



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE
DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAE

The story of Cain and Abel

Monday, 13 February 2017

(by *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly ed. in English, n. 8, 24 February 2017)

Pope Francis wished to dedicate Mass on Monday, 13 February, to Fr Adolfo Nicolás Pachón, a special missionary preparing to leave for Asia. As Fr Pachón is the former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, the Pope offered “a reflection on family”, asking that the Lord “repay all the good he has carried out and accompany him in his new mission”, followed by a heartfelt “thank you, Fr Nicolás”.

Referring to the first reading from the book of Genesis (4, 1-15.25), the Pope pointed out during his homily that “it is the first time the Bible mentions the word ‘brother’”. The story of Cain and Abel, he explained, is about “a brotherhood which was meant to grow, to become beautiful”, but instead “wound up destroyed”. And, he continued, “as we heard, the story began with a little jealousy: Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. The Lord said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door’; it is your instinct”.

In the end, the Pope said, “Cain favoured instinct; he preferred to let this feeling stew inside him, festering and allowing it to grow. This sin, which he will later commit, which is couching behind the feeling, grows”. This, the Pontiff continued, “is how hostilities grow between us: they begin with

something small: jealousy, envy, and then this grows and we see life solely from that point of view, and that speck” in our eye “becomes a log. It is we who have the log, it is there”, in our own eye. Then, the Pope added, “our life spins around that, and that destroys the bond of brotherhood; it destroys brotherhood”. Also when “we submit to this couching instinct in our heart, our spirit becomes yellow, as they say: with bile, as if we had no blood, but bile ”, he said. “So it is”, Francis continued, and at this point, “what matters is only that person, the one who did evil”. We are “obsessed, tormented by that person, and thus, animosity grows and it always ends badly”, he said.

So, Francis added, it ends up that “I pull away from my brother”, saying “this person is not my brother, this one is an enemy, this one must be destroyed, driven away!”. And, he continued, this is exactly the way that “people are destroyed; it is thus that animosity destroys families, populations, everything”. It is that “eating away at you”, that “being constantly obsessed with that person”, which is precisely “what happened to Cain, and, in the end, he killed his brother”. The Pope explained that Cain said “no, there is no brother; it is just me; there is no brotherhood; it is just me”.

What “happened at the beginning”, Francis warned , “can happen to all of us; it is a possibility”. For this reason, he continued, it is a “process” which “must be stopped immediately, at the beginning, at the first sign of bitterness”. It must be stopped, he added, because “bitterness is not Christian: pain, yes, bitterness no”. Indeed, the Pope continued, “resentment is not Christian; pain yes, resentment no”.

Instead, he remarked, “how much hostility and how many cracks” exist. “Today, there are new parish priests”, the Pope said, referring to the priests who were present at the Mass. “Even within our presbytery”, he added, “within our episcopal colleges, how many cracks begin in this way!”. One might ask: “‘why was this person given that office and not I? And why this person?’ Thus, with little things, small cracks, brotherhood is destroyed”. Faced with this human attitude, “what does the Lord do?”, Pope Francis asked. The passage from Genesis suggests that as he did with Cain, God also “asks us ‘where is Abel, your brother?’”. According to the Pontiff, “Cain’s reply is ironic: ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’”. The response should be, Pope Francis said: “yes, you are your brother’s keeper”. Perhaps “Cain could have answered, ‘yes, I know where Abel is, but I do not know where my brother is because Abel is not my brother: I destroyed that brotherhood’”. It is as if to say, Francis continued: “I know where this or that person is, or where these or those people are; I know this, but I do not know where my brothers are”. For “when we fall into this process that ends in the destruction of brotherhood”, the Pontiff explained, “one might say this: ‘I know where this man or that woman is, but I do not know where my brother or my sister is, because for me this man or that woman is not my brother or sister’”.

In Genesis we see this reaffirmed. “The Lord is strong: ‘the voice of your brother’s blood cries to me from the ground’”. It is true, Francis continued, that “each one of us can say: ‘Father, I have

never killed anyone, ever!”). But, he continued, “let us think of yesterday’s Gospel reading: if you have a bad feeling towards your brother, you have killed him; if you insult your brother, you have killed him in your heart”. Indeed, “killing is a process which begins from a small thing like this”, the Pontiff stressed. He suggested that each person — himself included — should “think: how many times have I left this one aside, felt jealousy, pulled away here, there and there”. And again, the Pontiff asked, “how many times, to tell the truth, have I said to the Lord: ‘I know where this or that person is , but I do not know where my brother is’”. This, said Francis, “is God’s word for us”; it is not about “knowing a piece of history or biblical theology”.

“And even today”, the Pontiff added, “God’s voice asks not only each of us, but all humanity: ‘where is your brother, where is your sister?’”. To this, we reply: “I know where those people who were bombed are, where those who were driven away from there are, but they are not my brothers, I have destroyed the bond”. In the same way, he wondered, “how many of the world’s powerful people can say; ‘I am interested in this territory; I am interested in this piece of land, that other; if a bomb falls and kills 200 children, it is not my fault; it is the bomb’s fault; it is the territory that interests me’” .

Therefore, Pope Francis observed, “everything begins with that feeling which leads you to pull away, to say to the other person: ‘this is the guy, he is made that way, but he is not my brother’”. And, he concluded, “it ends in a war that kills”. However, the Pope observed, “you killed at the beginning: this is the process of blood, and today the blood of many people in the world is crying to God from the ground”. And, he continued, “it is all connected: that blood there has some connection, perhaps a small droplet of blood that I caused to ooze out with my envy and jealousy when I destroyed a brotherhood. It is not the number that destroys brotherhood but what comes out of the hearts of each one of us”, he explained.

“May the Lord help us to repeat his words: ‘where is your brother?’”, the Pope prayed. And “each of us”, he suggested, should think “of all of those persons from whom we have pulled away, all those we speak ill of when we encounter them, or those we destroy with our tongues”. And, he concluded, “let us also think of all those people in the world who are treated as things and not as brothers because a piece of land is more important than the bond of brotherhood”.