

**The Second Sunday of Lent (Cycle B)
March 4, 2012**

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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S.S.P. "This is my beloved Son; listen to Him." Pope Benedict XVI: True Freedom is found in surrender to God's will. Married couples are called to be obedient to the Church's teaching on contraception.

- I. The very idea of slaughtering a child as a sacrifice to God is repulsive and abhorrent to us.
 - A. This was not immediately clear to Abraham
 - 1. Judaism had not taken on form as a religion yet; in fact the House of Israel would come through Abraham.
 - 2. Some of Abraham's neighbors engaged in child sacrifice.
 - B. Abraham was willing to obey God, but God sent His angel to stay Abraham's hand, making it clear that he was not to kill his son as a sacrifice to God.

- II. Today's Gospel account of the Transfiguration underscores the message of being obedient to God's Word.
 - A. Elijah and Moses appear with Jesus
 - 1. Elijah symbolizes the Prophets; Moses symbolizes the Law ((Torah).
 - 2. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets
 - B. As Jesus is transfigured, God the Father speaks through the Spirit: "This is my beloved Son: listen to Him."
 - 1. We are not told to "listen" to Jesus the way we listen to a radio station: we change the channel if we don't like what we're hearing!

2. God asks us to “listen” in the sense of being obedient to His Son.
- C. Obedience is not easy to hear about in our culture; we cherish freedom.
1. Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged this during his apostolic visit to the United States in 2008; at a Mass in New York’s Yankee Stadium, he said that true freedom is found in surrender to God’s will.
 2. Freedom does not mean do whatever you want; true freedom protects our liberty to follow God’s call without government interference.
- D. Much has been said about the HHS mandate that will require inclusion of contraception, sterilization and abortion-inducing drugs to be covered in all health insurance programs.
- E. Proponents of this mandate want to make this into a debate about contraception; but contraception is not the issue, government interference in religious liberty is the issue.
- F. Simply substitute some other religion and some other mandate to make this clear:
1. It would be wrong for the government to tell the Jewish owner of a delicatessen that he had to serve pork, or even to give him an exemption but require that pork be sold on his premises because the government wants to promote pork production and besides, “the other white meat” is good for you.
 2. It would be wrong for the government to tell a Muslim that he could not pray at work on Fridays because that would disrupt productivity.
 3. It would be wrong for the government to tell Native American who spoke a peace pipe as part of their religious rituals that they could not do so because smoking is bad for your health.
- III. At the same time, we should not avoid the issue of contraception, because some think it is an archaic or bizarre teaching of the Catholic Church.
- A. The Church teaches that artificial contraception is wrong, but planning the size of one’s family can be done with natural family planning.

- B. I don't have time now to explain all the reasons why the Church teaches that (I will write about it more this weekend in the *Catholic Times*), but note that Abraham did not ask God *why* He wanted him to sacrifice his son; he was willing to obey because it was what God was asking.
- C. You might object that I don't know much about this since I am not a parent (you might be "tuning me out," thinking you don't like what you're hearing on this channel!), but I am from a large family.
1. I am the third oldest of nine, and I changed a lot of diapers and fed a lot of bottles to my younger brothers and sister.
 2. I love being from a big family!
- D. You might object that things were different then, that it's impossible today to afford having a large family.
1. Oh really? My Mother was a stay-at-home Mom, and we managed on my Dad's income.
 2. God will provide as He did for us.
 3. There are always objections that we can raise, but all I ask is that you be open to God's message.
- IV. In the Eucharist, we heard God's Word telling us to be obedient as Abraham was obedient.
- A. Lent is a time to turn our hearts to the Lord.
 - B. In this Holy Communion, we will receive into our hearts Jesus Christ, of whom the Father says, "This is my beloved Son, listen to Him."

May God give us this grace. Amen.