

**WITNESSING BROTHERHOOD**



**LECTIO** (reading): Genesis 4,1 – 16

<sup>1</sup> The man knew Eve his wife. She conceived, and gave birth to Cain, and said, "I have gotten a man with Yahweh's help."

<sup>2</sup> Again she gave birth, to Cain's brother Abel. Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

<sup>3</sup> As time passed, it happened that Cain brought an offering to Yahweh from the fruit of the ground.

<sup>4</sup> Abel also brought some of the firstborn of his flock and of the fat of it. Yahweh respected Abel and his offering,

<sup>5</sup> but he didn't respect Cain and his offering. Cain was very angry, and the expression on his face fell.

<sup>6</sup> Yahweh said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why has the expression of your face fallen?"

<sup>7</sup> If you do well, will it not be lifted up? If you don't do well, sin crouches at the door. Its desire is for you, but you are to rule over it."

<sup>8</sup> Cain said to Abel, his brother, "Let's go into the field." It happened, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.

<sup>9</sup> Yahweh said to Cain, "Where is Abel, your brother?"

He said, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

<sup>10</sup> Yahweh said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries to me from the ground.

<sup>11</sup> Now you are cursed because of the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

<sup>12</sup> From now on, when you till the ground, it won't yield its strength to you. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth."

<sup>13</sup> Cain said to Yahweh, "My punishment is greater than I can bear.

<sup>14</sup> Behold, you have driven me out this day from the surface of the ground. I will be hidden from your face, and I will be a fugitive and a wanderer in the earth. It will happen that whoever finds me will kill me."

<sup>15</sup> Yahweh said to him, "Therefore whoever slays Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold."

Yahweh appointed a sign for Cain, lest any finding him should strike him.

<sup>16</sup> Cain went out from Yahweh's presence, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

**MEDITATIO** (explanation)

*After the stories about paradise and the expulsion from it the Scripture tells us the story of Cain and Abel (Genesis 4, 1-9), the first children of Adam and Eve. This story can, among others, be read as the first reflection on brotherhood.*

We also read that two occupations have developed: raising crops and raising cattle. So we see here a part of the history of mankind. The division of labor has started. They could complement each other, but the story indicates that there is also competition and discord. By just mentioning these two callings the narrator hints that not everything is right between the two brothers. Agriculture can interfere with raising animals and vice versa. And so we go from the expulsion from paradise to a conflict between two brothers. In this story Adam and Eve, the parents, play no role. The narrator focuses the story on the two brothers. It is not long before the trouble starts: the jealousy, the distrust, the feeling of disunity is already coming to a boil. Pride and inferiority complexes have immediately come to life with the birth of the brothers. God then offers the following words of wisdom (verse 7): 'If you act with righteousness, won't you be able to look everybody in the eye? If you act badly, sin will lie in wait, eager to get you in its grasp; but you need to be stronger than it.'

Cain did not arrive at this thought by himself. God showed him that sin can get a hold on him. And He challenges him to get a hold on sin. This wisdom is based on the experiences of Israel with God. He, who reads the whole history, will discover that Israel time and again falls into sin. And that is true for each person. This deeply human experience is thus shown to us from the beginning. Still, Cain murders his brother. Now God springs into action again and precisely because the blood cries out from the earth. Similar to the way that the suppression of the Israelites in Egypt reached the ear of God. And He puts the question to Cain: where is your brother? In addition to the wisdom of verse 7, this question too, from that day on, resounds through all generations: man, where is your brother?

Subsequently a remarkable development is seen. God curses Cain, and chases him away from the place where he tilled the land. This expulsion is parallel to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. They too did not listen to God's command and God makes them leave paradise. He tells Adam and Eve that they will earn their bread by the sweat of their brow. Cain is told that he only will drift and wander. Still, God protects him because God watches over him so that nobody in turn can kill Cain.

God watches over his people. He speaks to them if they want evil things; He speaks to them if they want good things. But if somebody wants evil, God does not prevent it, so the story tells us. The story about paradise shows that too. But God does point out to people the consequences of their evil deeds. It entangles you; it will become your curse, it makes you lose paradise, etc. How God is bound to people is expressed in the name JHWH. This four-letter word is the most frequent word in the Old Testament. This shows how much people have searched for their relationship to God. And it shows how much it is a *duty* to search for a relationship to God. From the beginning God establishes a relationship to man. Now it is up to each person to give substance to this relationship from his/her side.

