

**“He made peace by His death on the Cross”**

***Col 1:20***

It's odd, isn't it? We are redeemed by the shedding of blood. God could, presumably, have saved us from sin in any number of ways, so why does it take the Incarnate Son of God's blood to redeem us? As usual, to find the answer we have to return to the beginning, to the Book of Genesis, and to the story of Creation and the Fall.

The first two chapters of Genesis are filled with life: God's life-giving breath hovers over the waters and the created order is brought into being; plants and beasts are given life; and through the Garden of Eden flows a single river, the waters and banks of all four branches of which teem with life. In the centre of the Garden stands the tree of life, and into this Garden is introduced the beginnings of human life, Adam and Eve.

Then, dramatically, as soon as the Original Sin is committed death enters into the created order. And after she has forfeited Paradise Eve has two sons: Cain who tilled the ground, then Abel who became a shepherd. They both make offerings to the Lord, but whereas Abel gives the first born from his flock, giving God the first and the best, Cain merely sacrifices from *amongst* his harvest. Abel's offering is pleasing to God whereas Cain's is flawed. As a result, the first-born son, through anger and jealousy, spills the blood, and takes the life of, his brother. Moreover, whilst Adam had *excused* his sin (by blaming his wife), Cain threw *his* sin in God's face, bellowing, “Am I my brother's keeper?”

Adam's sin was one of pride and disobedience. Cain then sealed his father's sin with blood. And this blood cries out to God from the earth.

Fast forward to the time of Christ.

In Christ we have a second Adam who acts to reverse the actions of the first. But in Our Lord we also have a second Cain, insofar as Christ is also a first-born Son. Like Cain, Our Lord makes an offering to God, but whilst Cain's offering was wanting, Christ's offering is perfect or, as the Letter to the Hebrews puts it, *unspotted*. Furthermore, by coming down to earth to share in our humanity, and through His Passion and Resurrection and through the waters of Baptism, Our Lord makes us his brothers and sisters, and in the process He becomes what Cain refused to be, namely His brother's keeper.

Yet Our Lord goes beyond even this. The cries of Abel's blood still ring in the ears of God the Father, and this injustice must be righted. A first-born son has spilt his brother's blood. Now, the *new* First Born Son spills... not someone else's blood, but His own, and thereby reverses and forgives the sin of that first death. God in His infinite wisdom uses the very same means to restore life as were used to lose it in the first place, that is, the shedding of blood.

This is what redemption consists of: God's *infinite justice* acting to right a wrong and restore what has been lost, alongside God's *infinite mercy* acting through the bloody sacrifice of God's only begotten Son. Justice demands the paying of Man's debt of worship and thanksgiving to God, a debt Adam and Cain both failed to render. In the shedding of His Precious Blood Christ renders a worthy offering to the Father on behalf of Mankind whose nature He has assumed. In so doing, the Son of God, as it were, buys back from the Father the gifts forfeited by Adam and Cain. And in the exercise of His infinite mercy, the Father restores to an unworthy race the gifts that He always willed His creatures to have from the beginning but which we have thrown in His face. Abel's blood cried to God for justice and mercy; Our Lord's blood perfects that plea on behalf of us all and makes satisfaction for our sinful shortcomings. And from the depths of His tender heart, God the Father bestows upon

His only Son what He asks for, and pours out His forgiveness, grace, and love on all those who become His Son's adopted brothers and sisters.

By taking up Abel's cause Christ redeems not just Adam and Cain but *all* of Mankind. On the Cross *all* sins are forgiven. But what we call the gift of *Objective* Redemption (this forgiveness of *all* sins) now needs to be made *Subjective*, that is, it needs to be passed on to individuals through the sacraments, especially and chiefly through Baptism, and Confession, and Holy Communion. When the fruit of Christ's redeeming death on the Cross is applied to individuals, when the grace of redemption is given to particular souls, those souls are then said to be justified: in other words, unlike Cain, they now stand justly or righteously before God because the cry of blood spilt by sin has been heard and answered.

The Precious Blood of Jesus, to which the whole of the month of July is dedicated, rights the wrong done by Cain and restores the gifts forfeited by Adam. In the shedding of His Blood Christ brings about the Atonement – the *at-one-ment* – between God and Man, between man and his neighbour, or, as St Paul puts it in today's second reading, He makes peace by His death on the Cross.