

Homily for Feast of the Holy Innocents

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What a jolt this story is coming so soon after the celebration of Christmas!

It's a reminder that Jesus experienced human life to the full including danger and evil. This incident caused Mary and Joseph to become refugees. What if Egypt had closed its' borders and sent them back? How could Herod have been so cruel? Who was this man?

Born 73BC to Idumeanman and the daughter of an Arab Sheik.

Astute Politician – won favor with Octavian Caesar Augustus.

King of client state of Rome

Brilliant builder – Temple, Masada Caesaria

Brutal – killed Father-in-law, 2 wives and 2 sons

Insecure throne

In the midst of this come the Magi looking for a newborn King of Israel. Herod responds as we could expect of him – He perceives a threat to his throne. Worse – it's a vague threat. – an unknown male child somewhere in Judea indicated by a cosmic event seen by Magi 2 years previous.

So here is Herod – insecure, fearful and equipped with Kingly power! What a terrible combination!

We know the rest of the story: How Herod finds out the probable location of the child, how he is fooled by the Magi. He plans to have the Magi find the child for him but an angel intervenes. With his plan frustrated Herod does the unthinkable. The male children of Bethlehem pay the price for his paranoia.

This story seems so long ago and far away. But is it?

The murders of 20 children and 6 adults in Newtown Connecticut was committed by an unstable, mentally disturbed man in possession of the power of firearms.

Does this have anything to do with us? Yes I'm afraid so. These stories begin in the human heart. They begin in our hearts. When we are afraid, when we feel insecure, when someone stands in the way of our plans, we too are capable of causing pain to others. We too have weapons – we have words.

Remember the old saying “Sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me”. It’s not true. We can remember hurtful words said to us. If we let them, these words can color our relationships with others and even with God. We forget how powerful words are. That we later regretted. I certainly have. The quick comeback, the sarcastic remark, the muttering under breath are all too familiar. I want to respond differently. How do I break the cycle of being hurt and causing hurt?

I have 3 helpers available to me: prayer, silence and self-knowledge.

I can ask God for the blessing of conscious awareness of this unconditional love and acceptance of me. I can examine my life to become aware of how God has cared for me. I can keep a gratitude diary to become aware of how much I have to be thankful for. Doing these things can help reduce my insecurities with God and others as I center my: mind in God’s presence, I can be freed to respond to others more compassionately. Silence is my second tool. “Set a watch before my mouth, O Lord, and guard the door of my lips... Let not my heart incline to any evil thing” Ps.141:3. If I wait in silence before I speak I can be less quick to be defensive. I am enabled to turn hurt into self-knowledge

The last, but most important tool I have is prayer. In prayer, I give my fears, defensiveness, anger and insecurity to God and ask for help. I can pray for those with whom I am in conflict. Fred Shilling’s Blessing Exercise was an eye opener for me. As I pray those blessings for others, I find my heart becoming more free and open.

Finally, the world and each of us have already experienced more than enough hurt. We may not be able to remedy the world’s ills and injustices but we can influence our own small corner of it. It starts with us. It starts within us

Through prayer; silence and self-knowledge, with the help of God, we can transform the places where we live.

Let us ask God for the courage to do so.