

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Our observance of Holy Christmass leads us to learn much about the life of the Christian in the world. On Christmass we rejoiced at the holy birth of our Lord and Savior, born of the Virgin Mary, born in Bethlehem. We rejoiced with the shepherds and the angels and the heavenly host that the Christ was born. The altar was bedecked in gold. Christmass hope was ours.

The next day the gold was gone. The altar was red, as we heard the account of the martyrdom of St. Stephen. That account brought us to the sobering realization that the world that crucified the Son of God treats the Christian no differently. He came to His own, but His own received Him not. Neither do they receive those who come in His Name.

But yesterday the altar was white, and we learned of the Beloved Disciple and his testimony of the Incarnate Lord. We heard of the love of God, of the Holy Incarnation, of the God that is seen and touched and heard, God With Us, God with our flesh, God who redeemed us that we be declared holy, body and soul.

Today that same altar is violet. Today we hear of what well may be the greatest of atrocities in the New Testament, the slaughter of the infants we call the Holy Innocents. Gold to red to white to violet reminds us that while heaven is ours, we live out our lives in this fallen world. Holy Birth, to the first martyr, to the love of God, to the violence of men teaches us that while we have been declared holy in Christ, the world still perishes in sin and death.

An angel warned Joseph. He warned him that the Christ Child, the Babe of Bethlehem, be protected. God, who alone is omnipotent, took on our flesh and was born a helpless Infant. God the Son need to be protected by His own creatures. Joseph hearkened to the angel's warning, and took the Christ Child and Mary to Egypt.

Herod, deceived, angered, ordered the slaughter of all the male children in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the Prophet, saying "A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."

The violence and cruelty are unfathomable to us. Our natural reaction is to protect and nurture young children. We hold them, comfort them, feed them, and care for them. We protect them not only after birth, but from conception to birth. The child in its mother's womb has a soul.

As shocking an atrocity as Herod committed in the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, we must confess that many more children are put to the sword, or the scalpel, in our country every year. Of that we must all repent, seeking God's mercy, and we must work tirelessly to end the murder of the unborn among us. For God sees. God knows. And the God whisked to Egyptian safety by Joseph, the God shielded from Herod's blade by the Holy Innocents, the same God returns soon as Judge.

Herod swung his murderous sword, and the all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and younger, absorbed that fatal blow. They were a human

shield that protected the Child of Mary. Their blood ran that His be spared, for a time. So although no man born of human father is without sin, although no man of Adam's lineage, of which we all are, is conceived and born holy, because their lives were given to protect the Christ, we call them the Holy Innocents. And so are the paraments violet this day, for like Rachel weeping for her children, we mourn their unjust and violent deaths.

And yet the same Prophet that foretold that bloody atrocity also wrote "Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears." And to St. John the Divine the reason is manifest. For to John was the vision of the Church Victorious given, the Church in glory. There John saw the heavenly throne room, the reward of all those redeemed by the Blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. It is He that visits mercy upon sinful men, redeeming them by His own Blood.

And so it is for you, dear Christian. Yes, the paraments are violet this day. We remember the young boys of Bethlehem. But we do so in the light of Christ, in the sure knowledge that the Lord they died for was spared for a time, but then He too gave His life. And in His death is the remission of all your sins. In His death and resurrection is eternal life made yours. It is you of whom the Prophet writes when he says "they shall come back from the land of the enemy", for Christ has redeemed you, He has sundered you from the land of the dying, and He has made you His own.

So there is hope in your future, dear Christian. God has prepared a place for you in heaven. See that place through the Words of St. John, to whom heaven was opened. There are the holy martyrs, made holy in the Blood of Christ. There are the mysterious four living creatures, the elders, and the Church in Glory. That Christ has won for you. Heaven is yours – now – but not yet. The paraments are violet for a short time more.

But soon the gold and white of rejoicing will be yours. For the joy of Holy Christmas overcomes the violet days of this earthly life. The brilliant white of the resurrection of Christ eclipses the darkness of sin and death. The sure knowledge of your salvation, your forgiveness, your justification, your sanctification, the saving faith given you by the Holy Spirit, they bring you comfort and hope as you live out your days in this fallen world. For you live not for this world, but for the world to come, won for you by Christ your Lord.

It is He, your Lord, Mary's Son, the Babe of Bethlehem, the Man of Calvary, the Enthroned Lamb in the center of heaven, that makes Himself your Meal this Day. You eat His Body. You drink His Blood. You have His forgiveness. You have His life, life that cannot be taken away. So take heart, dear Christian. The Holy Innocents are commended to a loving God who gave His Son to die for you. He is a God of grace, a God of love, the God of Christmas joy.

The Son of God who was protected from Herod's sword by the Holy Innocents is the Son of God who died for you. He protects you from death and the devil by His precious death and glorious resurrection. For that He was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. For that He was made Man. For that He was born in Bethlehem. He was born for you. Rejoice, dear Christian. Receive the joy that Christmas brings. For in Christ you are safe, and Rachel weeps no more.

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