

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

Fratricide in Society Sixth Week in Ordinary Time Monday, February 16, 2015
8:15 AM **Gn 4:1-15, 25;** Mk 8:11-13 (Abel represents the shepherds of the world, Cain the farmers of Canaan.)

So we are continuing the once every two year reading from the Book of Genesis. These are very interesting stories. And this particular one might cause us to reflect on our understanding of inspiration. **Inspiration begins with some sort of insight from God**, a grace you could call it. But **then the author uses his own language, thought patterns, cultural patterns to express this insight**. In so doing of course sometimes the **authors**, because there is more than one obviously, trip up a little bit. They **involve themselves in contradictions**. This is a very human thing, especially when we have more than one author contributing to something.

You will recall that I mentioned earlier that this story of Genesis contains this insight that all human beings are brothers and sisters because Eve is the mother of all living. Well now we have Eve bearing a son, Cain, then another, Abel; Cain killing Abel; God punishing Cain; and Cain said, “Well, this is too much. If you send me out into the world someone will kill me.” Well, who would that be? Who could kill him if Eve is the mother of all the living and he is the only one she has had so far besides Abel? So in this way we see that **the authors were getting at different things at different times**.

In this particular section they are not really concerned about the unity of humanity, but rather they are talking about the sad fact of **a fratricidal relationship, not necessarily between two actual brothers, but maybe between groups. Abel may represent the shepherds of the world, Cain the farmers of Canaan**. So the word Canaan is related to Cain. And what happened was, and it’s repeated throughout history, we have a rather primitive group living from flocks, living from sheep. The sheep provide the wool and the

meat for the tribe. They require mobility; **they have to be able to move their sheep around to get new pastures**, since sheep eat all the grass and they have to go somewhere else.

Well of course the problem is that when people started plowing they wanted to preserve their **plowed land**, so they erected fences and walls. That was really the beginning of **settlements and villages and cities, but it excluded the shepherds**. The Israelites always identified with those who had been excluded. *Apiru* is another word used, related to the word Hebrew. They were the ones who had been excluded from participation in society because they weren't landowners. They were people who just used public land, to put it that way. But the **public lands started to disappear with the plow and the development of agriculture and the building of granaries**, which then led to actually armies, because someone had to protect the granaries from marauders and so on.

So this is really the beginning of **civilization**, as we call it. But it **contained a certain kind of injustice**. It wasn't worked out quite right. And this story about the slaying of Abel is really about **the fratricide that exists in society, whereby we pursue our own personal goals at the expense of others**.