

Lent 4 Murderous Eyes March 25 2020

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing unto You, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen!

“If looks could kill.” Can you picture eyes filled with rage? Likely you’ve seen it in the eyes of another; perhaps you’ve seen it on your own face through an ill-timed glance in the mirror. In the ancient world and still today in some cultures, the “evil eye” is a glance that is thought to cause harm to the recipient. That’s how I envision the eyes of the chief priests and scribes, the Sadducees and Pharisees, as they plotted Jesus’ death in tonight’s Passion Reading. They were filled with hatred and murder as they gazed upon Jesus being greeted with praise in Jerusalem during Holy Week, and before that, when face-to-face with Jesus, they heard Him speak woes and reproaches to them. If they could have spewed venom or shot arrows from their eyes at the Lord, they would have.

I don’t remember what I did to deserve it, but I recall my reaction to the punishment. My father had chastised me and sent me to my room. I vividly remember going into my room and behind closed doors muttering, “I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!”—out of earshot of my father, of course. I’m sure my eyes had that murderous look the Jews had. But I knew in my heart that I had gotten what was coming for my misdeed and needed to be sorry and change my ways.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” said Jesus (Matthew 23:29), no doubt with a rather stern, fatherly look. This rhetoric wouldn’t fit in with Dale Carnegie’s advice given in his 1936 bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. But it was what they needed to hear, so those words were spoken in love, just as my father had done in disciplining me. God and His representatives never speak the Law to us in malice, but only because we need to recognize our sin and know what to repent of.

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” said Jesus. “For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers” (Matthew 23:29–32).

Jesus wanted them to recognize their rank hypocrisy and repent. So He mockingly says, “Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers” to bring them face-to-face with the murder that lay in their hearts under their pious pretenses of honoring the murdered prophets and behind their pious platitudes of “We wouldn’t have done what our fathers did.” But multigenerational guilt is real when the sons of the fathers lack repentance, so Jesus challenges them to push things forward to their logical conclusion: “I know your hearts! I can see the murder in your eyes! Go ahead! Walk in the steps of your fathers! Why don’t you go ahead and kill Me too and continue your family tradition!”

“There is nothing new under the sun,” said the Preacher in Ecclesiastes. Murderous thoughts and looks are as old as the fall into sin. Cain’s downcast eyes became murderous toward his brother. The cause of murder is always the agency of man, but the original source is the devil, who, Jesus says, was a liar and murderer from the beginning. St. John says that the murderer Cain “was of the evil one” (1 John 3:12). In addressing the Jews who wanted to kill Him, Jesus identifies Satan as the father of all who hate God’s Son.

II. But how does that pertain to us? Aren’t John and Jesus just wailing on Cain and the murderous Jews? Surely the Lord’s not talking to us pious Christians, is He? But listen to His Word. His apostle St. John writes, “Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him” (1 John 3:15). And a bit later, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen” (4:20).

Follow the logic. If I claim to love God while hating my brother, I am both a murderer and a liar and cannot love God, and if I don't love Him, then I must hate Him. Looks like Cain and the hostile Jews and all of us are in the same boat. This is why we make this confession to Jesus in the hymn:

I caused Thy grief and sighing
By evils multiplying
As countless as the sands.
I caused the woes unnumbered
With which Thy soul is cumbered,
Thy sorrows raised by wicked hands. (*TLH 171:4*)

Don't lie to yourself. You have said in your heart, "I have reasons for hating my parents. I can make excuses for wishing that my brother were dead. I have good cause for casting an evil eye upon my neighbor." That's enough to make you a murderer in God's sight and place you under His wrath. The Jews filled up the measure of their fathers in tonight's Passion Reading, and if we're honest with ourselves, we must see ourselves right along with them.

III. What a marvel, then, that the Father would allow His Son to be murdered at the hands of sinful men, just to save a bunch of rotten, rebellious sinners with eyes filled with rage against God and man. "But God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God" (Romans 5:8–9).

The wrath of God is not a murderous glance from the Father, but a look of righteous judgment upon the guilt of sin. We all deserve God's wrath just as much as I deserved my father's punishment, but instead of giving us what we deserved, God put it on Jesus, and Jesus willingly took it, for us men and for our salvation.

From the cross, Jesus looked upon the masses of humanity and said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Original sin, which produces lies, hatred, murder, and every other sin, is so deep a corruption that we cannot recognize the depravity of what we think, say, and do unless it is revealed by God's Word. But once our murderous eyes have looked in horror on what we really have done—nailing the innocent Son of God to the tree with our sins—then we also are ready for the joyful Good News of the forgiveness of all of our sins for the sake of Christ's voluntary sacrifice at the hands of murderers, the death by which He has extinguished the wrath of God toward us. "For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation" (Romans 5:10–11). Rejoicing is the theme of *Laetare*, the Fourth Sunday in Lent. So rejoice in Christ, who has turned your murderous eyes away from sin, guilt, and despair and lifted them up to look upon Himself as your Savior. Amen.

May the love of God and the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit abide with you to life everlasting. Amen!