

Monday December 28<sup>th</sup>, The Feast of The Holy Innocents.

Good Morning from St. Bernadette's.

I hope everyone is keeping safe and well, and following all the guidance we receive to overcome these strange times, and continuing to pray for all our needs at this time.

Chilly and damp, but when I went in to Church at 8:30 this morning I was given a hearty greeting and when I turned round, my next but one neighbour were removing the chimney of the cottage two doors down – appropriately enough wearing a santa hat!

And so today we celebrate the martyrdom of the Holy Innocents, slaughtered by Herod the Great. Herod had a huge influence on Judah, building many cities and palaces. But he was also a very violent and unscrupulous person, afraid of any threat to his position. When he learned of the birth of a king he was worried and tried to eliminate all possible candidates around Bethlehem, all the young children under the age of two years. On this Feast, sometimes called 'Childermass', while still in the octave of Christmas, these innocent, nameless, victims are honoured as the first to shed their blood for Christ.

The first reading for today's Feast is from the First Letter of St. John 1:5-2:2. God is light. If we live in light we will live in union with Jesus Christ. None of us is innocent. If we deny any sin in our lives we are liars. But if we acknowledge our sins, then God will forgive our sins and the blood of Jesus Christ will purify us - he is the sacrifice that takes away our sins.

And the Gospel, Matthew 2:13-18 recounts the slaughter of the Innocents. God in his providence saves Jesus from the wickedness of Herod, with the Lord appearing to Joseph in a dream, telling him to '*escape into Egypt, and stay there until I tell you.*' It was only when he died that Joseph brought the young Jesus and his mother back to Nazareth. The children become special martyrs. The Gospel beautifully quotes the prophet Jeremiah:

*A voice was heard in Ramah,  
sobbing and loudly lamenting:  
it was Rachel weeping for her children,  
refusing to be comforted  
because they were no more.*

It is significant that in the Octave of Christmas we celebrate Stephen, the First Martyr, as well as these little Innocents, and tomorrow the Martyrdom of St. Thomas Becket. From the first moments of his birth, people sought to stop the message of the Christ child. In many ways, nothing has changed; there are still so many people who would wish to silence Christian teaching, even seeking to remove Christ

from his own birthday celebrations. Let us always have the courage to stand up for our faith – perhaps seeking the intercession of the Holy Innocents themselves.

*O God,  
whom the Holy Innocents confessed  
and proclaimed on this day,  
not by speaking but by dying,  
grant, we pray,  
that the faith in you which we confess with our lips  
may also speak through our manner of life.  
And May your Saints, these children,  
who, though still unable to profess your Son in speech,  
were crowned with heavenly grace  
on account of his birth,  
intercede for all your faithful people.  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

And with Rachel, weeping for her children, let us pray a prayer for all parents who are weeping for their children today:

*Oh Lord,  
you know every tear that has fallen onto our cheeks.  
You know how painful and devastated parents are at the loss of their precious child.  
Please help the parents to use their tears as healing  
and not to hold back or try to be strong on their own when it's too much to handle.  
Thank you that you care about every single tear drop that falls from our eyes,  
it is not lost on you.  
Help us to mourn alongside these parents,  
and help us to continue to trust you in moving forward.  
Help them to know that you are in control  
and that there will be a day when all the heartache and brokenness of the world  
will be gone forever. Amen.*

Let us sing 'Silent Night.' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRZOv31n1sY>

Have any of you been singing 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' over the festive season? There are lots of suggestions of the meaning of the song, but one theory is that it is actually a coded Christian song. The single partridge in a pear tree of course refers to the One God, and the other gifts:

2 Turtle Doves: The Old and New Testaments

- 3 French Hens: Faith, Hope and Charity, the Theological Virtues
- 4 Calling Birds: the Four Gospels and/or the Four Evangelists
- 5 Golden Rings: The first Five Books of the Old Testament, the 'Pentateuch'
- 6 Geese a-laying: the six days of creation
- 7 Swans a-swimming: the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the seven sacraments
- 8 Maids a-milking: the eight beatitudes
- 9 Ladies Dancing: the nine Fruits of the Holy Spirit
- 10 Lords a-leaping: the Ten Commandments
- 11 Pipers Piping: the eleven faithful apostles
- 12 Drummers Drumming: the twelve points of doctrine in the Apostle's Creed

I'm not sure how much truth there is to this, but it's a nice thought! And very Augustinian when I think about it. St. Augustine had a 'mathematical theology: one God, two emanations of the Holy Spirit (from the Father and Son), three Persons of the Holy Trinity, four relationships between the three persons, and so on. I think I'll just sing Twelve Days of Christmas. Altogether now... On the first day of Christmas...!

I believe that today is a Bank Holiday, so have 'a steady and solid-y jolly bank holiday' (anyone get the reference?). Oh, and here's a pic of the flower arrangement in front of the lectern. Beautiful.

Once again many thanks for all your return mails. Apologies if I don't reply immediately, sometimes they seem to get lost (or kind of bunched up). Any suggestions for ways to keep our faith and spirits up at this time are most welcome!

And remember, St. Bernadette's is not closed. We're just doing things differently for a while, until we are allowed to gather together once more, more stronger, more faithful, more loving, more creative, and more grateful for the amazing community that is St. Bernadette's.

With love and faith in Jesus.

Fr. P.