

Tuesday Reflection 28th December 2021 - Feast of the Holy Innocents

After the long wait in Advent and the joyous celebrations of Christmas, we are brought down to earth with a massive bump. There follow in quick succession the memorial of Stephen, the first Christian martyr, the memorial of the murder of the Holy Innocents and the memorial of the murder of Thomas Becket - a far cry from the 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all men' praised in the Christmas carol and a salutary reminder that the Incarnation is just the beginning, not the end, of the story.

It is uncertain how many children were the victims of Herod's bloodthirsty megalomania, but it was probably not more than 25. Unfortunately, Herod was not a one-off: in our days, 25 is the number of children killed or maimed in armed conflicts every single day over the last decade. Today, it is reckoned that 426 million children are at risk in conflict zones, and over the past five years more than 500,000 babies have died as an indirect result of conflicts - that is 300 every day.

'Coming back down to earth with a bump' could well be an alternative title to the poem *The Work of Christmas* by the Afro-American writer Howard Thurman:

When the song of the angels is stilled,
when the star in the sky is gone,
when the kings and princes are home,
when the shepherds are back with their flocks,
the work of Christmas begins:
to find the lost,
to heal the broken,
to feed the hungry,
to release the prisoner,
to rebuild the nations,
to bring peace among the people,
to make music in the heart.

from Howard Thurman's *The Mood of Christmas and Other Celebrations*

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