The story contains another special element - namely the preference of God for the second son. It is a situation that we encounter more in Bible stories. Examples are Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, the brothers and Joseph. For God there is no obvious relationship with the oldest. God chooses as a contrarian. The name Abel means as much as 'sigh', as 'nothing'. With that, the narrator wants to show that God prefers someone who is nobody or has nobody. That is more important to God than being the oldest.

*Notes*

**CONTEMPLATIO** (contemplate)

1. This is a story about the question: where is your brother? Where is your sister? The word brother occurs seven times in this story. This shows how important brotherhood is considered by the Scriptures. It is a red thread that we can follow through the entire Scriptures. A brother is described as somebody who is prepared to listen, to love, to be an intermediary for you in times of problems or stress. In the story of the Good Samaritan the law expert asks: who is my brother and who is my sister? Jesus answers with the challenging phrase: are you a brother or sister for someone else? Jesus himself wants to be a brother who approaches all suffering persons with solidarity and who opens for them the way to a new life and a true liberation. We become a brother or sister of Jesus thru our spiritual birth (our baptism makes us into brothers and sisters of Jesus). This demands an entirely new way of thinking. Following Jesus means, among others, telling others that we live with a community of faith as center. The love for all mankind is central. The one that joins this movement works actually at building a just and brotherly society.

Notes

2 'Abel' means something like a sigh; 'nothing.' God has an eye for those that nobody has an eye for. That seems self-evident. But those paying attention see that one has eyes often for winners, those who have "made it". Who has an eye for those standing along the edges? God asks us to look after each other and especially those who don't mean much. That too requires an entirely new way of thinking. Surrounded by competition and rivalry, God asks you not to participate in that. He does not ask you to be the best, but more importantly to get the best out of yourself. And what God calls the best is the commitment to brotherhood, mercy and justice. The Bible is at odds with our society.

Notes

3. God also does not abandon the perpetrator. God does not abandon Cain. He gives him a mark. The perpetrator is not a perpetual target, with whom everybody can do whatever they want. The perpetrator too – after he has had his punishment and served his time – has a right to a second chance. That too is not obvious. People who have done their time do not automatically get a new place in society. It is worth contemplating that crimes rarely are forgotten or forgiven. And that while forgiveness is central to the Christian Faith.

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4. Sin is a difficult concept. In the Catholic Catechism it is a well defined concept. The Bible is less exact in these matters. The texts we read make a different appeal to your conscience. It is not so much about the content of the sin but about the choice. Does the sin grab you? Or do you handle sin in such a way that you retain the upper hand? Here saints are our examples. Not because they were without sin, because they were not. But because they show us by their way of living how you can manage sin. It is – as always in Scripture – a fundamental life choice. The text itself is worth contemplating again: ‘If you act right, you will be able to look everyone in the eye. If you act badly, sin will lie in wait, eager to get you in its grasp; but you need to be stronger than it.’

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*<Intermezzo>*

**COLLATIO** (sharing)

In smaller groups the following questions are discussed:

- What comes up first for you from the meditation and contemplation?

- Has anybody ever made an appeal to you to be somebody's brother or sister in the biblical sense of the word? Tell a little bit more about that.

- How do you answer the Biblical question: where is your brother/sister?

- Evil easily forces itself into a person. Do you recognize that? And how?

**ORATIO** (praying)

At the end of the discussion the sharing is closed with a prayer:

- Cain as well as Abel makes a sacrifice to God. That is their prayer. What is your prayer?

- That all people may be one, Jesus prays. Praying for unity and for brother- and sisterhood is necessary. How do you pray for brother- and sisterhood?

