

Good Friday

We began Lent 45 days ago by being marked with ashes. A sign of the cross was traced on our foreheads, and we heard the words “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” The ashes remind us that because of our sins, “we are dust, and unto dust we shall return.” We are all sinners. None of us is innocent. The sign of the cross in ashes reminded us that we are all in this together.

It is the sins of all humanity going back to the time of Adam and Eve’s disobedience. Their disobedience which led to them being expelled from the garden of Eden. Sin rushed in and took hold quickly after the fall. Brother was soon against brother. Cain killed his brother Abel. The love of God was not in Cain’s heart, rather it was jealousy of his brother which led to hatred and murder. Sin led to Cain being further expelled from community. He was now exiled from any sense of family or unity. In Cain’s fear he pleaded with God for his safety. God, in His mercy, put a mark on Cain’s forehead to protect him. (see Gen 4:3-15) It is believed by many scholars that the mark that God put on Cain’s forehead was the sign of the cross. It was a sign of his sin, yet at the same time a sign of protection. Cain was punished for his sin, but because he turned to the Lord for safety he was not condemned. Cain still had the protection of God.

We can also see God’s protection for those that turn to Him for safety in ch. 9 of the Book of the prophet Ezekiel. Ezekiel had a vision in which God was going to punish Israel for its sinfulness. God commanded His angel to go through the city and put a mark on the foreheads of those that were still faithful and lamented the abominations that were practiced within it. Those that were faithful to God were marked with the sign of the cross. They were protected from harm when disaster fell upon Israel.

We are sinners too. We turn to God for protection. We may not have murdered our brother or sister; however, we are all guilty of anger towards others – envy, jealousy, resentment, calumny, slander, gossip, and for some of us maybe even hatred. Not one of us is innocent.

Jesus, an innocent Man, took our guilt upon Himself. In a sense, Jesus took the place of Cain. In a sense, Jesus took our place in being punished because of our sins. The exile that Cain experienced, and the exile that we experience in this world, was experienced by Jesus in His passion and crucifixion. “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mk 15:34; Ps 22:2) “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” is the cry of humanity throughout the ages voiced by Jesus on the cross. Jesus took our place and took the punishment due to sin. Yet, it is through the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus that we are given protection. It is through the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus that God brings His exiled children back to Himself. Atonement has been achieved for the damage that has been done due to sin. The Blood of Christ wipes away all the offenses.

Whenever we mark ourselves with the sign of the cross, whether it is with ashes, holy water, or simply just the sign of the cross, we should always remember that we are sinners. It is through the sign of the cross that God offers us the forgiveness of our sins. And It is through the cross that Jesus will always offer His faithful people His protection and the hope of salvation. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.