"Holy Innocents"
Based on Matt. 2
Preached on Dec. 27, 2020

Why didn't God stop the slaughter of innocents (and why not today when we see similar slaughters of innocents)? Answer: If God came in power to slay Herod and everyone like him, then none of us would be left. Instead, He came in meekness and love.

He did not come as a mighty King to slay His enemies. This is the kind of king Herod was trying to be. Christ did not want to come and be a bigger, better, stronger Herod. No, He came to be the King who is born in a manger. He came to be a helpless Baby King. He came to be hunted and persecuted and finally killed. In meekness and love, He came to save us.

Besides this, God allows persecution of His Church for a very good reason. Doctor Martin Luther puts it well when he says: "When tyrants rage against the Gospel, they do no more than blow into the ashes. Then the fire becomes greater, and the ashes fly into their eyes. This is the success which their tyranny is to meet. When they shed innocent blood, this blood of the Christians is to act as a fertilizer on the field, making it rich and productive. For through persecution Christendom grows; conversely, Christians become lazy and lax when conditions are peaceful and quiet."

This is a good word for us. Do we want good times and no enemies? Then we will likely become lazy and fat, spiritually speaking. We may complain when the world treats us poorly. Quite frankly, the little bit of persecution in America is barely worth mentioning. In other countries, they cut off your head for being a Christian.

Think how hot is the fire of the faith of those who are willing to stand up and be counted as a follower of Christ, when they know they will probably die for it. Think of how people outside the Church notice the courageous witness of these martyrs. Those seeking to extinguish the faith find that they only fan the fire.

In our country, most people do not intentionally set out to persecute Christians. They do not say, "Hey, I think I'll go afflict the Church today!" Why do they do it?

Why did Herod do it? Because Herod loved Herod. He loved being king. He loved his power. He loved his comfort. He would defend his way of life, even if it meant killing babies.

In defending their way of life, abortion supporters must also defend their sacrament, abortion. This act, which is sacred to them, represents their freedom to be who they are and defend their way of life and cherished beliefs, even if babies have to die.

Many who enjoy their lives of sin do not want a reminder to their conscience that what they do is wrong. They do not want reminders that they need the Savior. They want to continue loving themselves, and continue to think that their heart is a place of light and goodness. In the name of this light and goodness, they will do much to spread hate and darkness without recognizing what it is that they spread.

Are we better?  We at least do not destroy lives to the same extent as Herod.  Most of us sinners do not have so much power; therefore, the damage we do others in putting them second is not so spectacular as Herod's efforts in Bethlehem.

But shall we see ourselves as fundamentally better than the Herods of the world?  That would be to see our hearts as loving, and theirs as not.  But isn't that exactly what they do?  We do not hurt others, at least not unless it is justified in our eyes.  But that is to think much of the rightness of our own judgment.

We do hurt others.  We are not rampant murderers.  But we are, in our own ways, little Herods.  Give us enough power, and eventually our self-love will find a way to do much more damage.

In each baby that Herod killed, he was guilty of killing Jesus.  In Herod's case, that was what he intended to do.  More than that, by God's act of being born a Man in Bethlehem, He became each one of them and of us.  He became lowly so that even the lowly are His kin.  To kill the least of these is to kill Christ.

When we hurt, we hurt Christ.  When we, in our angry, hateful thoughts become murderers, we are thinking angry, hateful thoughts against Christ.

The same kinds of thoughts led Christ to the Cross.  The same kinds of sinners as we nailed His flesh to the wood.  He did not die with the Holy Innocents when He was a Baby because it was not the right time.  But His death was inevitable.  A world full of Herods insured that He would die.

But that was the plan.  He intentionally walked into the ambush.  He voluntarily jumped into the pit of vipers.  He knew what our world was.  He came nonetheless and took the lowest place, the place of pure innocence.  And this world knows only one thing to do to innocents.

In this way, He redeemed us Herods.  Even Herod, if he realized who Christ was, might have repented and received absolution in the Blood of the Innocent One.

This we have done, and are declared innocent.  In Christ, we are now the redeemed who stand innocently before a bloodthirsty world.  Now our blood may be required of us to bear witness to the Innocent One.  But that is okay.  Like the little circumcised males of Bethlehem, we are secure in the Covenant of our God.  By faith He holds us forever safe, in spite of the swords and spears of the enemy.  They may take this earthly life, but like Christ, we will rise, blessed forever.

Now we are the true refugees.  It has become popular in certain circles to refer to Mary and Joseph as refugees.  They were, at least in their flight to Egypt with the Christ Child.  But more than that, we are refugees and pilgrims in this life.  We live in this world, but we are not of it.  We wander, as it were, in a strange, hostile land.

The holy innocents were spared the long road of hardship in the foreign land which is this sinful earth.  Instead they took a shorter path to their triumph.

We take a longer path, yet triumph is ours nevertheless.  We are already more than conquerors.  The Innocent One, the Son of Mary, has walked this path to blood and suffering and death.  In so doing,

He conquered, and His victory is ours.  Whatever appearance our life may have, we have won in Christ Jesus our Lord. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.