

...as follows in Jesus' name:

...In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, 4 and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, 5 but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. 6 The Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? 7 If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, and you must rule over it."

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. 9 Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" 10 And the Lord said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. ... 13 Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. 14 Behold, You have driven me today away from the ground, and from Your face I shall be hidden....

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

People loved by God,

I am going to tell you a little secret: You cannot hide anything from God.

Okay, that's not really a secret, is it?

But often, by the way we act, one might wonder if we know that fact.

Certainly Cain would have known it, yet, we see him, literally, trying to get away with murder.

—Of course Cain would have known it! Even before he committed the act, the Lord had intervened.

"Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ...

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door."

The Lord was warning Cain about letting the anger and envy in his heart simmer into hatred, and boil into deceitful words, and finally boil over into the act of murder.

Note how the Lord used His omniscience in order to help Cain flee from temptation and sin, and not just from the sins of anger and murder, but also from the even more grave sin of unbelief.

The Lord didn't desire to have **no regard for Cain's offering**...

He wasn't eager for Cain to offer Him a faithless sacrifice so that He could reject him.

So the Lord intervened. He called him to faith, once again.

And while it might sound to our ears as God is demanding good works from Cain when He says,

"If you do well, will you not be accepted?"

We must understand that Cain could not **"do well"** without trusting in the promised Savior, as Hebrews 11[:6] tells us, **without faith it is impossible to please God.**

And that is what we are to recognize as the difference between Cain's and Abel's offerings.

In Hebrews 11[:4], we read, **By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain,**

through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts.

So let us consider their offerings: What differences do we see between them?

From Cain's hands we see the **fruit of the ground**.

We see the product of the work of his hands, since he was a farmer, a **worker of the ground**.

And it might have been that if Cain had offered this in faith... as a thank offering, for example...

The Lord would have accepted it, just as He accepts your thank offerings, the fruits of your hands.

But from Abel's hands we see a distinction: He gives **the firstborn of his flock & of their fat portions**.

We see a sacrifice that demonstrated his faith in and understanding of the promised Savior's redemption:

that the Savior's sacrifice would be one of blood,

and from the best of stock (**the firstborn... of all creation** Colossians 1:15)

and the best portions... the divine and, therefore, the holy and innocent blood of Christ).

So Cain's offering is one of hypocrisy, performed out of duty, out of a sense of obligation,

not out of faith, nor willingly, let alone cheerfully.

And this faithlessness of Cain led to envy of Abel and anger at God's acceptance of him.

...

And what the Lord had promised came true: Cain continued to give space in his heart

for his anger and hatred to grow and become stronger until sin pounced on him and overruled him.

But recognize this too... still, in God's great love, He again intervened and gave Cain

the opportunity to confess, asking **"Where is Abel your brother?"**

(Remember: He knows everything. Nothing is hidden from Him.)

But notice how the Lord does it — so unassumingly:

He doesn't immediately overpower Cain with the accusation, so as to push him away,

but allows room for guilt to humble Cain and move his heart to confess his crime.

But Cain's heart is hardened and he answers back with a question of his own, a snarky, impudent question:

"I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

It's at this point, as the Lord's grace had been spurned, and there was no humble, contrite confession,

that the Lord then humbled Cain, banishing him from His gracious presence.

Since Cain would not humble himself, the Lord humbled him to a whimpering, blubbery mess,

crying out, **"My punishment is greater than I can bear..."**

The man who stood so confidently before the Lord and lied to His face,

was now afraid that the **Lord's face would be hidden from him**.

Notice what occupied Cain's response to God's judgment:

Even now, He didn't turn to confession or repentance,

but instead was concerned about minimizing the consequences —

that others might seek him out to do to him what he himself had done to Abel.

Cain sought no spiritual care... He did not ask for forgiveness...

Like Judas, Cain despaired of God's mercy, no longer believing that God could or would save him.

His thoughts were only for the preservation of his earthly life.

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In this Adventide, this season of penitence, as we look forward to our celebration of our Savior's birth, the Lord calls us to examine ourselves,

so that we might appreciate more and more why Jesus Christ came to us.

Just as with Cain, the Lord knows the secret things of our hearts already.

He is not astounded by your envy. He is not shocked at your hatred.

He knows the stubbornness and hypocrisy that clings to you...
that was bred into you from your father Adam, as it was in Cain.
He knows the fears and burdens that you carry with you.
Nothing you confess to Him will surprise Him.
And neither is He deceived when you would try to hide sin from Him.

So then, why does the Lord desire us to confess our sins if He knows them already?
Why did He ask questions of Adam, **"Where are you? ... Did you eat of the tree?"** Genesis 3:9, 11
or of Cain, **"Why are you angry?... Where is Abel your brother? ... What have you done?"**
It is not because He wanted or needed to know the answer.
It is that He wanted them to examine their hearts so that they would recognize their need for forgiveness.
... So that they would humble themselves before Him and seek His grace and mercy.

It is this humbled spirit that we hear in Mary's *Magnificat*, which we heard just moments ago
and will join in singing and in confessing in a few more moments.
Her song, her sacrifice of praise, is a beautiful confession, not only of her need for a Savior,
but also of her belief in the Lord's salvation through the Son that she would bear. Luke 1:46-47
We hear it in the opening lines, **"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,"**
Here, the woman prophesied about since the Lord's promise to send the Savior from woman's seed,
does not at all consider herself to have earned such a role.
Instead, she magnifies the Lord that He **has regarded the humble estate of His handmaiden.**
Whereas the Lord has **no regard** for faithless offerings,
the Lord in His grace does **regard**... He does recognize... those humbled by their sin and guilt,
and who make confession to Him and seek His forgiveness.
These He **exalts**. These, **hungering for righteousness** Matthew 5, He **fills with good things.** Luke 1:53
Through the special authority which Christ has given to His Church on earth,
He forgives the sins of... penitent sinners... on account of the life and death of Jesus Christ.

...
Jesus, like Abel, died an innocent death—not for His own sins, but because of the sins of another.
But while Abel died because of the hypocrisy, envy, anger, hatred, and deception of his brother Cain,
Jesus died for the hypocrisy, envy, anger, hatred and deception, of you, His brother/sister
to atone for these and all your sins, that you may be with Him - forever in His presence.
And while Abel's life was taken from him, unwillingly as a victim of Cain's hatred,
Christ willingly offered Himself as the bloody and sacrificial victim of God's wrath so that He,
through His ministers and confessors, absolves you and declares you guiltless before His face.

He will not drive you away, nor hide His face from you,
but instead, like faithful and humble Abel and Mary, He exalts you and **blesses you.**
and makes His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you,
and lifts up His countenance upon you and gives you peace. Numbers 6

Thanks be to God!

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria