

To Be Angry or To Be Faithful

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



In Genesis 22: 1-18 we read the story of God's command to Abraham to take his only son Isaac and to "offer him as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."

We know how the story turns out, and that in the end Isaac was not sacrificed. But this event angers some people. They ask how it is possible to say that God cares for us if He would make this terrible demand of a person like Abraham, who did His will and followed His commands. Their anger prompts them to believe that having faith in God is foolish. Some of them say that Abraham also should have been angry, and should have refused to do as God commanded.

Yet what Abraham himself refuses is to be angry. When Isaac innocently asks him where the lamb is for the sacrifice, Abraham answers with what seems to be a calm statement, neither angry nor agitated. He simply says, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son." Abraham is faithful, trusting God

even in this extreme moment.

There is a wonderful story of another follower of God who refused to be angry: Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk. His monastic cellmate, Ivan Yefimov, wrote many reminiscences of the saint. Among them is a description of Tikhon's treatment by an arrogant nobleman.

It was reported to Bishop Tikhon that this nobleman, a member of his diocese, was beating his serfs. The bishop went to the man to ask him to be kinder, and to remember that every person, including the poorest and simplest, is a child of God.

The nobleman was not at all ready to have anyone tell him what to do, even his bishop. He was a hot-tempered person, very much used to having his own way. He became incensed at the bishop for daring to suggest he change his behavior. His anger built to such a point that he slapped Tikhon across the face.

For many people, receiving such humiliating treatment would have been a cause for anger. At the very least, we might expect that Bishop Tikhon urged the nobleman to remember that he was a Christian, and to act like one. But the bishop did neither.

On his way home from the nobleman's house, the bishop decided to return. But rather than reproach the nobleman or tell him he'd been wrong, he threw himself at the man's feet and begged forgiveness for having led him into temptation to sin. The nobleman was so stuck by this humility and refusal to be angry that he fell to his knees and begged Bishop Tikhon to forgive him. From that day, his serfs did not suffer abuse.

In Proverbs 16:32 we read: "He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit [is better] than he who takes a city."

