

## **Homily For the Feast of the Holy Innocents - Year C**

### **St. Peter's 8:30 AM Masses - Tuesday, December 28, 2021**

**1 John 1:5 - 2:2** "God is light and In him there is no darkness. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin."

**Psalm 124:2-8** "Our help is in the Lord who made heaven and earth, the sacrifice for our sins."

**Matthew 2:13-18** "Herod killed all the children around Bethlehem two years and under."

### **Their Death Seemed Pointless**

#### **Introduction**

For much of the world, the Christmas story is just a children's book. Once the last page is turned, the book is closed and put back on the shelf. For much of the world, Christmas is a celebration to be sure, but one that resolves itself into both children and adults playing with their new toys and thinking about when to take down trees and lights.

But for those with faith, Christmas is only the beginning of the greatest story ever told. For those with faith, it is a time to jump into the heart of the true story of salvation history. The events which take place on every page of this story tell us of an intense showdown between the good God who made life from nothing, and the entire forces of evil who are committed to snuffing out that life.

At creation, life is born into an intimate embrace. At the birth of Jesus, life itself is born into our human experience. No one expects Jesus who, in his weakness, will nurture the flame of that life through every attack by the evil one. Today, we are invited to weep along with the mothers of the Holy Innocents

#### **Matthew**

The Bethlehem slaughter of the male children by Herod is an event from Jesus' life. It is a persecution which immediately unites him to Israel's plight, as well as Christians persecuted today. Jesus is the new Moses. Moses also was saved from the killing of all male children by a jealous king. The first Joseph saved his family by inviting them to Egypt to save them from famine. The second Joseph rescues

the saviour by following the instructions from a dream, taking the new Moses and his mother into Egypt.

Years before religious authorities will reject Jesus as the Messiah, the first rejection of him comes from the secular authority. Make no mistake about it, secular authorities today are committed to eliminating what they perceive to be threats to their rule. Later, the religious and secular authorities will work together to torture and kill him. The world doesn't want a king who loves profoundly, and who sacrifices himself for the good of all.

The Innocents are martyrs for Christ. It's a baptism of blood, even before there is a sacramental baptism. As Jesus does for his mother when he applies the grace of his death and resurrection to his mother at her conception, so he applies to these innocent martyrs the crown of glory, even before it is made available to the rest of the world by his death and resurrection. They confess their faith, not by speaking or acting but by dying.

Matthew provides a mysterious image from the prophet Jeremiah. It is Rachel weeping for her children at a place called Ramah. This has much more significance than it first appears.

Rachel is Jacob's wife. The Book of Genesis tells us that she died in childbirth on the road from Bethel to Bethlehem, near Ramah. That's where she was buried. It is also the place where the Jews were gathered to go to exile in Babylon after Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed and a great number, including children, were killed. Jeremiah was one of those exiles gathered there. He imagines Rachel weeping at Ramah because she is watching the deportation of her descendants from the very place where she is buried. But the Lord tells her not to weep, because her hope for the future lies in the eventual deliverance and restoration of her children.

In Matthew's day, Rachel weeps yet again, this time over the slaughter of the children at Bethlehem. There are no words of consolation in Matthew. However, the very next verse speaks of Herod's death and the return of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus to the land of Israel. Just as in Jeremiah's day, the situation seems bleak, but

the hope of salvation lives on. Matthew's readers, including us here today, are meant to understand that the long awaited Messiah has been born and the hope of salvation is close at hand.

This powerful passage is taken from a bishop named Quodvultdeus. He declares: "Why are you afraid, Herod, when you hear of the birth of a king? He does not come to drive **you** out, but to conquer the devil. You destroy those tiny of body because fear is destroying your heart. You imagine that you can prolong your own life, though you are seeking to kill Life himself. See how the deliverer is already working deliverance, the saviour already working salvation. While you vent your fury against the child, you are already paying him homage, and do not know it. The children cannot speak yet they bear witness to Christ."

## **1 John**

Remember that, in the life of faith, sin and death have exactly the same role. Death ends physical life. Sin destroys spiritual life. Jesus came that we would have life to the full. The salvation he offers is total victory over both of those evils. That is why the Church offers us the reading from John's first letter. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. This puts us outside of the salvation won for us by Jesus and proclaimed even by those murdered children . John wants us to understand that, when we deny our complicity with evil, we place ourselves in the realm of the great deceiver, the devil himself. Only if we admit the destruction that our sin does to our lives can we receive Jesus as the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Only then can we say with the psalmist: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth."

## **Call To Action**

Come let us worship the newborn Christ, who crowns with joy these children who died for him. Innocent they stand before the throne of God. They will never again know sorrow and pain. These male children are martyred for Christ. What sorrow and sadness, but they are martyred for the sake of Christ. They are now honoured and resurrected and glorified. The veil that is pulled back reveals that this innocent, who live and die for Christ, will be with God in heaven.

Rachel's Vineyard takes its name from these words of Matthew. It is a ministry for mothers and fathers of aborted children. In their own words, "It is a supportive, confidential and non-judgmental environment where women and men can express, release and reconcile painful post-abortive emotions to begin the process of restoration, renewal and healing.

God will right all wrongs. Death does not have the final say. In all of the ways we have experienced death in our own lives, there will be a reconciliation and a final victory. Let us today seek ways to unite our suffering and death to the Holy Innocents.

#### **Key Verses Today**

**Entrance Antiphon:** *Slaughtered for Christ, spotless, they sing forever: Glory to you, Lord.*

**Collect:** *O God, whom the Holy Innocents confessed and proclaimed, not by speaking but by dying, grant that the faith we confess may also speak through our life.*

**1 John:** *God is light and in him there is no darkness. If we walk in that light, we have communion with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If we confess our sins, he will forgive us and cleanse us. Jesus Christ is the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*

**Psalm:** *If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when our enemies attacked us, then they would have swallowed us up alive, when their anger was kindled against us. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.*

**Matthew:** *An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Joseph took the child and his mother by night and went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. Herod was infuriated and he killed all the children in and around Bethlehem two years old or under. Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children.*