



# More about Today's Scriptures

## Proper 8, Year A

Today's readings bring us face to face with the intricate balance of God's judgment and God's mercy. In Genesis, God affirms his faithfulness to Abraham. Paul reminds the Roman community that their baptism was a death to sin and they now have a choice to live for God. In the gospel, Jesus reminds us that the response given to his disciples is also a response to him.

### **Genesis 22:1-14**

The account of Isaac's offering comes as the climax of the story of Abraham's relationship with God. At God's command, Abraham has already cut himself off from his past, from country and family, and retains only the promise of new status. Now God commands him to cut off his future, the heir of the promise, his beloved son Isaac—and no new promise is given.

### **Romans 6:12-23**

Paul defends himself against the charge (3:8; 6:1) that his emphasis upon grace as a free gift not dependent upon works was an encouragement to sin (5:20). He replies by pointing out the fact and nature of the Christian's new relationship to God: in baptism the Christian has died to sin. The waters of baptism identify the believer with Christ, indeed with the very act of redemption—his death and resurrection. By Jesus' act, the penalty for sin—death—has been

paid; baptism credits us with that payment. The Christian has been justified, set right, by being united to Christ.

The Christian is no longer enslaved to sin, for Paul asserts that death in baptism frees one from sin. The image of slavery highlights the issue of loyalty. The fundamental question for a Christian is simply, "Who is your Lord or Master? Is it Christ Jesus, or someone else?"

### **Matthew 10:40-42**

Today's readings focus on the rewards that come to those who undertake and who respond to the mission of disciples. Matthew here touches on a consistent theme of Jesus as "God with us" (1:23, 28:20) who hides himself in those whom we encounter (25:31-46).

As Jesus sends the disciples to continue his proclaiming and healing ministry, like every messenger they are invested with the power of the one who sent them. Christian disciples thus convey not only their message but the presence of Jesus and therefore of God. So people's response to these "prophets" and "little ones" is at the same time a response to Christ himself.



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### Reflection

This week's gospel presents us with a baffling paradox. After Jesus tells us that we must be able to sacrifice even the love of our parents—even the love of our beloved children—for the sake of God's kingdom, he immediately adds, those who give as little as a cup of cold water to a disciple of Jesus will be rewarded.

The latter teaching is the gospel we love; the first is the gospel we dread. Put God's kingdom before our family? All our instinct is to cherish and protect children, spouses and parents. What are we being called to do?

We are being called to die to ordinary human life. Perhaps we can see the call more clearly in the life of a saint—Francis of Assisi. This rich

young merchant's son, fastidious with his dress and person, heard the call in many vague ways until the day it became loud and clear for him in the sight of a leper swinging a bell, warning the healthy to stay away. Francis knew what cup of water was being asked. He leapt from his horse, drew near to his fear and embraced it—he kissed the leper.

So what are we being called to do, that which is hard or that which is easy? Well, to begin is easy. All you do is offer a cup of cold water, reach out with an unexpected kiss or open your door to a sister or brother in need. But then you climb the mountain, step by step, giving all to reach your journey's end: the cross of Christ. The love of God.