

**28<sup>th</sup> June, St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202 AD)**  
**on Monday Week 13 of Ordinary Time**

**Gen. 18:16-33**

St. Irenaeus was born in Smyrna, which is now in Turkey and eventually became Bishop of Lyons in France. As the Church grew, groups of people, known as “Gnostics” began to teach that the world was irredeemably evil and that they (Gnostics) were possessors of secret knowledge which made them elite and above everyone else. They also denied the Incarnation (that Jesus became man) and said that Jesus was some kind of “super being” who communicated in a secret way with a select group of people. Against these errors, St Irenaeus wrote a series of texts, now gathered as a collection known as “Against the Heresies.”

“Against the Heresies” is a well- argued treatise on why the Gnostics are in error. For example, he says that the Gnostic “regards himself as of greater and of higher authority than the Holy Spirit, even though he is a man”<sup>1</sup> St. Irenaeus’ response is that we are not more zealous than God and cannot be above Him. Neither is God a “psychic” being otherwise He could not have created a concrete universe.<sup>2</sup> On the relationship between man and God, St Irenaeus said that God became man (in Jesus Christ) so that man might become accustomed to receive Him and share in his own divine life; to make us what He is.<sup>3</sup> Finally, St. Irenaeus said that because man was united to God in Jesus Christ (that means, Jesus is both God and man) Jesus Christ is the one who mediates with the Father on our behalf.<sup>4</sup> No-one group of people has any more privileged access to the Father than anyone else.

The attitude of the Gnostics contrasts very strongly with Abraham’s attitude in the first reading. Abraham humbly pleads with God not to destroy Sodom if there are any just people living there (Lot, his nephew had set up home there). Despite his close relationship and faith in God Abraham recognises his own humble position as he pleads with God. He does not consider himself above God or even in any way equal to Him.

Abraham’s intercession with God on behalf of his nephew prefigures the intercession which Jesus makes with His Father on our behalf all the time. Because Jesus is both God and man and not some “super being” he shares our human nature in every way except sin. When we pray, asking the Father for what we need, it is Jesus who, knowing what we need, who effectively does the praying, on our behalf. Let us then, be grateful to Abraham who in his humble bargaining with God shows us that we too can be bold enough to ask the Father through His Son, for what we and those we love, need.

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<sup>1</sup> Against the Heresies, I 13, 4 in “Irenaeus Against the Heresies”, edited by Hans Urs von Balthasar.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid II 30, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid III, 20, 2 & V Preface.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, III 18, 7