

## **Saturday before Epiphany: January 5**

St. Anthony of Padua,

5 January 2019

Dear Father Justin, dear parishioners, and dear friends in Christ gathered for the monthly pro-life Mass and vigil:

### ***Introduction***

This Saturday during the Christmas season and before the great solemnity of the Epiphany, when we are still illumined by the Light from the Manger of the newborn Christ Child, is an especially appropriate occasion to raise our voices in praise of the beauty of human life. And so we pray fervently that the good Lord will continue to grant us the strength, courage and perseverance to continue to defend, protect and foster the dignity of each and every human life from conception to its natural end. With wonder of the Holy Family before our eyes, how can we fail to implore an outpouring of divine grace upon our world so infatuated by its ability to control the origin, development and ending of human life?

I want you to know that those of you who month after month and year after years come together on these first Saturdays, under the maternal protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, are an inspiration to the whole Church of Vancouver. You are heralds of hope and life to us and merit our deepest gratitude for your persevering fidelity. Thank you for your selfless witness. You are doing precisely what St. John wrote in his first Letter: “Little children – for that’s how the Apostle

referred to his Christian brothers and sisters –, let us love, not in word or speech – which by themselves are insufficient –, but in truth and action” (1 Jn 3:18). Your presence here today – and for an endless string of days – recalls for all of us that you love the truth of life as given to us by our Creator and that you are willing to act to defend that truth in a world which is so often indifferent or hostile. Truly, as your Bishop, I cannot thank you enough for your relentless determination in keeping the pro-life cause ever before us.

### *Cain*

In his Letter, St. John mentions Cain, a rather terrifying figure, the first murderer who appears in salvation history. The Apostle contrasts him to the believers who are admonished to love one another (cf. 1 Jn 3:12). He writes that “we must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother [Abel]” (1 Jn 3:12). And then John asks, “Why did he murder him?” (1 Jn 3:12). To this question, the Apostle provides the answer which, then as now, provides a key to understanding why people take human life. It is envy. This is how St. John puts it: “Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 Jn 3:12).

As we read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “In the account of Abel’s murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from

the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man.”<sup>1</sup>

In his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, the Gospel of Life, St. John Paul II writes of the “enormous and dramatic clash between good and evil, death and life, the ‘culture of death’ and the ‘culture of life.’”<sup>2</sup> At times, it even seems to us, when we look at our world, as if the forces of death have the upper hand. Tragically, the Pope noted, the biblical story of Cain’s murder of Abel (cf. Gen 4:2-16) is “a page rewritten daily, with inexorable and degrading frequency, in the book of human history.”<sup>3</sup> And our own city and country adds far too many dark pages to this history.

Like the first fratricide, every murder, every deliberate taking of innocent human life, is a violation of the *spiritual relationship* uniting us to one another in one great family. In this family, we all share the same dignity, for each of us, without any exception whatsoever, is created in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27) and called to salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ. This spiritual kinship is gravely violated when relationships break down and abortion and euthanasia are practiced.

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2259.

<sup>2</sup> St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 28; cf. 50 and 104.

<sup>3</sup> St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 7.

Every act of violence against another human person manifests a fracture in that love which we are to manifest as our “brother’s keeper” (Gen 4:9). The inspiration for such actions come “from the evil one” (1 Jn 3:12), the one whom St. John describes in his Gospel as “a murderer from the beginning” (Jn 8:44).

After Cain’s murder of Abel, he does not answer God who asks him about the fate of his brother. Instead of showing remorse for his wickedness, Cain arrogantly eludes the question: “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9). Think about these words, “I do not know.” Cain tries to cover up his crime with a lie.

In our society, lies about life continue to hide the truth. So many different justifications are offered to justify and disguise the most atrocious crimes against human beings. Even the language we use – the “termination of a pregnancy” or “medical assistance in dying” – are attempts to mask reality.

In saying “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Gen 4:9), Cain shows that he does not wish to think about what he has done to Abel. He wants to brush his murder aside, pretending it is a matter of no consequence. Like millions down through the centuries, and so pronounced in our own day, he refuses to see the truth of his actions. He hides from it. I am afraid that is what we are tempted to do: to hide from the ugly truth that our

society is stained not only by those take human life, who are often desperate, but also, and perhaps even more, by those who sit on the sidelines. They accept the banality of this evil and give up any of hope of changing a situation which, humanly speaking, seems impossible.

But, as Gabriel said to Mary, “nothing is impossible for God” (Lk 1:37). We know that by ourselves we cannot change the hearts of those who deny the truth about life. Attempts to do will inevitably fail.

As people of faith, however, we are convinced that the world’s salvation is not our doing. It is a gift that comes from God himself who responds to the fervour of our prayers. Despite the contemporary Cains who surround us with their murderous intent, and the hells created where human life is trivialized, deprived of its light, they will not, in the end, prevail. The power of God’s love is stronger than evil.

### ***Conclusion***

That love will ultimately triumph because Christ overcame evil and death through his Cross and Resurrection. In the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which we are now celebrating, this offering of his is now made present so that we can be strengthened to fulfill our mission as heralds of hope in our world.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver