

THE GOSPEL OF LIFE

Study Guide by the SISTERS OF LIFE

CHAPTER 1, PART 1: QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. "God did not make death, nor does he delight in the death of the living. For he has created all things that they might exist" (*Wis 1:13*). Reflect on the fact that things are alive. Think of your life. Describe yourself physically (i.e. a woman of medium height, blond hair, grey eyes, etc.) Describe yourself interiorly (i.e. choleric in temperament, thoughtful, etc.) Reflect: God intended me to be.
2. Reflect on how our being and life is contradicted by the painful experience of death (cf. *Evangelium Vitae* paragraph 7). How have you experienced the pain of death in your own life?
3. In this chapter, John Paul II draws heavily from the story of Cain and Abel (*EV 7*). How do you feel when you read this story? Does it trouble you? If so, why?
4. God only desires Cain's good; He allows him to be tempted in order to teach him: "...sin is crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (*Gen 4:7*). God respects our freedom, even to the point of sin and death — even to His own crucifixion and death on the Cross. Why is freedom necessary for love?
5. The revolt against God in the garden of Eden eventually results in brother killing brother. "The presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin" (*EV 8*), leads us to often see the other as a threat, not as a gift. Can you think of examples of this in your own life?
6. Cain "refuses to accept the responsibility which every person has towards others" (*EV 8*). John Paul II connects this posture of heart with "the lack of solidarity towards society's weakest members" and "indifference" towards others (*EV 8*). How have you seen this manifest in society? In your own life? What does it mean to be responsible for others?
7. John Paul II notes that "whoever attacks human life, in some way attacks God Himself" (*EV 9*). God so closely identifies Himself with us that Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt. 25:40*). Reflect on this. This changes how we relate to others, and even how we see our own sufferings.
8. "God cannot leave [Cain's] crime unpunished" (*EV 9*), and so allows Cain to live with the consequences of his choice: "scarcity, loneliness, and separation from God" (*EV 9*). "And yet God, who is always merciful even when He punishes, 'put a mark on Cain, lest any who came upon him should kill him' (*Gen. 4:15*)." (*EV 9*) How does this illustrate "the paradoxical mystery of the merciful justice of God?" (*EV 9*)

9. Why is it that “not even a murderer loses his personal dignity” (EV 9)?
10. How does “the voice of the blood shed by men continue to cry out” (EV 10) in the world today?
11. John Paul II begins to speak of “attacks... affecting life in its earliest and in its final stages”, “which most often... are carried out in the very heart of and with the complicity of the family” and “have been designated by the state as ‘rights’” (EV 11). He asks: “How did such a situation come about?” What are your thoughts?
12. How does John Paul II describe “the culture of death”? Does it resonate with you? How have you seen a “conspiracy against life” ; “a war of the powerful against the weak” ; “structures of sin” (EV 12)?
13. John Paul II refers to a societal “contraceptive mentality” that undergirds the culture of death. How does he describe contraction and abortion as being connected? How does this make you feel? What do you think about this? Are you open to learning more about why the Church teaches what she does about contraception? (EV 13)
14. Reflect on your own understanding of techniques of artificial reproduction. Does what John Paul II describe regarding these techniques come as a surprise to you? (EV 14)
15. In a culture that “fails to perceive any meaning or value in suffering, but rather considers suffering the epitome of evil, to be eliminated at all costs”, euthanasia and assisted suicide are beginning to be offered as an answer. How does the Catholic faith understand suffering? Why is there always hope and meaning, no matter the situation?