sacrifice of his only Son.

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