

03/01/15 2 Lent B

-- One of the troubling things in the recent news has been the recruitment of teenagers in Europe by the Islamic state. British authorities have been trying to track down three young girls whose families are afraid that they're heading to Syria to be brides to warriors.

-- These girls were not poor and destitute, and they were toward the top of their classes in school. Why would they fall victim to the Islamic state propaganda?

-- While we know the people recruiting them have a distorted view of their religion, we also know that there is, within all of us and especially the young, a desire to serve a greater cause and to make sacrifices for it.

-- Suicide bombers have gone to their deaths thinking they were serving a noble cause. Yes, it is perverted thinking, but it can capture the hearts of many people, and not just the young.

-- In fact, there is a noble sense of sacrifice. For every young person who has been recruited by the Islamic state, there are more who've signed up to defend their countries against that terror.

-- We know the sacrifices made by families with members in the military, especially over the last 12 years or so. We note the commitment of many young people who've sacrificed a year or more of their lives to teach or do other work in poor countries and poor areas of our own country.

-- And we see the great sacrifices made by medical personnel fighting the Ebola virus in West Africa. Some have gotten sick, and a few have died.

-- The story of Abraham and Isaac walks a thin line between authentic sacrifice and a distorted notion of sacrifice. Abraham seems to hear God asking him for a literal sacrifice of his son. Almost like a parent in

an emergency waiting room, he spends his three day journey with his son wondering whether this is really what God wants of him.

-- We know the end of the story, though Abraham didn't know it at the time. When a crisis comes our way, we are in the same boat as Abraham. A father whose daughter is clinging to life after an accident wonders, *Is God really asking me to let go of her?* A mother bailing her son out of jail asks, *Will this happen again, and what will I do then?*

-- Abraham did not kill his son. God provided a sacrificial victim for him, a ram. But, from then on, he knew he could not cling to his son.

-- More importantly, what happened to Abraham prefigured what would happen to Jesus, but with one big difference. Jesus would not be spared at the last minute. Abraham's raised knife would become the spear of the soldier which pierced Jesus' heart at Calvary.

-- It is that sacrifice we celebrate every time we come to Mass. It is a true and authentic sense of sacrifice: not someone destroying others as he destroys his own body, but someone who is faithful even to the point of being killed by those who fight his message.

-- His sacrifice puts our personal sacrifices in stark perspective. God holds nothing back out of love for us. God invites us to the cross, but only to share his glory in the end.

-- For the road to Calvary does not end at the cross. It ends at the empty tomb.