

He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost +

I remember a sermon preached during this season by a beloved priest who had a great deal to do with my vocational formation. Fr. Russell's sermons I know now were theological, but at the time I thought they were sermons were usually direct and a bit stuffy. This Sunday however he began by telling this joke:

What pet does the Bible tell us that Jesus had as a child? The answer he said was a flea. The Bible says that the angel told Joseph to take the child, his mother and flee to Egypt.

The congregation smiled or even chuckled and then he said we make jokes about those things that are so terrible that we cannot stand to consider the reality of them. We make jokes to pretend they are not so horrible. We make jokes because doing so allows us to think of them as somehow normal and worst of all that we can do nothing about them.

Why was Joseph told by the angel to take his family to Egypt? Because Herod driven by his sinful pride and arrogance was going to order that all the male children in Bethlehem who were two years of age or younger be killed. This he believed would save his kingship. This is the slaughter of the innocents we commemorate each year on December 28th.

In the midst of the great and glorious celebration of the Word becoming flesh, the fact that God became man so that we could share in the divine life, we commemorate a holocaust of unimaginable proportion. Thank God that is all in the past. But is it?

On Wednesday the usual group gathered and we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Innocents. I offered part of this reflection to them and so to them I apologize for being repetitive.

The question that this yearly commemoration poses for us is about our role in the slaughter of the innocents and whether that slaughter was an historical event or part of the human condition. I suggest to you that we feel most comfortable considering this historic reality as if we are looking at it through a telescope.

When we look through the eye piece of the telescope the image of what happened is clear. Herod is to blame, what a horrible man he was and now that he has died I'm sure he getting his just reward. It is a nice neat package that does not affect us at all. Except that when we do that we are being like the Pharisee that when into the synagogue with the sinner; the sinner beat his breast and begged for forgiveness. The Pharisee prayed to himself as he boasted of his righteousness. I am not like that man.

If we turn the telescope around the situation is just as bad. We look at the event and now rather than seeing it more clearly it appears to be even more of the distant past. We can say to ourselves that we have evolved so much since that time. And again we are being like the Pharisees; trusting the structures we have built, the laws we have enacted and the culture in which we live has corrected all those past mistakes.

How could be any more incorrect!

The slaughter of the innocents goes on minute by minute day by day and we cooperate with the slaughter. The easy and obvious comment I could make would be about the Holocaust in Germany or the Soviet Union. The death camps in Thailand or the continuing murders for the sake of religious zealotry in the Middle East and around the world. Just yesterday morning 20 people were murdered when a bomb exploded after Mass had been celebrated outside their church.

And again lest we be too proud of ourselves I must mention the children killed each day by health care professional who abort them, killing them. In his country where we proudly proclaim life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, for all our citizen, we take those rights away from the youngest citizens of this country.

And I pray that I am not making you weary with this list of injustices committed against the innocent, there are the even more subtle things for us to consider. What about the economic decisions we make every day. We are delighted to find the bargain and we never consider the true cost. A nice shirt, tool or appliance, but where is it made, and by whom? There are innocents in China, Malaysia and around the world who live desperate lives working long hours for pitiful wages so that we can have that bargain.

Look at the T.V. guide, the local video store, computer games or the internet and consider what is being offered as entertainment to our children and the children of the world. Are we not slaughtering their innocence with this so called entertainment which focuses on violence and sexuality?

And consider what they are learning about eternal life when they are influenced with stories of witches, demons and vampires? Are we not continuing the slaughter of the innocents when we cooperate with the production and distribution of such materials? Preachers warned a generation ago warned about the hidden dangers of Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom. How right they were and how much farther down the slippery slope we have traveled in a single generation.

The excuse that the culture accepts these things and so they must be okay, is not acceptable for the Christian, because the culture is not Christian. St. Paul writes in Romans 13:11 "Besides this you know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; "It is time for us to rise from our sleep, or complacency and act.

We must in the here and now as Kingdom People, people who expect that not just one day that they will live in the Kingdom of God with Him forever, but choose to live in a manner fitting the kingdom now. Speak out boldly about injustice, consider the purchases you make and when you are concerned about the source of a product tell the store manager and then do not buy the product. What good does one voice do? Perhaps not much, but what if it was hundreds or thousands who refused to cooperate with this slaughter of the innocents.

Practice what our parents taught us, custody of the senses. Be aware that what we see and hear and experience affects not only our minds and bodies but our souls. Parents guard your children and again speak out boldly against the public library lending movies

that should not be seen by children. Consider what books, movies and video entertainment you allow you children to experience. If they are desensitized to violence in the video world, why are we surprised when their actions transfer to the real world?

A few month ago I spoke of the role of the baptized as being living Sacraments. This is exactly what I am asking you to consider today. I began with the quote from the prophet Micah. He lived in a time when human life was cheap, slaves were owned by many people. Witchcraft was practiced and many people sought comfort in so called mystery religions such as the vampire myths of today.

Micah's words should both a comfort to us and a challenge. "He (Micah is referring to God) He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

We are gifted to know the right way to live, and we are challenged to do justice and love kindness and to protect the innocent.

Amen