

12.28.2018 – Feast of Holy Innocents, Martyrs – Homily

I Jn 1:5-2:2 Mt 2:13-18

A few days after celebrating the birth of a child, today's feast recalls that passage in Matthew's gospel that describes the death of children. There is a lot of darkness in today's gospel reading, all of it due to the ruler of the time, Herod the Great.

We know from the historical sources of the time that Herod the Great had a reputation for eliminating anyone whom he considered a threat to his power. He became increasingly suspicious towards the end of his long reign and had several of his own sons killed because he suspected they were plotting to overthrow him. The picture that Matthew gives us in this morning's gospel reading of Herod as a ruthless tyrant is in keeping with what we know of Herod's character. Herod could not tolerate anyone who might be considered King of the Jews, even if the King in question was a recently born baby and, so, in an effort to ensure this baby would die, he ordered the killing of all babies of a similar age.

Matthew suggests that Jesus was born into a world where those in power were ready to sacrifice innocent people if necessary, to ensure their own political survival. As a consequence, the family of Joseph, Mary and their infant son Jesus became refugees in the land of Egypt, far from their own home. We cannot but think of all those who have been made refugees today because of the abuse of political power and those who have been made victims by the abuses of many kinds of the powerful in the Society. Every day we pray for those victims and let us continue to pray for them.

There have been many such figures like Herod the great, down through the course of history, even up to recent times, rulers who are prepared to sacrifice any number of innocent people to ensure that they stay in power. This form of kingship, the kingship of Herod, was the polar

opposite of the kingship that Jesus came to proclaim, the kingship of God.

God is always at work in our world to preserve and enhance life in its various forms, especially life at its most vulnerable. We tend to be at our most vulnerable 1. at the beginning of our lives, 2. in our mother's womb and in the first months of life, and also 3. at the end of our lives when we often have to deal with sickness/suffering of many forms – like illness, disease, handicap, physical pain and emotional trauma, slander, abuse, poverty, and injustice. The gospel reading this morning suggests that there are other forces in our world, like Herod, that work to eliminate life, especially when it is at its most vulnerable.

Our calling from God, our mission in life, is to bring into line ourselves with God's life giving work. The feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that far too many innocent lives have been and, indeed, are being slaughtered.

There is darkness in each one of us but the darkness does not define us because the light of God's mercy is always stronger than the darkness of our sins. God remains faithful to us and keeps on calling us to bring the light of his Son into the darkness of our world.

Let us pray

Lord, I surrender all hurt, pain and confusion to you. I unite myself, this day, with the sorrow of those who lost these little children and I trust that their lives, as they reign now in Heaven with you, are a sign for me of things to come. I place before you all the children who are aborted, who are made victims of the abuse of the powerful in the society and pray for those innocents. Jesus, I entrust all the affected children and adults to you and know that you will right every wrong.

Jesus, I trust in you.