

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
June 28, 2020

“So the Lord said to Cain: ‘Why are you so resentful and crestfallen? If you do well, you can hold up your head; but if not, sin is a demon lurking at the door: his urge is toward you, yet you can be his master.’” (Genesis 4:6-7)

Last weekend we began our examination of sin. We looked at two questions. First, what is sin? Second, where did it come from? In case you were not here, the two answers were (1) sin is a transgression against a divine law, and (2) sin from mankind. This weekend, I would like to examine one of the effects of sin. We shall see how sin affects mankind pitting brother against brother through the story of Cain and Abel.

“Am I my brother’s keeper?” These famous words of Cain in response to God’s question underlie the reality that sin drives a wedge between people. The Book of Genesis records how both Cain and Abel presented their gifts to God. God looks favorably upon the gifts of Abel which allows the sin of envy to creep into Cain’s heart. Proponents of the philosophies of Socialism/Communism would find this treatment reprehensible. They would argue: How dare God choose to bless Abel and not equally bless Cain? Cain is just as deserving of a blessing as Abel. Although their gifts are not counted as equal, their reward should be. Needless to say, they would see Cain as the victim of an unfair system which favors one person, group, or class over another. God would now be labeled an unjust tyrant and someone to be opposed. We, for our part, cannot fall into this uninformed trap. We must view the whole story to understand how sin affects mankind.

We believe that each person is a unique creation from God. Being unique, we have been blessed with gifts or talents which are unique to us. No matter how closely identical twins resemble each other, they still display gifts and talents which are uniquely their own. Coupled with that is the fact that we are competitive. No one truly enjoys being runner-up. Although Scripture does not mention pride, we can assume that it was pride which first led Cain to separate himself from his brother Abel. It was the pride of Cain, the pride in Cain which led him to murder his brother.

The effect of sin is separation. It is a separation which allows mankind to commit unspeakable crimes against each other. It is a separation which seeks to justify itself through whatever means are available. Cain would lie to God claiming he had no knowledge of where his brother was. Even when faced with the consequences of his crime, the separation Cain feels from Abel impels him to justify himself as the true victim of the whole event. He tells God that the punishment inflicted is too great. He finally goes so far as to label everyone else as the thing he himself is - a murderer. The effect of sin is separation. It is a separation so intense that Cain never expressed any grief for what he had done. Think about that for a second, he never expressed sorrow for murdering his brother. It is a separation which hardened his heart and has the real potential to harden our hearts to the plights we can, and so often do, inflict upon others.