

THE EARLY WORLD

The Descendants of Adam

Genesis 4-5

INTRODUCTION

The Church tells us that the personal sin that Adam and Eve committed was transmitted to the rest of the human race in the form of a fallen human nature, “a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice” (Catechism, 404). This is the same thing as saying we are born without *sanctifying grace*.

Original sin is thus not something we do; it is something we are: it is a state of being. From the moment we are born, we lack the original holiness and justice that Adam and Eve cast aside. Our souls are wounded, in a sense; the image and likeness of God has been darkened or tarnished. We are turned away from God. Our wills are weakened, we are subject to pain and death, and we are inclined to sin (this latter state is sometimes called “concupiscence”). Our spiritual eye, the heart, has been blinded and is no longer able to see God directly.

Fortunately, God was not willing to abandon His children to the fate they chose. In Genesis 3 we read that He left Adam and Eve with a flicker of hope: one day, a “seed of the woman” will crush the “seed of the serpent.”

STUDY AND REFLECTION

The Story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1-18)

What did Abel do for a living? What did Cain do for a living?

The oldest son, Cain, was a tiller of the ground. His name means “I have gotten.” As a tiller, Cain is close to the land. He has chosen to become a steward of God’s earth, taking care of the land on behalf of God.

The second son, Abel, became a keeper of sheep. His name means “transitory breath” or “emptiness”, indicating the shortness of his life. As a shepherd, Abel becomes a steward of God’s animals.

We see here a division of responsibility in the vocation of stewardship. This is normal and acceptable. Every person takes on a specific work in his/her vocation to be a steward of God’s creation. The goal is to the best and to do it for God.

Why did Cain and Abel offer sacrifices? Why was this important in their worship of God?

Once the earth has produced fruit and the animals have multiplied, both Cain and Abel are aware that they need to give thanks to God; to praise and to acknowledge Him as the Giver, the Provider and the Owner; and finally, to express their love for Him.

STEWARDSHIP: Obviously, they are aware of their vocation to be steward's of God's creation. To be a good steward means first to remember, that everything really belongs to God. God is the sole Owner, who has entrusted His creation to the care of man. Secondly, a good steward is aware of the importance of working diligently to fulfill the command of God, to till the earth and to keep it. There is a sense of responsibility and accountability before God, to bring back to God a good and plentiful return. (*Remember the parable of the talents?*)

PRIESTLY ROLE: Cain and Abel are also aware of their priestly role in life: to receive everything as gift and to offer up everything back to God as gift! By his very nature, man is a religious being. His vocation is to fulfill a *PRIESTLY ROLE*, to bless and to worship God in behalf of all creation. For Cain and Abel, the need to worship God with the offering of sacrifices, flows from the very core of their being. First, the offering to be sacrificed is chosen from the first fruits of their produce. It will become a symbol representing everything: all that has been given to man for his use, the world and his very life. From a thankful heart turned to God, the offering is then sacrificed in recognition that all good things are a gift from God alone. As the sacrifice is burnt and the smoke rises up on high, everything is re-offered to God as gift in the spirit of love and surrender.

REMEMBRANCE OF THE SACRIFICE IN PARADISE: However, is there another reason for their need to offer a sacrifice? Is there a remembrance of what God did in Paradise? How God out of love for Adam and Eve, sacrificed an innocent and beloved animal in order to clothe them, to protect and to prepare them for life in the world? This would have been an unforgettable expression of God's love and care for fallen mankind. If there is a remembrance of this event, then there would naturally be a desire to express one's love for God by means of a sacrifice.

PARENTAL EDUCATION: The knowledge and understanding of their vocation (as stewards and priests) and a remembrance of the events that took place in Paradise have obviously been passed on to them by their loving parents. They have also passed on to their children the need to be thankful for everything, to see everything as a gift and to love God.

What was wrong with Cain's offering, as compared to Abel's?

The story of Cain and Abel describes the second test for the use of human freedom. Cain and Abel present their offering, the fruit of their labour, to God, each according to his occupation. The first offers "the fruit of the ground," the second "the firstlings of his flock."

From all his flock, Abel chose the best animal that he had: a firstborn lamb. He wanted to give to God the best possible gift and he gave it from a heart filled with devotion. God accepts Abel and his gift-offering, for he is a just and righteous man. In some way, his offering is prophetic. It points to the coming of the promised Saviour and His sacrifice as a lamb for the salvation of the world (*see Mt 23:35, Luke 11:51. Jesus seems to infer that Abel was the first prophet to be killed.*)

In contrast, Cain seems to have simply grabbed some grain or vegetables on the way to the altar. His sacrifice comes from a heart that is already not sincere. The Lord does not accept Cain's gift-offering, because the inward state of his heart is not right with God.

God warned Cain in the same way that He warned Adam and Eve, saying to him: "*Sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it*" (Gen 4:7). This crouching beast is very much like the serpent of the previous account. But Cain does not listen to God; he listens to the voice of evil and instead of conquering it, he allows envy, anger and hatred to take hold of him. Assuming to himself power over life (which belongs only to God), he throws himself upon his brother and murders him.

The passions, especially pride, envy, anger and hatred, are always ready to take possession of the human soul. We can overcome them with repentance and with the grace of God; otherwise, we fall under their control and do evil. This was the case with Cain.

According to Hebrew understanding of the body, where was the life of a person to be found?

The primitive Hebrew understanding of the human person does not speak of a soul, but only in terms of the body. The life of the person is therefore to be found in the blood. So, when the blood of Abel is poured out upon the ground, it is the voice of his blood (i.e. his life) that cries out to God from the ground.

