

Item #60 (Jesus and Genesis 22)

In Item #59 I discussed what “Getting Inside a Text” means for me. It means understanding the human implications of a text in human terms. In this Item I would like to speculate about what “getting inside Genesis 22” meant for Jesus Christ.

We know from the authentic Tradition that guides us Catholics in our reading of Scripture that Jesus was one Person with two Natures, one Divine, the other Human. As Divine Jesus would have had no problem understanding the implications of Genesis 22 perfectly. But as Human He would have taken time to grasp these implications fully. (See Luke 2,52: “And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man”.) We also know that as a youngster Jesus was a precocious student of the Law. (See Luke 2,41-52.) Which means He must have been aware of the first five books of what was for Him and the other Jews of His time the first five books of what for Christians today is the Old Testament, of which Genesis 22 is part of the first book.

In Genesis 22,1 God “puts Abraham to a test” by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac. God had previously told Abraham that through Abraham’s own “issue” all the nations of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 15,1-6). But now He commands Abraham to sacrifice, that is, kill his “issue” (Genesis 22,2). Abraham, after being a part of his wife’s Sarah’s giving birth when both of them were well beyond the time when having an “issue” was possible (See Genesis 21,1-8), was a believer that God was a master of life and death, and so he had no hesitation in beginning to carry out God’s order. (See Hebrews 11,19.) When God saw that Abraham had faith in God’s ability to raise Isaac from the dead in order to carry out His promise as recorded in Genesis 15,1-6, He commanded Abraham through an angel not to proceed with the sacrifice and rewarded Abraham’s obedience with a renewal of His initial promise made in Genesis 15,1-6. But that left God’s original command to Abraham to offer his son in sacrifice as a “parable” or “symbol” unfulfilled. (See Hebrews 11,19.)

In my dissertation written for a doctoral degree at the University of Oxford (published as *Jesus and Isaac. A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in the Light of the Aqedah* (Analecta Biblica 94; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981) I argued that the text of Hebrews at 5,7-10 was about Jesus asking His Father to be allowed to die (see pp. 182-185). The text is much discussed, and I went out on a limb to hold what I did. My argumentation was based mainly on the Greek of the text itself. I failed to recognize the importance of seeing in God’s command to Abraham not to sacrifice Isaac as a “παραβολή” in the sense of a paradigm waiting to be fulfilled, as it is described in the Epistle to the Hebrews in retrospect. A sacrifice there had to be, and since Isaac was not the one sacrificed the sacrifice had to be fulfilled by his successor, Jesus Christ, who was also Abraham’s true “issue” (see Matthew 1,16 where Jesus is paired with Abraham and given the designation “Christ” by reason of His Resurrection. That is, by reason of His Resurrection Jesus would be the “issue” (descendant) of Abraham through Whom all the nations of the world

would be blessed.

The story of Genesis 22 must have begun playing itself out in the thoughts and prayers of Jesus in His residence at Nazareth at an early age. It was a text impossible for Him not “to get into”, for it was a text the implications of which it must have been impossible for Him to avoid. It was a “paradigm” or “παραβολή” wherein Jesus found His destiny. But He found it before it happened so that in Hebrews He could be recorded as asking His Father to allow Him to die, which God His Father, like any Father, was reluctant to sanction. (**August 8, 2020**)