

Reflection Wednesday Christmas Week The Holy Innocents 2022

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.

None of those baby boys deserved to die. They had no chance to do anything, be anyone or become anyone. They had done nothing: nothing bad, nothing good. They were born and then died; that was all. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Yet they share the title of “martyr” with people like St Stephen, who insisted on preaching the truth until his hearers stoned him for it, and St Thomas Becket, who insisted on living the truth until his king had him killed. Unlike Stephen and Thomas, these innocents made no voluntary act of being martyred and not being martyred.

The Holy Innocents stand for the “unimportant” and “unnecessary” pawns, child and adult alike, that permeate the whole of human history, the ones who are sacrificed for some greater cause because they *“don’t really matter”*; the eggs that were broken to make an omelette... or even broken to make nothing at all. The feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that in God’s eyes, *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.

The honour given to the Holy Innocents shows 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.