

HOLY INNOCENTS - 2014
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER JOHN ALTBERG
REVELATION 14.1 MATTHEW 2.13

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Martyrs occupy the mind and calendar of the Church on two of the three days immediately following Christmas...St Stephen on 26 December and the Holy Innocents... young male children of Bethlehem today.

St Stephen was killed to stop him from speaking out...being a vocal deacon in the formative moments of Christianity.

The children were killed before they could even speak in a despotic and cowardly attempt keep Christianity from ever becoming known.

Neither seem very happy topics for the joy of Christmastide and the great feeling we retain from the week just concluded. Indeed they are not. Anyone who tries to spin them otherwise looks pretty foolish...even the reformers of 1662 who embarrassingly changed to Collect to suggest that the murdered children of Bethlehem were at least glorified by the grisly act of Herod. BCP commentator Father Massey Shepherd and we are fully aligned around their absence of wisdom.

Their apologist viewpoint is tantamount to saying acts of ISIS, Sadaam Hussein, Pol Pot, Adolph Hitler and faceless terrorists acts of cruelty are partially mitigated by some resulting good!

There are some object lessons to be learned from the murders of both Stephen and the Children and the wisdom of the Church in making both of these immediate post Christmas topics is that we not be lulled into a euphoric sense of total wellbeing by the overwhelming grandeur of Christmas. As Christians we live in a world that is not always hospitable.

Herod was clearly a self-absorbed madman who used his governing power in the most despicable manner possible...relentless mass murder of the most helpless of all...children. And we have seen that same behavior in very recent times and in the century just past...one need look no further than ISIS. Sadaam Hussein, Pol Pot, Hitler or Stalin. All share a common thread of mass muuderousl callous

cruelty upon the innocent, the weak, the infirm, the dispossessed .

The current cruelty to innocent children unborn cannot be overlooked...for more than 30 years America and most of the world has become increasingly comfortable with the manipulated acceptance of abortion

At this point one cannot help but ask where's the good news of today...what can I take away from all this that's connected with Christmas...?

It is the fulfilling role of Joseph and Mary...comprising, with Jesus, the Holy Family.

Joseph and Mary, doubtless still in shock at all that had happened as they followed God's instructions,left Bethlehem to escape from the depravity of Herod.

At is all to easy to dismiss this as long ago in a far away place...and it was...BUT...

The pattern has repeated several time during our lifetime has occurred and occurs right today in sevaral places...

Suddenly our awarness to Innocent people, from children to the aged takes on a very cuurent dimension...one demanding our awareness, our care and our prayerful concern. The result of the world turning its back on the Innocent is all too familiar

We pause on this day to consider and give thanks for those who cared for us and enabled us to arrive safely at this point in our lives.

And we pray for families...our own, our friends and those unknown. We ask that God will guide, guard and direct them...always helping them to remain safe.

And on this day we pray especially for children...that they may be preserved in their innocence to live in freedom to safely grow and develop their talents.

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