

Holy Innocents Annual Pro-Life Mass

Holy Rosary Cathedral

28 December 2017

Dear brother priests and deacons, dear friends engaged in fostering the culture of life, and brothers and sisters in Christ:

Introduction

In one of his writings, St. Augustine points out to us why we are celebrating the vicious slaughter of young boys as a feast day in the Church, especially at this time when continue to rejoice in the birth of the Infant Jesus in Bethlehem. This is what he wrote:

Blessed are you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah! You suffered the inhumanity of King Herod in the murder of your babes and thereby have become worthy to offer to the Lord a pure host of infants. In full right do we celebrate the heavenly birthday of these children whom the world caused to be born unto an eternally blessed life rather than that from their mothers' womb, for they attained the grace of everlasting life before the enjoyment of the present. . . The end of the present life is for them the beginning of glory. These then, whom Herod's cruelty tore as sucklings from their mothers' bosom, are justly hailed as "infant martyr flowers"; they were the Church's first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief.

Born into a Dark World

Today's feast reminds us that the pastoral scenes of the warmth and intimacy of the manger, while they rightly focus our attention these days of Christmastide, are not the whole story surrounding Jesus' birth. He was born into this world of ours, which then, as now, is full of inky darkness. Feeling threatened by some unknown king who has been announced, Herod sets out on the attack to kill the opposition. As soon as the new Adam is born, we have a new Cain in a murderous Herod. Yesterday, as today, authoritarian and despotic rule knows no bounds in what it is willing to do to foster its own interests.

Tragically, and with the consent and aggressive agenda of political and social elites, abortion continues to kill countless holy innocents in our own country and in our world.

We ignore the implications of the uncomfortable and disconcerting narrative of the Holy Innocents at our peril, for it makes clear one of the main themes of Matthew's account of the birth of Christ. Evil exists in the world, and it will stop at nothing to counteract the good, to oppose God, who so desperately wants to make his dwelling among us.

Besides the joy that overflows from the birth of Jesus, Christmas is also accompanied, much to our dismay and whether we like it or not, by tears. Matthew the Evangelist did not disguise this reality to make it

more attractive, nor indulge in comforting but empty words. For him, the Nativity was not a flight into fantasy, a way of hiding from the challenges and injustices of his day. On the contrary, he relates the birth of the Son of God was an event fraught with tragedy. Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Matthew presents this grief in the bluntest of terms: “A voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children” (2:18). It is the sobbing of mothers bewailing the murder of their children in the face of Herod’s brutal tyranny and unbridled thirst for power.¹

Today too, we hear heart-rending cries of pain, which we can neither ignore nor silence. We are surrounded by the lamentation of so many mothers who have lost their children before birth or as young infants, of the silent screams of the unborn as they are killed in the womb, of the elderly who being pressured to think that they are a useless burden on their families and society.²

Nor can we forget the cries of those mothers who, like Rachel, weep for the loss of a child whom they have aborted. On this delicate matter, I would like to cite the words of St. John Paul II. They should always be kept in mind, and they remind us to be grateful that Project

¹ Cf. Francis, Letter to Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December 2016).

² Cf. Francis, Address to the Sant’Egidio Community (15 June 2014).

Rachel reaches out to those experiencing grief from the loss of a child by abortion:

The Church is aware of the many factors which may have influenced your decision, and she does not doubt that in many cases it was a painful and even shattering decision. The wound in your heart may not yet have healed. Certainly what happened was and remains terribly wrong. But do not give in to discouragement and do not lose hope. Try rather to understand what happened and face it honestly. If you have not already done so, give yourselves over with humility and trust to repentance. The Father of mercies is ready to give you his forgiveness and his peace in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. You will come to understand that nothing is definitively lost, and you will also be able to ask forgiveness from your child, who is now living in the Lord. With the friendly and expert help and advice of other people and as a result of your own painful experience, you can be among the most eloquent defenders of everyone's right to life. Through your commitment to life, whether by accepting the birth of other children or by welcoming and caring for those most in need of someone to be close to them, you will become

promoters of a new way of looking at human life.³

To contemplate the manger during the Christmas season also means, therefore, to contemplate these cries of pain, to open our eyes and ears to what is going on around us in politics and the legal realm, and to open our hearts to those who suffer from the trivializing of human life which engulfs us. To contemplate the manger in isolation from the world around us would make Christmas into a lovely story that inspires warm feelings but would rob us of rising to the challenge that the slaughter of the Holy Innocents presents us.

Faced with the atrocious crimes that were taking place in Bethlehem, St. Joseph – that model of an obedient and loyal man – was capable of recognizing God’s voice and the mission entrusted to him by the Father. Because he was able to hear God’s voice, and was docile to his will, Joseph became aware of what was going on around him and was able to interpret these events realistically.

The same thing is asked of us today: to be attentive, and not deaf, to the voice of God, and hence to be aware of what is happening around us. And, like St. Joseph, to do something about it.

I want to thank and express both my admiration and support for all of you who have not remained on the sidelines but, year after year, indeed decade after decade, have been willing to confront the Herods of

³ St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 99.

our day who wear so many different masks. Your patience, sacrificial love and determination are exemplary. The ways in which cherish, foster, protect, and defend human life are varied – and rightly so. Some lobby, some march, some counsel, some adopt, some write letters, some organize programs. All pray. We have to remind ourselves that there are many ways to be pro-life and that it is by being united in heart and mind, by living in charity, that the good Lord will give us the victory.

Conclusion

We are offering this Eucharist together because from this divine gift we receive the grace to be to be strengthened in our resolve to do all in our power to foster in Canada a culture which receives with gratitude and honours the beauty of life at every stage of its God-given existence from conception to its natural end.

To the Herods of our day, we can reply with the joyful angel choir, who sang at the birth of Jesus and continue to raise their song for each child conceived and destined for eternal life.⁴ Let us thank the Lord that Christ, the light of the world (cf. Jn 8:12), has shone in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

⁴ Cf. Bishop Anthony Fisher, Homily.

Be Realistic but Hopeful

As pastors, we are called to help foster this joy among the faithful. We are charged with protecting this joy. I ask you once again that we not let ourselves be robbed of this joy, for we can be disillusioned at times, not unreasonably, with the world around us, with the Church, or even with ourselves, and feel tempted to indulge in a certain melancholy, lacking in hope, which can lay hold of our hearts (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 83).