

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

“Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked. For you, O Lord, are my hope.”

It’s idolatry plain and simple to insist that God’s ways must be our ways and his thoughts, our thoughts. Yet even though thinking that way is idolatrous, we still do it and we get mad at God in the process. The fallen human intellect and will don’t want to face the world in which people suffer. We don’t want a God who rules over the world all the while people are killed, children get sick and die, or in the case of the reading today, little boys are killed in Bethlehem simply because this is where they lived.

No, in our minds God must conform with what we recognize and want as good. If God doesn’t follow our thoughts and ways, then we will dismiss him because in our minds we think that God is not worthy of our love and our worship. It goes this way with how we live our lives as well. “If the Bible condemns what I love and what I love to do, then God must not really care about me” or “If there is suffering and death then how can there be a God and these things happen?”

The danger, on the flip side, however, is trying to use our reason in a way that answers where God has not answered. The easiest course of action is to put the blame onto people in ways where we think God isn’t a big boy and can’t answer for himself. We think, “that person got cancer, he must have done something to deserve it.” Or we may try to package it up a bit more piously by saying, “I lost my baby, God just must have really wanted her with him.” Jesus warns against this line of thinking in Luke 13 when he refers to a tragedy that occurred. Jesus said, “Those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”

We can’t judge God, we can’t assign motives, we can’t comprehend the incomprehensible. Romans 11 references several Old Testament passages when it states, “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’”

What then do we have? Do we simply chalk this up to God’s sovereignty and think God is just going to do whatever he feels like it at the time or that is distant and cannot be known in any way? No. Where does that lead? Despair. So, what, then? Lord, to whom shall we go? God does speak. We have his word, the Holy Scriptures. We have what God has given to us and reveals to us. Does that give us every answer? No. What does it give us, then? It reveals who our God is and how he does operate and ultimately everything comes to head in God who dwells among us and was born in Bethlehem, Jesus. God’s word has been given to us and God, the Holy Spirit gives us something through this word, faith.

Today is the feast of the Holy Innocents. On this fourth day of Christmas, there are not four calling birds (although some attribute the four calling birds to the four gospels) rather there is this event which jumps beyond Epiphany and the visit of the magi. St. Matthew recorded by divine inspiration, “Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men.”

Two kings are in this reading on this feast day. One is wicked and tries to exercise his power to kill. The other King is good and in great humility and weakness is exercising his power to save and give life. The fact that these young boys were killed is nothing short of wicked, terrible, and something sinister. Both statements are true, then, we know that God is not the author of sin and evil and we know this from the reading itself. “Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more.””

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Amid the tyranny and death of Herod and these young boys, which most likely was quite a small number such as around 20, the prophesy of Scripture was fulfilled. When this happened by Herod's wicked ways then the prophesy was fulfilled. Were these boys martyrs? Typically, the term martyr is reserved for someone who died for his or her confession of the faith or because of a faithful confession. In that narrow sense, then perhaps no. However, the children of Bethlehem do occupy a unique place in Christian history because of what God was doing in Jesus at that unique time and place. Indeed, God was at work and was even able to take up human evil and sin and cause it to be known as part of the scriptural plan that was fulfilled by the Christ Child. The babes of Bethlehem would not have been slaughtered if the Christ had not been born among them. In that sense, then, they did die for the sake of Christ. Their deaths on account of Christ prefigured the martyrdom of those who would bear Christ's name. Thus the church's observation of Holy Innocents' Day on December 28 can rightly be the occasion—as will all the martyrs' days—to praise and honor the One who died and rose for the martyrs and for all.”

Despite the best efforts of sinful man, God could not be conquered. The darkness of Bethlehem was great that day but the darkness that is sin, death, and the devil, could conquer the Light of the World, Jesus. The passage from Jeremiah which is fulfilled in this event is part of the Old Testament reading today. The Old Testament reading ended with these words of Jeremiah, “There is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country.”

