

The Gospel of Life

*"You have come to the sprinkled blood" (cf. Heb. 12:22,24):
signs of hope and invitation to commitment*

"The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (*Gen 4:10*). It is not only the voice of the blood of Abel, the first innocent man to be murdered, which cries to God, the source and defender of life. The blood of every other human being who has been killed since Abel is also a voice raised to the Lord. In an absolutely singular way, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, *the voice of the blood of Christ*, of whom Abel in his innocence is a prophetic figure, cries out to God: "You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God ... to the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (12:22,24).

It is *the sprinkled blood*. A symbol and prophetic sign of it had been the blood of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant, whereby God expressed his will to communicate his own life to men, purifying and consecrating them (cf. *Ex 24:8; Lev 17:11*). Now all of this is fulfilled and comes true in Christ: his is the sprinkled blood which redeems, purifies and saves; it is the blood of the Mediator of the New Covenant "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (*Mt 26:28*). This blood, which flows from the pierced side of Christ on the Cross (cf. *Jn 19:34*), "speaks more graciously" than the blood of Abel; indeed, it expresses and requires a more radical "justice", and above all it implores mercy, it makes intercession for the brethren before the Father (cf. *Heb 7:25*), and it is the source of perfect redemption and the gift of new life.

The blood of Christ, while it reveals the grandeur of the Father's love, *shows how precious man is in God's eyes and how priceless the value of his life*. The Apostle Peter reminds us of this: "You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot" (*I Pt 1:18-19*). Precisely by contemplating the precious blood of Christ, the sign of his self-giving love (cf. *Jn 13:1*), the believer learns to recognize and appreciate the almost divine dignity of every human being and can exclaim with ever renewed and grateful wonder: "How precious must man be in the eyes of the Creator, if he 'gained so great a Redeemer' (*Exultet* of the Easter Vigil), and if God 'gave his only Son' in order that man 'should not perish but have eternal life' (cf. *Jn 3:16*)!"

Furthermore, Christ's blood reveals to man that his greatness, and therefore his vocation, consists in *the sincere gift of self*. Precisely because it is poured out as the gift of life, the blood of Christ is no longer a sign of death, of definitive separation from the brethren, but the instrument of a communion which is richness of life for all. Whoever in the Sacrament of the Eucharist drinks this blood and abides in Jesus (cf. *Jn 6:56*) is drawn into the dynamism of his love and gift of life, in order to bring to its fullness the original vocation to love which belongs to everyone (cf. *Gen 1:27; 2:18-24*).

It is from the blood of Christ that all draw *the strength to commit themselves to promoting life*. It is precisely this blood that is *the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God's plan life will be victorious*. "And death shall be no more", exclaims the powerful voice which comes from the throne of God in the Heavenly Jerusalem (*Rev 21:4*). And Saint Paul assures us that the present victory over sin is a sign and anticipation of the definitive victory over death, when there "shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory'. 'O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' " (*I Cor 15:54-55*).

(Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 25 March 1995, no. 25)

It is a long time since in our milieu one speaks of the "Gospel of Blood". This phrase begins to become familiar. What does it mean?

We can explain it in this way: "It is a good news that comes from understanding profoundly the mystery of the Blood of Christ". Such good news, like that of the Gospel, from which it is taken to the point of constructing an important and all-inclusive nucleus, is not something that is peripheral but comprehends all of human life and radically transforms it. The Gospel of Blood, therefore, is appropriately called also, the Gospel of Life. The text of Pope John Paul II expounds magnificently upon this assertion.

The Pope places the reader before two classic scenes of importance to the blood: two emblematic stories: that of Abel and that of Christ. One cannot avoid it. It is intentional. John Paul II --according to the author of the Letter to the Hebrew-- makes from the two bloods, two archetypes. The blood of Abel, poured out by Cain and the Blood of Christ sprinkled over humanity, convey two messages. In the blood poured out by Cain, the Pope sees the beginning and the

key to interpreting all the evil that has poisoned human life until our own day. In the Blood of Christ, on the contrary, he sees a way out from the evil towards salvation, that which the Christian calls redemption.

