

## Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Dec 28th 2018

Feast of the Holy Innocents, martyrs

The feast of the Holy Innocents, dating back to the fifth century in the Latin church, presents us with something of a quandary. Ordinarily the celebration of a Saint or group of Saints is meant both as a way of honoring their memory and as an incentive for us to imitate their example. We can certainly honor the memory of the Holy Innocents, but what is there for us to imitate? We honor a group that was not yet capable of taking a stance before God and indeed not yet capable of accepting or refusing the sacrifice of their lives. With all the respect due to this commemoration, it is difficult for me to propose a lesson we could learn from the Holy Innocents themselves.

But we can learn a lesson from Herod, the one who dictated an order that, according to one tradition, applied even to three of his own sons as potential rivals to the throne. Regardless of the accuracy of such details, historical sources do present Herod as a cruel ruler, ambitious to the point of paranoid jealousy when it came to potential rivals, especially a “newborn king”. He had obviously acquired wealth and power and, in the Ignatian paradigm of Satan’s standard or program, he had come to absolutize himself. It is in this that we can find a lesson for ourselves. We may not have his wealth or power, but I am afraid we have the agility to jump straight to the self-absolutizing stage and, once there, we can easily be tempted to sacrifice others to our own advancement. We can and at times do hurt people (“Innocents”?) in order for ourselves to look better and to improve our position or status. Being aware of this real risk, we can profit from considering once more with Ignatius of Loyola the Lord’s standard or program diametrically opposite to that of Satan, one that leads us through poverty/simplicity to not seeking being honored and to acknowledging humbly before God our position as creatures.

I wonder how many people today would consider that the Holy Family were refugees, having had to leave their homeland to escape the violence that threatened them at home. Refugees do not leave their homeland on a whim, but rather seeking to live in security. They leave behind everything, except their human dignity, which we all –individuals and governments– need to respect.

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