

Reflection Thursday Christmas Week - The Holy Innocents 2023

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.

They did not deserve death yet they had no chance to do anything, or be anyone, or become anyone. They had done nothing bad nor anything good. So passive are these babies that some find it hard to understand how they can share the title of “martyr” with people like St Stephen, who insisted on preaching the truth until his hearers stoned him for it, or St Thomas Becket, who insisted on living the truth until his king had him killed because of it. They simply had no choice.

In celebrating this feast, we see how inadequate are our rational, worldly-wise thoughts. God reminds us again and again throughout salvation history that his thoughts are *not* our thoughts.

The Holy Innocents can stand for those considered “unimportant” and “unnecessary” pawns, child and adult alike, that permeate the whole of human history, those who can be 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. There are plenty of them; think what is happening in Gaza at this very moment. The feast of the Holy Innocents reminds us that in God’s eyes *no-one*, absolutely *no-one* is unimportant, *no-one* is unnecessary, *no-one* “doesn’t really matter.” However meaningless their lives and deaths might seem to us; they shine glorious in heaven.

In the honour we give to the Holy Innocents we show 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 the martyrdom of the people these children could have become, and their children’s children as well. We also remember the contemporary and continuing massacre of those who die before birth for the convenience of those who have them killed. May they rest in peace!

The frugal pastor walked into the house panting and utterly exhausted. “What happened, honey?” asked his wife.

“It’s a great new idea I have to be a better steward of our resources,” he gasped. “I ran all the way home from the stewardship committee meeting behind the bus and saved £1.50.

“That wasn’t very bright,” replied his flustered wife. “Why didn’t you run behind a taxi and save £10?”