

13. February 2023

## The first 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 Lord,' 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 Lord, 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. Lord 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. Lord asked Cain, 'Where is your brother Abel?' 'I do not know,' he replied. 'Am I my brother's guardian?' 'What have you done?' Lord 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 Lord, '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,' Lord 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.'*

Cain, the older brother, was irritated and his face was downcast when he realised that the Lord had not been pleased with his oblation. Evidently there was something in his attitude that was not right. Although what he was doing outwardly was the same as what his younger brother Abel was doing, what was going on inside him was very different.

Recall, for example, Jesus' warning to the Pharisees and scribes: *"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). Many other parts of Holy Scripture also show us how important it is for the Lord that we meet Him in the right attitude.

Cain's face became downcast...This reminds us of the story of Paradise, when, having fallen into sin, the first human couple hid themselves from God, i.e. they could no longer freely meet with Him. Something had come between Cain and God. He received two clear inner signs, which must have been enough for him to realise that something was wrong: he became irritated and his face fell. This criterion may also apply to us, especially the second one: are we able, so to speak, to "look God and other people in the eye", or do we lower our gaze and our face falls? If the latter is the case, then we should evaluate what is in our hearts: Is something in my life not in order; is something not in accordance with God's will?

Then we read in the Genesis text God's words of warning to Cain: *"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"*. How precise is this warning and indication which the Lord gives to Cain! Dominate over sin, watch over your actions, for sin lurks like a wild beast. He wants to tempt you, but you can overcome him.

With these words, God gives us a guideline for our walk with Him. We need to be vigilant! We must not do anything that will lead us into darkness, or indulge wrong thoughts or feelings. Our inner self must be clear and always ready to be further purified by the Lord. We know well how merciful God is, so we should not be shy to bring before Him every shadow we discover within us, knowing that He is compassionate towards us.

We should also know that the devil has his "eye on us", so to speak, and all the more so if we have seriously embarked on the path of following the Lord. This is what he fears most, for then we are not only delivered from his clutches, but there is also the risk that we will snatch away others who are still under his influence.

Unfortunately Cain does not heed the Lord's warning. On the contrary, his malice reaches maturity and is consummated in the blood crime. Satan triumphs over him!

Perhaps it had been he himself who had incited him to terrible envy of his brother, and finally Cain carried out the fratricide. What a deep abyss!

According to the biblical account, not only was man's disobedience present in the world with the consequent loss of the paradisiacal state; but now the bitter fruits of sin were being reaped: fratricide.

The history of misfortune was going from bad to worse, and no one could have stopped it... until the Saviour came!