In that was this terrible event, God still used it for his purpose in redeeming his people. Jesus was protected by Joseph as the Lord told him to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt to escape the attacks of Herod. Just as God led his people out of Egypt into the land he promised, the Father would call out his Son from Egypt to bring his people to their eternal paradise. God reveals himself in Jesus. God reveals what is going in this reading and for what purpose.

Those boys died that day too early and because of a sinful man. The one who escaped because an angel warned his earthly father and guardian is Jesus. But you see, Jesus would not escape death, but he would do so on his own terms and for his own purpose. Jesus fulfilled all righteousness and the day would come when Jesus would submit himself to the earthly rulers and lay down his life for the life of the world. He laid it down for these boys of Bethlehem, for the whole world, and for you. Jesus gave his life for theirs and for yours. That's what you know in all this and what God speaks to you. The incomprehensible God reveals himself in one who is fully God and fully man and has redeemed you. In a situation and event that is horrible, life has the final word. Christ is the one who has conquered.

Consider your life even today. The same thing remains that God's ways are not your ways and his thoughts are not your thoughts. But dear saints of God, your Lord is the one who has redeemed you and does reveal his will for you in the person and work of Jesus. He is the one who sees you in your sin and rather than throwing you to the waste side says, “I forgive you.” He is the one who rather than looking distantly at this fallen world and all that is sin, death, suffering, evil, and the assaults of the devil, entered this world and has overcome the world. He is the one who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem fulfilling all that has been promised. He is the one that entered death destroying death by his death. He is the one who is risen from the grave and says, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” This is Jesus. You want to know God's ways? Here is Jesus who the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Will this give you every answer to living in this vale of tears that is life on this side of glory? No. What will it give you? Jesus and fixing your eyes on him in faith, perseverance, endurance, and hope.

As you go through this life, fix your eyes on Jesus. In this life you will have trial, tribulation, suffering and death. There are times when these things may ebb and flow. Sometimes you may suffer difficulties that are mere inconveniences and sometimes you resonate with these mothers who cried out over the lifeless bodies of their sons. In all circumstances however, you don't know God's ways and thoughts in terms of why these things are happening or how these fit into the grand scheme of the things. What you do know, though, is who your God is and that he is good, just, and there is no evil and malice in him. You know the Lord who has given himself for you and is truly good and cares for you. When your sinful flesh, the devil, and the world try to get you to doubt God, confess before them all, “In you, O Lord, do I

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take refuge; let me never be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. For you are my rock and my fortress; and for your name's sake you lead me and guide me." This is what you know in faith as you trust God's word or rather this is who you know, Jesus.

There is a real freedom to live in this faith as well. You aren't weighed down with the sufferings of this life because you know your future and what it entails because you belong to Jesus. Even at times when you cry out in lament, "why God?" you do so as children of your heavenly Father knowing that he hears and answers your prayers and never forsakes you or puts you to shame. Even suffering and all the terrible things that may happen in this life God does use them for your good. This doesn't dismiss what happens as insignificant or write them off, no what it does mean is that God in Christ has taken sin upon himself to atone for it. He has overcome the world by his life, death, and resurrection. He gives you healing and new life as Isaiah beautifully prophesied, "Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." You know God and his mercy and salvation in Jesus and he is for you.

The Holy Innocents is not a particularly joyous day in the church year or a pleasant day of the twelve days of Christmas. Yet the Church doesn't hide her past and what really happened when the Lord Jesus was born in this world. The truth remains, though, it is still Christmas. Christ the Savior has been born, and he was born for you. Weeping is turned to rejoicing as Christ is revealed to you and given to you and you have the victory. God grant you a steadfast faith each day and in every circumstance. He will do this for he who promises is faithful. Rejoice in Jesus and this Christmas joy you have in him who has gives eternal life. "There is hope for your future, declares the Lord, and your children shall come back to their own country." What a joy it is to have such a future in Christ and this hope even now and a joy beyond compare when you and all God saints stand before your Lord face to face. On that day those who lived in Christ on this earth over a hundred years will stand shoulder to shoulder with those who lived but a few hours or few years waving the palm branches of life and victory. That day, is the day all sorrow, sin, death, and evil are no more and there is only life forever.

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