The first chapter of the encyclical is titled: "The Voice of Your Brother's Blood Cries To Me From The Ground" and has as a subtitle, "Present Day Threats To Human Life". The chapter is all full of these two bloods that confront one another. God has created the human person for life. The immortal breath of the Creator penetrates the person, it is located in the blood, and makes him crowned with glory, a little less than an angel. Death enters into the life of the person because of the envy of the devil; and enters in a violent way as a consequence of sin.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" responds Cain to God when God asks about Abel.

When Cain responds in such a way to God, he has already killed Abel. The phrase is therefore arrogant; an attempt to avoid a discussion; it is an evasive response. But taken in itself, it appears fascinating and indisputable and seems that humanity today wishes to appropriate it for herself.

Yes, cries the Pope. Everyone of us ought to feel responsible for our brother and sister. God will ask us about our brother..."I shall demand an account of man as regards his fellow man..." (Gn. 9,5) Human life is sacred and is not to be disposed of by another human person. This is inviolable. God has entrusted it to us because, living it according to its intrinsic value and in the bond of love with God and neighbor, we reveal day after day the glory of God. "The Glory of God is the human person fully alive."

The irresponsibility which is at the bottom of the phrase of Cain, is the same which leads to indifference towards the marginalized and --let us think well-- is the same that leads to violence against others. In fact, if the other is free to do what he wants, to go where he wants without me being "his keeper", then I am also free to do what I want and no one can pretend to have the right to be my guardian. The conclusion: I am not accountable to anyone! No one is accountable to anyone else! No one has the right to ask me anything about anything. On the contrary, if such a society wants to have a task, it should be that of allowing everybody to do whatever he wants.

No! cries the pope. God did not leave the weak helpless. The blood does not permit it. God says to Cain: "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!" (Gn. 4, 10) Cain did not hear the voice of the blood, of his own blood that flowed through the veins of his brother. That voice called him to be pleased with his own brother, and that he follow his example. However, jealousy and anger armed his hand. Now that spilled blood invokes justice from the ground which is soiled by it.

But, comments the pope, "the voice of the spilled blood of humanity does not cease to cry out from one generation to another, assuming tones and different and always new accents." "It is not only the voice of the blood of Abel, the first innocent man to be murdered, which cries to God, the source and defender of life. The blood of every other human being who has been killed since Abel is also a voice raised to the Lord" (n. 25).

The question God directs to Cain remains very current if we direct it to the human beings of our days: "What have you done?" How much blood is shown, how much blood is hidden, how many insults against the blood in the chronicles of our time! The blood remains intact in its power to denounce. Pay attention to it. All the expressions of violence wherever they be found, are at least loathed by public opinion: wars, massacres on Saturday nights, syringes infected with AIDS, acts of violence... It is a blood which cries for justice from the earth. But it doesn't cry any less than that blood which dirties the antiseptic hands of the surgeon which extracts the embryo by means of suction; or the test tube of the apprentice magician, which manipulates the genetic patrimony; or the formula of the chemist which prepares poisons destined to kill off the first seeds of human life; or the cold minds of the industrialist which calculates how and where to place his factory in order to exploit the poor, underpaying their work...There doesn't exist in the criminal annals cases more "premeditated crimes". It is an affirmation which may make a stir, but is difficult to deny it. The cream of science and the best of technology are involved in this; enormous capital has been invested...

"In an absolutely singular way", writes the pope, "the voice of the blood of Christ of whom Abel in his innocence is a prophetic figure, cries to God". The blood of Christ is the true purifying blood; or, if one prefers, is the blood of the true cleansing. It is not only a figure of salvation, but carries it out. In this, all who prefigure it and all who await it, find their completion. This inaugurates and upholds the new era of which so many of the prophets speak.

(Don Michele Colagiovanni, "Evangelium Sanguinis", Nel Segno del Sangue, Rome, May 1995, pp. 95-107)