

Lent 2024, Week 2 Reflection

LOVE AND PARENTHOOD

Welcome to the Second Week of the Lenten audio retreat, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. If you haven't listened to last week's reflection about "Contemplation and Covenant," not to worry! You can always revisit past audio clips at your convenience. For now, we invite you to pause, breathe deeply, and notice the Spirit of life around you, wherever you are. Check in with yourself, too. What might help you enter more fully into this time of prayer? For instance, you might like to light a candle, move to a more comfortable spot, or close your eyes. Simply be here, now, as much as you are able, feeling yourself held by the floor, chair, or ground, and by God, as we explore this week's theme: "Love and Parenthood." This reflection was written by Matthew Ryan-Bender, a 2023 alum of the Contemplative Leaders in Action program in Philadelphia...

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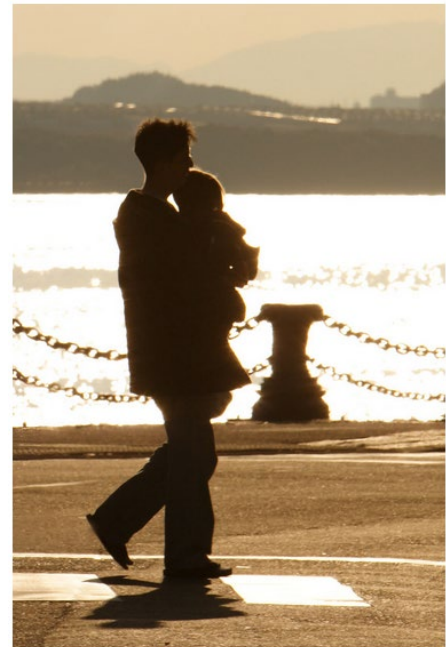
At the Easter Vigil at my parish two years ago, the lector proclaimed the reading from Genesis of God ordering Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. The lector, a man I had seen around the parish with his young son of about six, wept from the ambo as he read of Abraham raising his knife towards his beloved Isaac.

Sitting in the congregation, I too was moved to tears as I thought about what this man must be feeling, imagining how he would react to being told to sacrifice his own son. But my emotion two years ago was vicarious, not personal. This Lent, as I now hold my own daughter, just 15 months old, this reading hits me differently. Now a parent, I hear this story with a new and more personal ear.

So what do we do with this reading? What kind of God would command someone to do such a thing? What lesson about trust or faith or fortitude is worth the anguish and pain of sacrificing one's own child? How can we reconcile a God who loves unconditionally with a God willing to do this?

When my daughter Maura was born, I was in the middle of completing the Contemplative Leaders in Action program (CLA). In one of my final sessions, I reflected on what the change of becoming a father meant to me and my faith. The Spirit moved in me as I prayed about holding my tiny daughter and being overwhelmed with love and awe for the miracle that she is.

That moment of connection between the two of us broke open for me the realization that just as I was holding, protecting, and delighting in my daughter, God was doing the same for me. If I was overcome with emotion about my new capacity for love for my daughter, how incredible and unfathomable must God's love for me be? If there is nothing I would not do for her, then truly what would God not do for me? "If God is for us, who can be against us?"



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On its face, this reading from Genesis puts Abraham on one side and God on the other, in opposition to one another. But praying with and for my daughter makes me see how God is right there with Abraham. Imagining Abraham's anguish, our lector's emotion, and my own new grief at the prospect of sacrificing my child, I now wonder what God was feeling as Jesus approached Jerusalem and His fate. What pain coursed through God's heart, knowing that Jesus would be put to death? What all encompassing love did God feel for Jesus?

Becoming a parent has changed me and expanded my capacity for love. And while this personal transfiguration has certainly not made my clothes dazzling white, my daughter has taught me to love in new ways. My new ability to love has given me an insight into the love God had for Jesus and indeed for each of us.

God was not apart from Abraham in his pain at losing his son. God was not distant from Jesus as He walked towards Good Friday. God is not far from me now as I rock my daughter to sleep. God shares in our anguish and pain and delights in our joy and hope. God knows intimately the heartache Abraham must have felt at the thought of losing Isaac, because God felt that sorrow as Jesus went to the cross. God feels the wonder I feel when holding my daughter, because God feels that awe when beholding me. God is with us, here and now.

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Thanks for contemplating this week's reflection, presented by Jesuit Connections, a program of the Office of Ignatian Spirituality. We hope you'll join us next week for an exploration of "The Paradox of Growth."

Reflection questions:

- *As we move deeper into Lent, where do you see God journeying with you and sharing your emotions?*
 - *How can you respond in your daily life to the ways God shows love for you?*
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Opening & Closing Prayers

Let Your God Love You by Edwina Gateley

Be silent.
Be still.
Alone.
Empty
Before your God.
Say nothing.
Ask nothing.
Be silent.
Be still.
Let your God look upon you.
That is all.
God knows.
God understands.
God loves you
With an enormous love,
And only wants
To look upon you
With that love.
Quiet.
Still.
Be.
Let your God -
Love you.

Margaret Silf, *Wayfaring: A Gospel Journey in Everyday Life*

Ways are made very simply.
We don't have to accomplish some feat of heavy engineering.
All we have to do is put one foot in front of the other and walk them.
To walk with Jesus through his lived ministry,
through his suffering and death, and into his resurrected life and discover for ourselves
what it really means for us, and asks of us.
It is an invitation to become a wayfarer who,
simply by walking the way alongside
the One
who is the Way
and in loving relationship with fellow wayfarers,
will also become a waymaker for others.