

**February 28, 2021 | [Second Sunday in Lent](#)**

Gn 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18

Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19

Rom 8:31b-34

Mk 9:2-10

*By Lawrence E. Couch*

The first reading for the Second Sunday of Lent tells the story of how an angel stops Abraham from sacrificing his son, Isaac. The reading reminds me of the First World War poet, Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) and his following poem.

*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*

*So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,  
And took the fire with him, and a knife.  
And as they sojourned both of them together,  
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,  
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,  
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?  
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,  
and builded parapets and trenches there,  
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.  
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,  
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,  
Neither do anything to him. Behold,  
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;  
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.*

*But the old man would not so, but slew his son,  
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.*

Both the reading and the poem raise the question of human sacrifice and what place it has in the modern world. Certainly, whenever we engage in exploiting other people for our own comfort or profit, we are engaged in human sacrifice.

While child labor was outlawed in the 1938 in the U.S., the practice continues elsewhere and produces products many of us use, or benefit from, daily. For example, the cobalt used to power our cellphones [may well have been mined by children](#) as young as six years old who risk their lives amid toxic dust to profit the world's big electronic firms.

I enjoy chocolate, but the cocoa for that chocolate may well have been harvested by young children. The [Food Empowerment Project](#) explains: “The children of Western Africa are surrounded by intense poverty, and most begin working at a young age to help support their families. Some children end up on the cocoa farms because they need work and traffickers tell them that the job pays well. Other children are ‘sold’ to traffickers or farm owners by their own relatives, who are unaware of the dangerous work environment and the lack of any provisions for an education. Once they have been taken to the cocoa farms, the children may not see their families for years, if ever.”

Addressing a [conference on human trafficking](#) this past summer, Pope Francis said that our contemporary world is “...sadly marked by a utilitarian perspective that views others according to the criteria of convenience and personal gain.” This applies to both labor trafficking and sex trafficking.

We know that children are more vulnerable to sex trafficking than adults. According to [a report by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), this is because “They're easier to control, cheaper, and less likely to demand working conditions.” It is estimated that more than 300,000 young people in the U.S. are considered at risk of sexual exploitation.

There are measures we can take to prevent labor trafficking and sex trafficking. The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, the Columbans, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Sisters of Mercy, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, and the United States Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking invite you to a virtual conference on March 8 and 9, 2021.

The conference will examine some of the root causes of human trafficking such as poverty and unjust immigration policies. Sr. Norma Pimentel, who was rated by *Time* magazine as one of the 100 most influential women in the United States in 2020, will speak on immigration. There is no cost to attend the conference and you can register [here](#).

Please join us in the work to alleviate the conditions and vulnerabilities that lead to trafficking. And pray for those who are exploited, that they may experience a miraculous intervention like that which saved Isaac.

*Lawrence E. Couch is the Director of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd located in Silver Spring, Maryland. To learn more about their work, visit [www.gsadvocacy.org](http://www.gsadvocacy.org).*