

Giving thanks in tragedies and blessings of life

Genesis 4:1-7

“Adam[a] made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain.[b] She said, “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth[c] a man.” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. 4 And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. 6 Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” NIV

1) First, the text begins with a couple generating children. And it is in this **new generation that we can start noticing some diversity. We have two brothers, two professions and two points of view.**

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

God created us and gave us talents and gifts so that we are unmatched. We do not need to copy anyone. We can be inspired by others but we do not need to be the copy of someone else because God made us unique.

My uncle worked on a bank by the time computers were not around. He told me that they did a course on signatures, to check if they were fake or not. They would have to go to the archive and check if the signature presented was the same written in the signature card. His instructor said something interesting: Each signature is exclusive, even from the same person. You will never find two exact signatures. The day you find two exact signatures, one of them is fake.

We are our Creator’s signature. Each one is exclusive and impossible to copy.

If I am not to copy or be copied, which then is my parameter for changing? What should I aim? I should aim to improve myself. It is like an app or software, when something is not working right, there comes a new version with “bugs fixed” or “improvements done”. We also have to update

ourselves and if I decide not to do it, time will go by and the problems will increase, when they could be solved. Who likes to have the old version of a program?

We are called to follow our path, according to what we were called to. Imagine if those two brothers decided to do that. How would the story be?

I look at you and I am so happy to see the richness and variety of professions, talents and characteristics gathered in the same place. Different cultures, tongues, ways of see the world and life. Somehow this brings color to this planet. It brings balance.

2) They went to give thanks to God, recognizing that the fruit of their work was His blessing.

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock

It is a beautiful thing to do, to recognize that what we do, the abilities and skills we have to deal with work and life is a blessing from God.

Everything in this story is fine up to now, isn't it? But let's move on.

The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.

Since beginning of mankind we fight against each other, with this spirit of comparison.

Who is the best? Who is on the top, the number one? On the other side: Who is the loser? Who got in second? Isn't it from this that comes the feeling that "the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence"?

When my neighbor is my reference, it is easy to lose focus of what really matters in life. It is interesting that in the gospel we notice the same attitude among the disciples: Who is going to be the biggest in the kingdom of heaven? Or which one of us is the most important?

But this is not the spirit of the gospel, on the contrary, it incentives cooperation, collaboration, being together and serving each other. Paul gives us an idea of how we are supposed to see ourselves:

1 Corinthians 3:9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

He compares us to a farming field or a building.

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When we look at a plantation or building, we look at the whole; the beauty of the whole building or the whole plantation. You and I are part of the beauty of God's creation.

3) *Wrong focus wrong feelings*

So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

When our look focuses on what is good, our heart becomes a pleasing offering to God.

If one focus on others, firstly if one feels wronged, there will come a day when this feeling will generate something terrible.

The result of Cain's feelings you certainly know. One important thing to notice is that this is the first thanksgiving registered in the Bible and we already see tragedy, with one brother killing the other.

5) Council of God:

Lastly in the text we can see God asking a question: If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?

And he continues

But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it."

In order words, God is saying: Even if you want to be a good person, inside of you there is a tendency to do what is not good, learn how to control it.

We are called to walk in life doing what is good because we never know what life will bring us in the future. But if our life is a constant thanksgiving to God, every day, in all circumstances then God will be pleased with us.

If Cain had just been grateful for what he had achieved of course God would be pleased. If he trusted in the grace of God, even if it is a mystery to us, that would be enough.

Why did the offer of Abel please God and the Cain's did not?

Cain's offering

Abel's offering

Fruit of earth

First born of animals

I do not see anything wrong with Cain's offering. Maybe some vegans here agree with me 😊. Cain's offering was perfect! Let's protect the animals! Eating fruits and vegetables is the best. Being from South of Brazil, I would prefer Abel's offering, a delicious barbecue 😊

But that was not the reason why the offering was not accepted, in fact the reason is not specified in the Bible text but if you consider the appearance a table full of fruits and vegetables is much prettier than a table with a slaughtered animal but the reason was not outside, in the appearance. It was inside, in the heart and understanding of why to thank, how to thank.

In a mysterious way, Abel's offering portrayed Christ in his sacrifice thousands of years later. It represented the death of an innocent in sacrifice for the sins of men and God rejoiced with Abel's offering. God foresaw His only son, His first born being offered before the world, because of us all.

All the time, our society is becoming more individualist and competitive. This brings doubts, fear and guilt.

Do we really have to compete? Yes, of course.

For example, we have to compete for a job opportunity but we do not need to hurt other people in the process.

Do we have to be better? Yes, but not better than others but better in our interior and before God. Today I have an opportunity to be better than yesterday and tomorrow better than today... in Jesus and through Jesus.

Do good, be good to your neighbor, do good when the opportunity comes and trust in God. After all, we are surrounded by blessings and tragedies in life and it is in this context that we are called to bring our offerings to God, to give Him thanks.

Abel made a sacrifice and it pleased God but for this exact reason he ended up killed out of his brother's envy. Somehow he ended up being a sacrifice himself and in a certain way we are also living sacrifices before God in life.

But I would like to finish with the encouraging words of Paul in Romans 12.

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship (why not to say this is your true and proper thanksgiving). Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Let's pray together:

Dear Lord, thank you for this time together. Thank you for your word. Help us so that your Holy Spirit illuminates us so that we can walk in this life spreading light and good seeds. We pray that our lives be a pleasing sacrifice to you. Bless our communion and we also thank for the food we are about to receive. Amen.

May God bless you all!