

As recent as in 2013 a 7-year-old girl by name Lalita Tati was murdered and her liver was offered to appease Gods to get better harvest and other blessings. The two men were arrested on suspicion of killing the girl and offering her liver to the gods in a grisly religious tribal ceremony. Police said the men had confessed to the crime. The girl was murdered in a forested area in the state of Chhattisgarh which is also my home state.

This type of human sacrifice may not be common. But the cases of human sacrifice occasionally pop up even today in many parts of the world. India being one of them. In very deeply religious and superstitious India the incidence usually occurs in poor areas and among mostly illiterate people.

More common human sacrifice today are atrocities and killings are committed in the name of God and religion. Religious fanatics think they have a place reserved in heaven when they kill somebody in the name of God. They believe that they can please God by a blood bath. The incident of 9/11, killing of Christians by ISIS in Syria, killing of Christians in other parts of the world including India by some religious fanatics are clear examples of human sacrifices in the name of religion to please Gods.

It is in this context that we have to understand the Word of God in today's reading from the Book of Genesis.

God asks Abraham to sacrifice his only son. It may sound that God is demanding a human sacrifice. But in fact, it was a test of faith. God did not want an innocent boy to be killed. Instead, he wanted to ban the practice of human sacrifice in a dramatic and explicit manner.

The story of Abraham's sacrifice teaches us two things. Firstly, it explicitly forbids the practice of human sacrifice and every act harmful to human life like abortions.

Secondly, it underlines the spiritual significance of sacrifice. What is important before God is the readiness to offer even those things which are dear to us. Abraham did not spare even his only son, when it came to the obedience to the will of God. And God was pleased with the inner disposition of Abraham. And he established a covenant with him promising him abundant blessings.

Lent is a time of making sacrifices which does not mean killing oneself but offerings something for God – something which we love. When offerings are made to God one must feel the pinch of giving. Then only it shows real love. The offerings given out of the surplus we have, are not pleasing to God.

The selfless love of Abraham, who is ready to sacrifice his only son to God can be drawn as a parallel to God's love for humanity in offering his only Son to save the world. The connection between Isaac and Jesus is obvious. Isaac prefigured Our Lord in the sense that he was to be sacrificed on a hill, and he carried on his shoulder the wood for the intended sacrifice. Jesus also was sacrificed on a hilltop and carried the wood on which he was sacrificed. But, unlike Isaac, Jesus was aware of what lay ahead. ” he had said.

Shortly before the Transfiguration, when he first told the disciples that “The Son of Man must suffer”, Peter had protested saying that God would not allow such a thing to happen. Whereas poor Isaac had no idea that he himself was the victim of sacrifice.

Abraham was spared from sacrificing his son as God gave him an animal to be sacrificed instead. But, in order to save us God had no choice but to allow his own son to be sacrificed on the cross. No animal or human sacrifices were good enough to redeem us from sins. Jesus had cried during the agony in the garden, “if possible, take away this chalice from me.” But, other than the Son of God, the Second person of the Trinity no one's sacrifice was good enough to save us. St. Paul tells us in 2nd reading

“He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all”

The incident of transfiguration or mountain top experience in today's Gospel was to get the apostles be prepared for the great sacrifice of the Son of God. The shining revelation of the divine person of Christ was in sharp contrast to watching him in Gethsemane sweating blood before his Passion. The God who spared the son of Abraham and showered him with blessings, did not spare his own Son, but left him in the hands of his enemies for our redemption. Just before transfiguration Jesus had told them that he will have to suffer and now after transfiguration, Jesus climbs down from the mountain of glory to the valley of human suffering, with the readiness to carry the cross and die.

As Jesus was coming down from the mountain with his disciples, he ordered them not speak about the Transfiguration until his resurrection. By that he meant that the full meaning of cross and suffering will be known only when they are overcome by the glory and joy of resurrection.

The Transfiguration of Jesus teaches us that only through sacrifice there is transfiguration. The coincidence the two opposites, cross and crown, suffering and joy, humiliation and victory go together. It could be seen even in our regular life. Students, athletes or anyone who wants to succeed has to make lot of sacrifices. If they want crown of success in life, they have to carry cross as well.

So, during this season of lent Church invites us let's to carry our own share of cross and do some sacrifice like Abraham some of the things we love or like most.

And as we meditate the great faith of Abraham, his willingness to sacrifice even his only son, let's be aware of the fact that even today so many sons and daughters are being sacrificed at the Altar of so called pro-choice to please the Gods of their egoism, and selfishness. Just like Isaac, these babies also are not aware that their own moms are going to sacrifice them. What can we do to stop this type of human sacrifice?