

15. February 2021

“The fratricide”

*Gen 4:1-15.25*

*The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. 'I have acquired a man with the help of Yahweh,' she said. She gave birth to a second child, Abel, the brother of Cain. Now Abel became a shepherd and kept flocks, while Cain tilled the soil. Time passed and Cain brought some of the produce of the soil as an offering for Yahweh, while Abel for his part brought the first-born of his flock and some of their fat as well. Yahweh looked with favour on Abel and his offering. But he did not look with favour on Cain and his offering, and Cain was very angry and downcast. Yahweh asked Cain, 'Why are you angry and downcast? If you are doing right, surely you ought to hold your head high! But if you are not doing right, Sin is crouching at the door hungry to get you. You can still master him.' Cain said to his brother Abel, 'Let us go out'; and while they were in the open country, Cain set on his brother Abel and killed him. Yahweh asked Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I do not know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's guardian?' 'What have you done?' Yahweh asked. 'Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground. Now be cursed and banned from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands. When you till the ground it will no longer yield up its strength to you. A restless wanderer you will be on earth.' Cain then said to Yahweh, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Look, today you drive me from the surface of the earth. I must hide from you, and be a restless wanderer on earth. Why, whoever comes across me will kill me!' 'Very well, then,' Yahweh replied, 'whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.' So Yahweh put a mark on Cain, so that no one coming across him would kill him. Adam had intercourse with his wife, and she gave birth to a son whom she named Seth, 'because God has granted me other offspring', she said, 'in place of Abel, since Cain has killed him.'*

“When two do the same thing, it is not the same thing”, said the Roman poet Terence around 200 BC. This is true of the above account in the Book of Genesis. Two brothers offer a sacrifice to the Lord, but only one did the Lord look upon with favour. The following passages make it clear why this was so. Cain, the elder brother, was very angry and downcast when he realised that the Lord did not look upon his offering with favour. Obviously something was wrong in his attitude.

Outwardly he performed the same as his younger brother Abel, but inwardly it must have looked different.

Let us think, for example, of the criticism that the Pharisees and scribes received from Jesus: *“Alas for you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of cup and dish and leave the inside full of extortion and intemperance.”* (Mt 23:25) In this and many other passages of Scripture we notice how important it is to the Lord that we meet Him in the right spirit.

Cain was downcast. This is reminiscent of the story of paradise when, after the fall of man, the first human beings hid from God and could no longer meet the Lord freely.

So there was something standing between Cain and God, and at first he got two clear internal indications: he was very angry and downcast. Both should have alerted him that something was wrong with his inner self.

This may also be a hint for us, especially the second point. Can we look upright before God and other people, or do we lower our eyes? If the latter is the case, then we should check well what is in our heart. Is there anything wrong with my life, is there anything not in agreement with the Lord? We can find that out relatively easily if we ask Him about it. However, this requires trust, especially when we already sense that something is not right in the light. This is also true in our encounters with people. Perhaps we have something against them in our hearts, have spoken or thought badly about the person we meet and have not corrected it in ourselves. This lowers our gaze.

Then in the biblical text: *“If you are doing right, surely you ought to hold your head high! But if you are not doing right, Sin is crouching at the door hungry to get you. You can still master him.”*

What a clear warning and instruction from the Lord to Cain! Rule over sin, watch your actions, for sin is crouching at the door as a demon. He wants to tempt you, but you can defeat him!

With these words, God gives us a directive for our walk with Him. Vigilance is needed. We should not do anything that brings us into a twilight, nor should we abandon ourselves to such thoughts and feelings. Our inner being must be clear and constantly ready to be purified more deeply by the Lord. We know, after all, of

God's mercy, so that we can carry every shadow of ourselves to God, knowing that He is gracious to us.

We too should know that the demon is out to get us, especially if we are serious about following Christ. He fears this very much, because we are not only lost to him, but through us other people can also be lost to him.

Unfortunately, Cain does not follow the Lord's instructions. On the contrary, wickedness matures and bloodshed ensues, Satan triumphs over him. Perhaps he incited him to envy his brother terribly and Cain carried out fratricide. What an abyss!

According to the biblical account, there was now not only the disobedience of man in the world and the loss of the paradisiacal state, but also the bitter fruits of sin: fratricide.

The history of disaster continued to take its course and no one could stop it until the Saviour came.