

The murder of Abel by his brother Cain is a tragic story. Cain resents his brother who has done nothing more than give his best to God. Cain methodically plots to kill his brother and then lies to God about it. Everyone suffers from this capital crime. Abel has lost his life. Adam and Eve have lost one son to death a second son to sin. Cain can no longer till the soil. In the midst of this family tragedy, the Lord upholds the dignity of life. He places a mark on Cain so that no one will try to avenge the death of Abel. God shows great mercy in protecting Cain from vigilante justice.

Following the merciful example of God, we too must protect the life of our brothers and sisters even if they have taken the life of another. Given enough time to reflect on the error of their ways, we must allow for the possibility of remorse, and reconciliation for every sinner. As Jesus was being unjustly crucified, he cried out for the mercy of humanity. “Father forgive them, they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34). Just after Jesus makes this declaration of mercy, the good thief, defends Jesus against the other criminal who mocked him. “Then he said, ‘Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.’ He replied to him, ‘Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise’” (23: 42-43).

Let us take a very different example of remorse and reconciliation from the life of Dorothy Day. In her youth, she became pregnant by a man who used her body for his lustful ends but had no intention of a permanent lifegiving relationship. The man insisted she have an abortion. Under the pressure of the situation, she chose abortion hoping that the relationship might endure. It did not. He abandoned her and she suffered on multiple counts. She lost her child. She lost the father of the child. And she lost herself. Only through the love and mercy of God, was Dorothy able to feel whole again. She became a Catholic and came to know the love and mercy of God firsthand. Having experienced the pain of abandonment, and the exultation of resurrection, Dorothy Day became a model for reaching out to others. “Dorothy Day’s life was dedicated to seeking holiness, defending life, and promoting social justice and peace. In valuing human life, she came to reject the violence of abortion and to abhor war and crushing poverty.”ⁱ In Dorothy Day, we see that redemption is possible and one can atone for sins by helping others in a thousand ways.

Human life created in the image and likeness of God is sacred. Let us honor God and the Fifth Commandment as we:

- Reach out to those who are suffering so they do not feel abandoned or alone.
- Never lift a hand to unjustly inflict bodily harm to another.
- Never utter hateful words to another person, nor wish evil upon anyone.
- Never lift yourself up by putting another person down.
- Avoid teasing and nagging lest you provoke another person to lash out in anger.
- Treat your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Avoid the abuse of alcohol and drugs.
- Put aside petty jealousies, lest you lift your hand in anger against a brother.

In closing, let us reflect on the wisdom of Saint John Paul II from the Gospel of Life: “It is from the blood of Christ that all draw the strength to commit themselves to promoting life. It is precisely this blood that is the most powerful source of hope, indeed it is the foundation of the absolute certitude that in God’s plan life will be victorious.”ⁱⁱ

ⁱ United States Catholic Catechism for Adults. United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Chapter 29.

ⁱⁱ vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae.html, #25.