

## **Holy Innocents Annual Pro-Life Mass**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

28 December 2018

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

### ***Introduction***

Today's Gospel tells us of the heartless killing of infants. Herod distinguishes himself by the cold-blooded murder of innocent babies, in an effort to secure his throne against any rivals. Informed by the Magi who came from the East to see the new king who was to be born (cf. Mt 2:2), Herod senses a threat to his power, and after their departure he orders the death of all male children aged two years or under in Bethlehem and the surrounding towns.

The radiant light that shone over the Bethlehem manger now appears to have lost its brilliance in face of this systematic slaughter of children. Already at Jesus' Birth, we see at work the great battle between the forces of life and the forces of death. The struggle that begins with the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, proceeds to the Crucifixion on Good Friday, and continues with the killing of unborn children down to the present day. Even as a Child, Jesus is a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2:34).

Whether we like to think about it or not, Christmas is accompanied by tears. To contemplate the manger in isolation from the world around

us would make Christmas into a lovely story that inspires warm feelings but fails to take into account our own situation in Canada where killing life in the womb and euthanasia are legally sanctioned. We can't experience the peace of Christmas if we ignore the cry of those whom our society discards.<sup>1</sup>

The Evangelist Matthew did not want the joy of Jesus' Birth to hide the injustices of his day. On the contrary, the events surrounding this Birth were fraught with tragedy and grief. Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Matthew presents it in the bluntest of terms: "A voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children" (Mt 2:18). The birth of Mary's Child is accompanied by the sobbing of other mothers bewailing the death of their children in the face of Herod's tyranny and unbridled thirst for power.<sup>2</sup>

The unrelenting struggle between a culture of truth and love, on the one hand, and a culture of lies and death, on the other, is first fought in the hearts of individuals. Every life-giving gesture has an individual giver and beneficiaries. So too does every act of violence or killing, where perpetrator and victim both suffer the moral evil.

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

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Francis, Letter to Bishops on the Feast of the Holy Innocents (28 December 2016).

Yet this struggle also has social, political and cultural dimensions. There is a wide web of people, forces and ideas that incline us to act in ways that either build up or tear down a culture of life which recognizes “the transcendent dimension of human life, the imprint of God’s creative work, from the first moment of its conception.”<sup>3</sup>

We can never lose sight of, nor neglect to affirm, that “The law of God is unequivocal and categorical with respect to human life. God commands: ‘You shall not kill’ (Ex 20:13). No human lawgiver can therefore assert: it is permissible for you to kill, you have the right to kill, or you should kill.”<sup>4</sup> This teaching was recently affirmed by Pope Francis: “Our defence of the innocent unborn, for example, needs to be clear, firm and passionate,” he wrote, “for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development.”<sup>5</sup>

Because a spiritual battle is underway, we need evangelizers of life, more people like you who are willing and prepared to take on our culture which has made the most wondrous and sacred human space –

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<sup>3</sup> Francis, Address to the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (20 September 2013);

<sup>4</sup> St. John Paul II, Letter to Families, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Francis, *Gaudete et Exsultate*, 101.

the womb – a place of unutterable violence. We have to continue to work hard and competently to help people to understand that using violent means against another human being, no matter how small or how fragile that person may be, is never a truly humane and compassionate solution to a trying situation.

In the Christmas Gospel we heard the Angel declare to the shepherds: “I bring you news of great joy for all the people: today is born for you in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord” (Lk 2:11). The source of this “great joy,” as Pope St. John Paul II once pointed out, is obviously the coming of the Saviour. But it is also the joy that should accompany every child’s coming into the world.

Let us work prayerfully and zealously to foster a society which in every case would relish the joy of new life and protect it from the moment of conception.

Your voice in the defence and promotion of all life, dear friends, whether by personal or collective actions and prayer, is crucial if the minds and hearts of Canadians are to be converted to support the dignity of every life from conception to its natural end. I know that many of you have struggled for so long that you might have become a little tired. I understand that all labourers deserve rest. But one thing I would ask of you. Be mentors to the young people who are taking your place, sometimes with new methods but always with the same ardour. It

is an enormous blessing that they recognize and live the intimate connection between the pro-life cause and the pursuit of social justice.

### ***Conclusion***

Today the Lord is saying to us all: do not be afraid to engage the good fight for life (cf. 1 Tim 6:12). Pray and pray long and hard for the grace to be courageous and persevering in the struggle against the wickedness and snares of the devil.

Let us pray for the babies who are threatened by the termination of pregnancy, as well as for the people who are at the end of life – every life is sacred! – so that no one may be left alone and that love may defend the meaning of life. Let us recall the words of Mother Teresa: “Life is beautiful, admire it; life is life, defend it!”, be it a baby who is about to be born, or a person who is close to death: every life is sacred!<sup>6</sup>

Remember that when you proclaim the liberating truth about the dignity of human life, you are offering the joy to the world of which the Angels sang.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, *After the Angelus* (5 February 2017).