

DECEMBER 28, 2019
Feast of the Holy Innocents, Martyrs
Matthew 2: 13-18

HOLY INNOCENTS “INFANT MARTYR FLOWERS”

Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great who ruled 37–4 BC. He was unpopular with his people because he was a Roman client king. He has strong connections with the Romans rather than to his own people. He was also unpopular because of his religious indifference. He was insecure and fearful of any threat to his power and his throne. He was a tyrant capable of extreme brutality for example, he killed his wife, his brother, and his sister’s two husbands, to name only a few.

The Feast of the Holy Innocents, who is part of the Octave of Christmas, just the fourth day after Christmas, commemorates the massacre of those innocent boys whose lives were taken by Herod because he was frightened by the coming of the new king.

In our gospel, Matthew described Herod greatly troubled when the Magi or astrologers from the East came asking the where is the newborn king of the Jews. Herod shrewdly told them to let him know if they found the child so that he too could do him homage. When the Magi found Jesus, offered Him their gifts, and warned by an angel to not come back to Herod on their way home Herod became mad and ordered the massacre of all the boys in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under. This horror of the massacre of innocent children and the desolation of the mothers and fathers led Matthew to quote Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled because they are no more.”¹

¹ Matthew 2:18 NRSV Catholic Bible Press USA

According to St. Augustine of Hippo: “We celebrate the heavenly birthday of these children whom the world caused to be born unto an eternally blessed life for they attained the grace of everlasting life before the enjoyment of the present. The death of these children is precious in the sight of God because of the beatitude they gained so quickly. These then, are justly hailed as “infant martyr flowers”; they were the Church’s first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief.”²

My dear brothers and sisters, even today human life is in danger just as much as the Holy Family was under attack during their time. Children are bullied and abused in the school, homes and even in the church. They are murdered, mostly affected during wars and conflicts, and abandoned because of greed and selfishness. Amidst these situations, we can make a difference, we can change the world even just a simple act of kindness and support. Just like the Holy Family threatened by Herod’s madness, we need holy families that will proclaim the Good News with great joy. We need holy moms and dads and children that inspire others through their unconditional love, care, support and sacrifices for each other. We need children who are willing to follow their parents and grandparents, to live their faith even others are not, and care for others through simple gesture of helping in household chores and looking for their younger siblings. Let ask the Lord, the baby Jesus in the manger, to protect our children as we care and love them.

My brothers and sisters, let this be our prayer as we celebrate this feast of the Holy Innocents:

“Holy Innocents, you died before you were old enough to know what life means, pray for all children who die young that God may gather them into His loving arms.

Holy Innocents, you were killed because one was filled with hatred, pray for those who hate that God may touch their hearts and fill them with love.

² www.communityofjesus.org

Holy Innocents, you experience a violent death, pray for all who are affected by violence that they may find peace and love.

Holy Innocents, your parents grieved for you with a deep and lasting sorrow, pray for all parents who have lost young children that God may wrap a warm blanket of comfort around them.

Holy Innocents, those around you certainly felt helpless to prevent your deaths, pray for all who feel helpless in their circumstances that they may cling to God for courage and hope.

Holy Innocents, you who are now in Heaven, pray for all of us that one day we may join you there to enjoy in God's love forever."³

Amen.

³ www.communityofjesus.org