

Readings for Tuesday in the Octave of Christmas the Holy Innocents

FIRST READING: 1John 1:5—2:2

A reading from the first Letter of Saint John:

Beloved: This is the message that we have heard from Jesus Christ and proclaim to you: God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say, "We have fellowship with him," while we continue to walk in darkness, we lie and do not act in truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the Blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin. If we say, "We are without sin," we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we acknowledge our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from every wrongdoing. If we say, "We have not sinned," we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. My children, I am writing this to you so that you may not commit sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 124:2-3, 4-5, 7cd-8

Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare.

Had not the LORD been with us— When men rose up against us, then would they have swallowed us alive, When their fury was inflamed against us.

Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare.

Then would the waters have overwhelmed us; The torrent would have swept over us; over us then would have swept the raging waters.

Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare.

Broken was the snare, and we were freed. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.

Our soul has been rescued like a bird from the fowler's snare.

GOSPEL: Matthew 2:13-18

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

When the magi had departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I tell you. Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him." Joseph rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed for Egypt. He stayed there until the death of Herod, that what the Lord had said through the prophet might be fulfilled, *Out of Egypt I called my son*. When Herod realized that he had been deceived by the magi, he became furious. He ordered the massacre of all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had ascertained from the magi. Then was fulfilled what had been said through

Jeremiah the prophet: *A voice was heard in Ramah, sobbing and loud lamentation; Rachel weeping for her children, and she would not be consoled, since they were no more.*

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Tuesday in the Octave of Christmas the Holy Innocents

There is a conundrum presented in today's readings. Jesus is our savior. His death freed us from sin. His resurrection gave us the promise of eternal life. However, we still sin and in order for eternal life to become our gift, we must die first. Jesus may be the light but how? He dispelled the darkness yet the darkness remains in us. What gives? What does it mean to walk in the light with Jesus? How is Jesus the light?

Johannine theology is full of signs and symbols that need interpretation. Light and darkness seem to be polar opposites. Black and white, good and evil and right or wrong betrays a duality of thinking. On paper, this is very simple. We live in a world that is anything but simple. We experience the world as a complicated place. We have to make all sorts of choices all the time. Some have little or no moral value at all, like what to have for lunch or what to watch on TV tonight. There are other choices that we make that have moral implications. To wear a mask or not in public during a deadly pandemic and whether or not to get a vaccine against COVID have grave moral consequences.

If we listen carefully to John, walking with Jesus in light is an action. Believing in God and Jesus are not simply internal, personal experiences. To believe means acting in life a new. Acting without sin? Is that the newness? No, we are all human beings and not perfect. Only God is perfect, good, holy and unconditionally loving. Try as we might, failure is always our likely option. Forgiveness is always God's action toward us. God's justice is always forgiveness for us, sinners. We think in our limited and human way. For us, justice is punishment for our sins. To seek punishment is the path of darkness. To seek forgiveness is the path to light; the path to God.

We, as believers, will continue to seek God, God's forgiveness and Jesus' light our entire lives. Our lives are a journey from birth to death with Jesus to eternal life. The light does not end there either. Jesus will return, the dead will rise and the living live together in the Kingdom of God. This passage is the gospel, the good news of God's eternal, infinite and unconditional love for you, me and the rest of humanity.

The gospel of Matthew is the sole source of this heinous act of genocide. True, human history is replete with such acts. Matthew wanted to connect the story of Jesus to specific prophetic passages to show that Jesus' life was consistent with the scripture's promises. I must point out that Matthew wrote his gospel not as Jesus contemporary or as a witness to the events as they unfolded. He wrote from a perspective of faith. His faith was in the Risen Jesus who triumphed, through the cross and grave, over sin and death. He reflected the post Pentecost, Holy Spirit filled faith of the Early Church. He made all the prophetic connections as he wrote as a testament to the Church's faith.

What effect has the Incarnation had on human life and the world? We can point to specific things, events and individuals. We live, though, in a world that appears just as violent and full of despicable deeds as did Jesus. Our news is full of the atrocities of murders, poverty, wars, insurrections, disease, avarice and sexual exploitation. Has anything really changed in Jesus? What exactly did Jesus do when, as God was born like us in all but sin, Jesus died, rose, ascended and sent the Spirit? Hopefully Jesus has changed each of us. We can admit our sins and seek forgiveness from him as we fail on our journey to the kingdom. In doing so, we turn to God, seek God's loving presence and continue our journey with God. Things continue to happen, good and bad. God shares compassion and mercy with sinners, of whom I am foremost. Sin leads us to God and God leads us through this life to the Kingdom. With God's forgiving grace we give witness to God's life and promise. All we need do is to entrust all, our sins and pain included, to God. God works in God's time and God's way.

As to why atrocities have happened and why they continue to happen I have no idea. Each time they do I cringe. All I can do is to entrust victims, perpetrators, you and me to God's grace and mercy. God has promised to accompany us with God's presence. Faith does not give any of us the answer to the question why. I have no idea, sometimes of why I do what I do. Can I presume to know God's mind and reasons? Faith gives me the opportunity to know God's heart. God is love; infinite, eternal and unconditional. God's heart is Jesus. God has never shared with me any intimate thoughts. God has revealed Jesus and through him spoke the Word that created the cosmos and you and me, love.

May we always find God's compassion in painful moments.

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