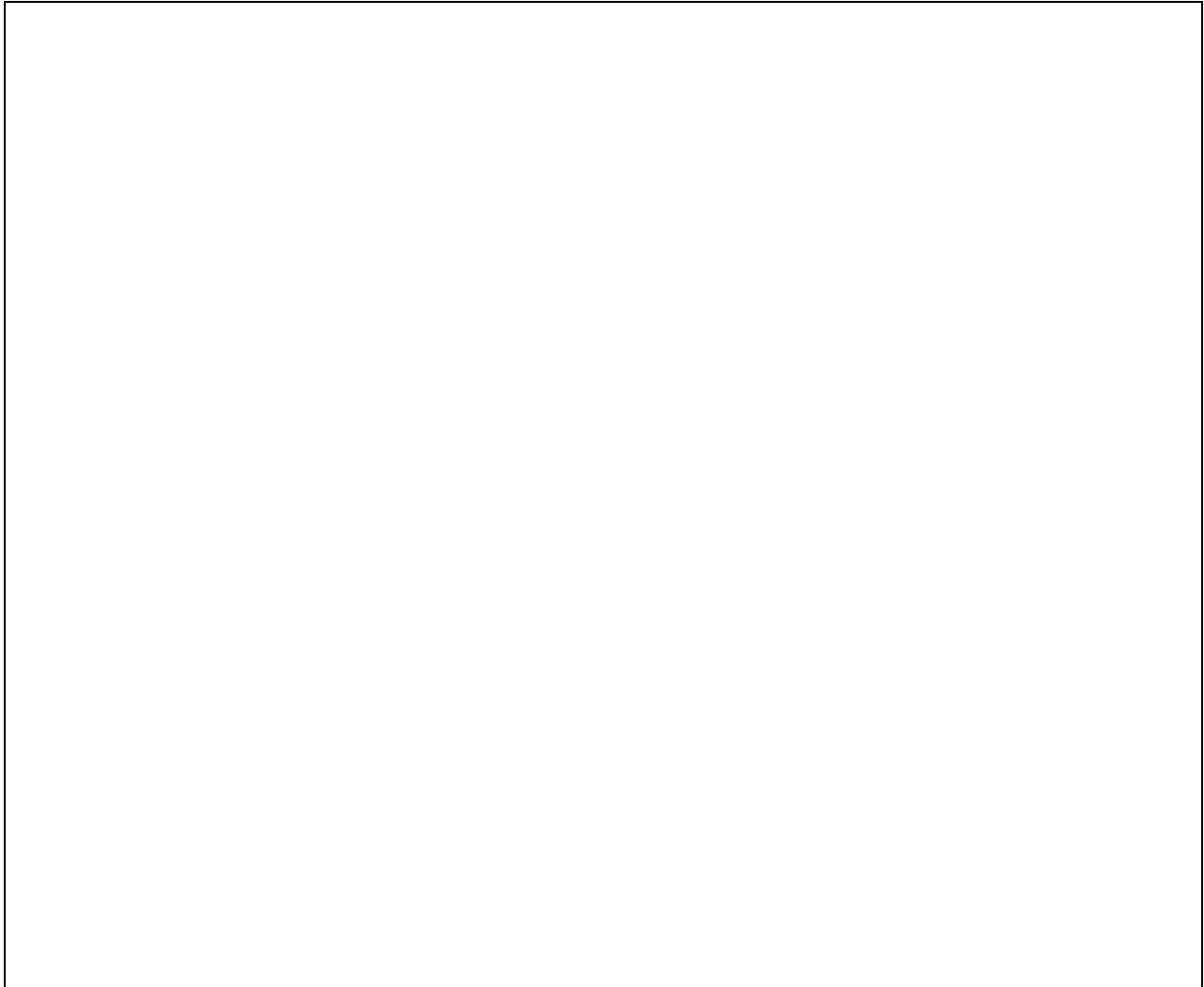
In the large group we share the results.

**CREATIO** (creating)

*Needed materials: photo camera, paper and drawing supplies, old magazines/newspapers, scissors and glue. Computer with internet connection.*

Brother- and sisterhood: how do you greet your brother or sister? Is that with a hug? A kiss? Do you shake hands? A wink? A pat on the shoulders? A high five? Do you have your very own greeting ritual? Do you greet a sister differently than a brother? What do you reveal in your greeting ritual?

Make a picture (or select one from your archive), a collage or a drawing in which you show how you welcome and greet you brother and sister. Add in writing why just this image represents your idea of brotherhood and sisterhood. Share the results with each other but also with your brothers and sisters in other countries, on [facebook.com/AmbassadorsWWB!](https://www.facebook.com/AmbassadorsWWB/)





**OPERATIO** (to act)

*“Brotherhood is a prophetic witness in this world which does not consider this choice obvious. Rather the world considers it crazy. Brotherhood is a witness that people need each other. A witness that you are ready to abandon everything to live in this manner, exactly because in this way you will find a true and happy life.*

*Brotherhood is also a witness that you don’t want to wait until somebody comes to you, but that you are actively interested in the other person. Just as Jesus did not feel himself inferior to go to others, so we want to be too. Witness that we, like God, care for people, that we, like God, look to and go to people ourselves. Brotherhood is not only a witness that we want to act like God, but especially a witness through which we show God and Jesus. God and Jesus become visible again by being brothers for each other and for those who suffer.”*

(From the brochure Witness of Brotherhood, 2002)

- Ambassadors of a Worldwide Brotherhood are challenged to be prophetic witnesses in the world. How do you free up time? Try to set aside some time each week for this witness. And next time tell your experience to the others.

- And finally: start a journal in which you record what your personal preparations for the WJD consist of (among others the effect of the element ‘operatio’).