

Monday 28th December 2020, Feast of the Holy Innocents

I've taken today's reflection from www.universalis.com where the explanation of today's feast is very clear and better explained than anything I could produce!

The Holy Innocents are the children who were slaughtered at the orders of King Herod, in the hope that by killing every boy born in Bethlehem at the same time as Jesus, he would succeed in killing the new-born King of the Jews.

There was nothing about those baby boys that made them deserve death. Look at any one of them, and you can see that he had no chance to do anything, or be anyone, or become anyone. He had done nothing; nothing bad, nothing good. He was born, and then he died, and that was all there was to him. So passive are these babies that some people find it hard to understand how they can share the title of “martyr” with people like St Stephen (the day before yesterday), who insisted on preaching the truth until his hearers stoned him for it, or St Thomas Becket (tomorrow), who insisted on living the truth until his king had him killed because of it. These children did not insist on anything except their mothers' milk; and unlike Stephen and Thomas, there was no voluntary act of theirs that we can see as making the difference between being martyred and not being martyred.

So in our rational human terms these children are a puzzle, and that is one reason why God has inspired the Church to celebrate this very feast – to show us how inadequate our seemingly rational, worldly-wise thoughts are. As he reminds us again and again throughout salvation history, his thoughts are *not* our thoughts. Babies may not rank high on the scale as far as our human calculus is concerned; but then neither do sparrows, and yet God has told us that God sees and counts every one of those.

The Holy Innocents can stand, therefore, for the so-called “unimportant” and “unnecessary” pawns, child and adult alike, that permeate the whole of human history, the ones who can be sacrificed for some greater cause because they “don't really matter”. The feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that in God's eyes (that is, according to the true value of things), *no-one* is unimportant, *no-one* is unnecessary, *no-one* “doesn't really matter.” However meaningless their lives and deaths may seem to us, they shine glorious in heaven.

On a more personal level, the honour given to the Holy Innocents reminds us that if we suffer or even die for God's sake, it has value even if we have little or no say in it ourselves. Honouring them effectively honours also the martyrdom of the people these children could have become, and their children's children as well; and at the same time, we can remember the contemporary and continuing massacre of those who die before birth for the convenience of those who have them killed.

A note on Universalis: do explore the universalis website as there is so much material there and a subscription bought once lasts for ever and on any device that you have. It's useful for following Mass online and gives the full range of readings for all the Church's liturgies, not just Mass, as well as biographies of saints of the day and reflections on our life of faith. – Carol Ann.