God put Abraham to the test…

Lent is all about testing…it’s very nature and origin is Christ being tested in the desert…we need to be tested to know what are potential is…what our limitations are and thus improve upon them…whether in business…in sports…in relationships…but most of all our faith…there must be that desire to improve…be better…Lent invites us to get our holiness on…develop and strengthen and grow that muscle of faith through the disciplines of Lent.

One of the more inspiring and yes even controversial stories of Lent is Gianna Molla…who sadly was placed in the position, married and already with three children, having to choose between the life of her child at delivery or her own…my goodness, we find it difficult to choose what we will give up for Lent…

how would you respond if the sacrifice involved was your life or having to forfeit the life of another…your own child…the exact position Abraham finds himself in today? What if any are the faith lessons to be learned from that story and that of Gianna’s?

She was born in Magenta, Italy in 1922 as the 10th of the thirteen children of Alberto and Maria Beretta. From a young age she was “other centered,” practicing works of charity as a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and Catholic Action. Catholic Action was a movement whose aim was to mobilize the Catholic laity to live a more intense spiritual and charitable life.

Her joy and love for life was contagious. She thoroughly enjoyed the world around her. Her hobbies included fashion, painting, and frequenting the opera.

She also had an adventurous spirit and especially enjoyed skiing and mountain climbing. Despite her love for the beauty of creation, Gianna devoted her life to the crown of it: the human person…ever aware that all people are created in the image and likeness of God…and that as Christ said so she lived…whatever you do to and for the least of My brothers and sisters you do to Me…faith in action

Gianna studied medicine, and in 1949 graduated from the University of Pavia with degrees in medicine and surgery. She opened a medical clinic, where she gave special attention to mothers, babies, and the elderly. Gianna considered her work as a doctor to be a mission from God. As a physician she had a profound reverence for the gift of human life; her coworkers said she was like a sister to every expectant mother she met, ready to care for their every need.

In 1954, Gianna met Pietro Molla, an engineer. The many letters they exchanged during their relationship reveal their deep love for each other and the true beauty they recognized in Christian marriage. Many of these letters have been compiled in a book that should be on the reading list of every married couple or those seeking to get married.

Gianna wrote to Pietro: “Love is the most beautiful sentiment that the Lord has put into the soul of men and women.” Shortly before their marriage in September, 1955, she wrote: “My dear Pietro, our wedding is just a few days away now, and I feel very moved to be so near receiving the sacrament of love. We will be working with God in his creation; in this way we can give Him children who will love Him and serve Him. ” Their marriage was soon blessed with three children.

Since we are created and drawn forth from a never ending and always increasing in power love…we must be ever mindful and heartful of ways to increase the power of love in our own lives…as in faith so in love…complacency is the cancer that kills…

How then do you show someone that you love them? Perhaps the ultimate way is by sacrificing your life to save another. And Jesus could not more agree having set that standard when on the night of the Last Supper He announced: greater love has no one than to lay down one’s life for those one loves.

St. Gianna Beretta Molla did just that when she chose to risk her life in order to give birth to her fourth child.

During the second month of Giana's fourth pregnancy, she developed a severe pain. The doctors determined that she had a fibroid tumor in her uterus. Gianna had to choose between three options:

Hysterectomy - save her life, meaning no more children in the future and the death of the baby

Abortion - save her life, meaning more children in the future but the death of the baby

Removal of the fibroid - continuation of the pregnancy, though the operation could harm the baby and/or result in further complications that could lead to Gianna's death

Despite being well aware of the risks, Gianna chose the third option for the sake of her unborn child. She believed that an unborn baby has a fundamental right to life from the moment of conception. Before the operation, Gianna asked the surgeon to save her child's life over her own. She stated, 'I trust in God, yes; but now it is up to me to fulfill my duty as a mother. I renew to the Lord the offer of my life. I am ready for everything, to save my baby.'

Just a few days before the baby's delivery, Gianna once again told her husband, 'If you have to decide between me and the child, do not hesitate; I demand it, the child, save it.' Gianna gave birth to Gianna Emanuela on April 21, 1962 by cesarean section. A week later, St. Gianna Beretta Molla died at the age of 39.

I cannot imagine any greater affliction than having to choose between your life and the life of another…but having lived a whole life of faith…having it so well modeled for her by her parents and husband…she believed and with greater heroism than even Abraham…

And what of the heroic Faith of her husband Pietro…did he not have the right to insist that her life be spared…she remain his wife and mother to their three children? Whereas for Gianna…her decision was informed by the Spirit of Christ’s Self-Sacrifice…

perhaps Pietro was in the position of the greater sacrifice…a more true modern day Abraham…having to forfeit the life of his soul mate and mother to their children…to agree to it…more than in a spirit of Abraham, his spirit was more in tune with God the Father who would agree to and allow the sacrifice and death of His most beloved love…His own Son…

But sacrifices are made with a greater good in mind…the test of Abraham was presented with this goal in mind…

As God stated: Because you acted thus I will bless you abundantly…her daughter became a doctor…how many then would be blessed by her medical care informed by her great faith…Closer to home, the Saint Gianna Pregnancy Resource Center New Haven or

The Saint Peter’s Gianna Center in New Brunswick dedicated to providing a more natural alternative to assisted reproductive technologies such as in vitro fertilization, in accordance with the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services. Comprehensive gynecologic primary care and specialized fertility and family planning techniques are used to unmask the true causes of infertility for all women, regardless of faith.

Lent…especially Holy Week culminating in the greatest sacrifice ever on Calvary…is all about engaging the power of authentic never ending always needing to grow, deepen and expand love. Our whole lives then each moment should be about growing the power and strength of our faith and love…

“I would not be here if I was not loved so much,” said Dr. Gianna Emanuela Molla at a 2017 luncheon. It’s true of all of us, but in an especially direct way for this woman because her mother and namesake, St. Gianna Berretta, gave her life to save her daughter’s.

And how loved are we…not only in being given the gift of life…but the Father chose to give us eternal life through the gift of His Son’s life…our life is worth the life of God who died on the cross…can we not then see all life beginning in the womb is of infinite value and therefore must be safe guarded reverenced nurtured defended not exterminated disrespected have violence and harm inflicted upon it…since that harm spills again the blood of Christ kills again Jesus Christ.

As both a mother and a doctor, Gianna knew the reality of the life that was growing within her and was willing to put the needs of her unborn child above her own. She is a model and inspiration to any woman facing an unexpected or difficult pregnancy because she brought the love of God into her choice. As she admitted: “Love and sacrifice are closely linked, like the sun and the light. We cannot love without suffering and we cannot suffer without love.”

“Their love was so great,” Molla said of her parents. “They lived the sacrament of marriage as a vocation. Dad used to tell me that Mom was a happy wife and a happy mother, and a great physician. She loved all the good things of life. For Momma, everything was a gift from God.”

No gift more precious than life…