After killing Abel, does Cain tell God the truth?

Cain lies to God. He says that he does not know where Abel is. He says, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yet as the eldest son, Cain was responsible for Abel's welfare. Just as his parents looked out for his welfare, Cain too should have shown the same love and care for his younger brother. In essence, all of us are our brother's keepers. We are called by God to love one another as He has loved us.

How does God deal with Cain? What does He do?

Cain is banished from fertile soil and condemned to be "a wanderer on the earth" (Gen 4:12). He weeps bitterly: "From Your face I shall be hidden; and I shall be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth; and whoever finds me will slay me" (Gen 4:14).

Thus, we see the consequences of this Second Sin. The First Sin in Paradise caused alienation with God, with others and with the earth (God's creation). Now, the Second Sin committed in the world brings about further alienation from God, from other humans and from the earth. Cain shall be "hidden from God's face"; he will be a "wanderer and a fugitive," while others will look for him in order to kill him; and finally, the earth shall no longer "yield its strength" for him because it has been cursed by the blood he has spilled.

But God is merciful to Cain, just as He was to Adam and Eve. He continues to manifest His love for mankind. God places a mark on Cain so that he will be protected and so that, even while wandering the earth, he shall not be killed out of vengeance or retaliation.

The message here is clear: Human life is sacred. It is sacred right from the beginning because conception itself requires the creative action of God. During life, it always remains in a special relationship with the Creator, Who is its sole end. Thus, God alone is the Lord of human life, from beginning to end. No one, under any circumstances, can claim for himself the right to destroy human life.

What is the purpose of the Cain and Abel Story?

The purpose of the story is to provide us with an account of the Second Sin. The First Original Sin committed in Paradise was a rejection of God, a failure in the love God. The Second Sin committed in the world we live in, was a rejection of my “brother”. It was a failure in the love of neighbor.

The story makes it clear to the reader that every person must continue to make a choice: to follow God and His Word (tree of life); or to follow fallen human nature (man) and temptation (tree of knowledge). Thus, there are only TWO WAYS in life: to live according to God (as children of God and of the promised woman) or; to live according to man (as offspring of the world and the tempter).

The story indirectly brings to our attention the two most important commandments and their inter-connection: Man is called to love God with all his heart, his mind and his strength; and to love his neighbor as himself.

Finally, the story underlines the fact that sin begets sin. If sin is allowed to reign in the human heart, it will spread and multiply, causing further and further alienation from God, other human beings and creation itself.

Two Genealogies: The Family Grows in Two Directions (Genesis 4:19 to 5:32)

Compare and contrast the two lines. What do the two genealogies reveal?

Cain built a city named after his son, Enoch. His descendants play music and raise livestock (possibly for food, without God’s authorization). They become polygamous (Lamech takes for himself two wives). They forge tools and weapons and continue to be violent and vengeful like their forefather. The picture is one of a civilization bent on self-sufficiency, on pleasing itself and conquering others. Through the genealogy of Cain, we see the gradual drifting of mankind further and further away from God.

The genealogy of Seth shows us a line of people that remain faithful to God. It stands out in sharp contrast to the self-determination and violence of Cain’s line. The descendants of Seth are described not by their accomplishments but by their characters: Enoch “walked with God” and was taken up by God before he died. They raise “sons and daughters”, holy men and women for the service of the Lord. Lamech predicted that his

son Noah would bring relief from the toil brought on by the Fall. This line of descendants is a group of people, whose faces remain turned toward God, waiting for His promised Deliverer. They are the “sons of God.”

Thus, we see that the author had a specific purpose in mind when he included the two genealogies in the text. He wanted to show that there are two kinds of “families” of people in the world. Cain and his descendants become a symbol of those who choose to live according to man as children of the world. Seth and His descendants become a symbol of those who choose to live according to God. Thus, there are only TWO WAYS in life: The Way of Life and the Way of Death.

In conclusion, the story of Cain and Abel and their genealogies serve as a reminder to every reader that they must also make a choice: to follow God and His Word, or to reject God and follow the world.

Which genealogy is the “official” genealogy of Adam? Why?

Obviously, the genealogy of Seth’s line becomes the official genealogy of Adam. From the first verse of Seth’s genealogy, the author notes that this son is “in Adams own likeness, after his image.” This is the seed-line we are meant to follow in our search for the “seed of the woman,” the child who will crush the serpent’s head.

What prophecy does Lamech make about his son?

When a son was born to Lamech, he called him Noah, saying: “*He will give us rest from our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground the Lord God cursed*” (Gen 5:29). The name “Noah” means rest, or consolation.

Originally, God gave every plant and tree yielding seed in its fruit to man as food (Gen 1:29). After the fall, however, acquiring food became much more difficult, for God had said to Adam: “*cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field*” (Gen 3:17-18). After the Fall, God will bless Noah. He will renew that command that he gave to man at the time of creation: be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion over the earth (Gen 9:1-3). But in the case of Noah, God will add something new: man will be authorized to kill animals in order to feed himself. “*Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you*” (Gen 9:3). This will make life easier. Man can rest from his toil, for he will no longer be solely dependent upon the fields of the earth to acquire his food.

There is also a sense in which humanity and the whole world need to rest from the evil that had filled the earth. By the time of Noah’s birth, what had happened is that Cain-style civilizations had become the rule. Relief was needed, for humanity and all creation, from the wickedness that had filled the earth. After the flood and the cleansing of the earth, God will establish an everlasting Covenant with Noah and all the nations that will proceed from him. God’s plan is to save humanity part by part, nation by nation.