

"A person who walks with God"

At his 27 May General Audience, Pope Francis continued his catechesis on prayer by focusing on the first chapters of Genesis.

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Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

Today's catechesis is dedicated to the *prayer of the just*.

God's plan regarding humanity is for the good. Yet in our everyday lives we experience the presence of evil: it is an everyday experience. The first chapters of the Book of Genesis describe the progressive expansion of sin in human living. Adam and Eve (see *Gn* 3:1-7) doubt God's good intentions. They think they are dealing with a jealous God who wants to prevent their happiness. Hence rebellion arose: they no longer believe in a generous Creator who desire their well-being. Their hearts yield to the temptation of the evil one. They are taken in by the delirium of omnipotence: "When you eat of the fruit of the tree, you will become like God" (see v. 5). And this is the temptation: this is the ambition that enters into the heart. The experience goes in the opposite direction, however. Their eyes are opened and they discover that they are naked (v. 7), with nothing. Do not

forget this: the tempter is a bad payer, he pays badly.

Evil becomes even more explosive with the second human generation, it is stronger: it is the story of Cain and Abel (see *Gn* 4:1-16). Cain is envious of his brother: there is the worm of envy. As the first-born, he sees Abel as a rival, someone who threatens his place as the first-born. Evil enters within his heart and Cain does not succeed in controlling it. Evil starts to enter the heart: we tend always to look badly at others, with suspicion. And this also happens with our thought: "This person is bad, he will harm me". And this thought gradually enters into the heart. And so we have the story of the first relationship of brothers that ends in homicide. I think, today, of human brotherhood ... war everywhere.

Cain's descendants develop crafts and arts, but violence develops as

well. It is expressed in Lamech's sinister song that sounds like a hymn of vengeance: "I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for bruising me ... If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times" (*Gn 4:23-24*). Revenge: "You will pay for what you have done". But the judge does not say this, I do. And I make myself the judge of the situation. Thus evil spreads like wildfire until it invades the entire picture: "The Lord saw how great the wickedness of human beings was on earth, and how every desire that their heart conceived was always nothing but evil" (*Gn 6:5*). The great frescoes of the universal flood (chapters 6-7) and of the Tower of Babel (chapter 11) reveal that a new beginning is needed, like a new creation, that will have its fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

Yet, in these first pages of the Bible, another story is also written. It is less

apparent, humbler and more devout. It represents the redemption of hope. Even though almost everyone behaves cruelly, making hatred and conquest the driving force behind human affairs, there are persons who are capable of praying to God with sincerity, who are capable of writing humanity's destiny in another way. Abel offers God a sacrifice of first-fruits. After he dies, Adam and Eve had a third son, Seth, of whom Enosh (which means "mortal") is born. It is said that "at that time people began to invoke the Lord by name" (4:26). Then Enoch appears, a person who "walks with God" and who was taken up into heaven (see 5:22-24). Finally, there is the story of Noah, a just man who "walked with God" (6:9), before whom God withholds His plan to destroy humanity (see 6:7-8).

Reading these accounts, one has the impression that prayer is an

embankment, that is humankind's refuge before the wave of evil that is growing in the world. We see well that we pray even to be saved from ourselves. It is important to pray: "Lord, please, save me from myself, from my ambitions, from my passions". Those who pray in the first pages of the Bible are peacemakers: in fact, when it is authentic, prayer liberates us from our instinct toward violence. It is a gaze directed toward God, so that He might return to take care of the human heart. We read in the Catechism: "This kind of prayer is lived by many righteous people in all religions" (CCC, 2569). Prayer cultivates flowerbeds of rebirth in places where human hatred was only capable of sowing a desert. And prayer is powerful, because it attracts the power of God, and the power of God always gives life: always. He is the God of life, and He brings about rebirth.

This is the reason why God's lordship is transmitted down the chain of these men and woman, who are often misunderstood and marginalised in the world. But the world lives and grows thanks to God's power that these servants of His attract through their prayer.

They are like a chain, which does not make a lot of noise, that rarely makes the headlines, and yet its importance is such that it restores trust in the world! I remember the story of a man: a head of government, important, not of this time, from times past. He was an atheist who did not have religious feeling in his heart, but who as a child used to hear his grandmother praying, and this stayed in his heart. And in a difficult moment of his life, that memory returned to his heart, and he said, "But my grandmother prayed...". In this way he began to pray with the formulas his grandmother used, and there he found Jesus. Prayer is a

chain of life, always: many men and women who pray, sow life.

God's path and God's story is transmitted through them: it is passed down to the "remnant" of humanity who have not been conformed to the law of the strongest, but have asked that God accomplish His miracles, and above all that He transform their hearts of stone to hearts of flesh (see *Ez 36:26*). And prayer helps this: because prayer opens the door to God, transforming our heart, very often made of stone, into a human heart. And it takes great humanity, and with humanity one prays well.

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