

This Sunday, as we commemorate the Holy Innocents, we confront an imponderable evil: how could Herod heartlessly order the murder of numerous innocent children? Today we remember how Herod sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under. What insanity, what cruelty! It is hard to imagine someone so cruel and vile! What is next? Will we hear of assassinations and attempted assassinations done in front of thousands? Will we hear of throwing things and shooting at to police officers? Will we have riots and unrest?

You know, in some ways Herod’s insanely vicious order doesn’t seem so extreme after all.

This world has been filled with horrors and atrocities throughout time. In the 8th Century BC, the Assyrian army destroyed Israel and attacked Judah. Those not killed in battle were either murdered and impaled, or led off literally with hooks in their skin. In 70 AD, fulfilling Jesus’ prediction, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem with great horrors and death.

The last century witnessed a Great War that was supposed to “end all wars.” But it didn’t bring peace. Rather, then came the Nazi holocaust with Hitler responsible for the deaths of a total of 17 million people. Hitler was outdone by Stalin, who killed between 20 and 30 million. Then along came Chairman Mao making their slaughters look like child’s play, with over 45 million dead. Then there were Tojo, Pol Pot, Kim Il Sung, Castro, Franko, and, well, you get the picture.

This world seems to be just insane! But this is not new. Hatred, violence and evil are simply normal. If anything, humanity has just gotten more efficient at everything, including killing other people. Violence, murder, hatred, you name it, should not surprise us.

The world is insane, and for one very simple reason – the world has rejected its LORD. If it seems like this world is filled with anarchy, there’s a good reason for that: it is! Anarchy is the chaos that comes from not having or rejecting authority. The true Monarch over our world is its maker, the true God: God the Father, along with our Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit. But the world has rejected its true King.

Consider what John wrote in the first chapter of his Gospel:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. ... The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. (John 1:1-3, 9-11)

From the very beginning of time, people have rebelled against God. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, had only one command to follow – don’t eat of the one tree. So, what did they do? They ate it. Their firstborn son Cain took sin to the next level by murdering his brother, and from there mankind has continued on that path. If we really understand the nature of sin, it should not surprise us when people commit murders and heinous crimes. Sinners sin; pagans act like pagans; the godless act in godless ways.

However, if we take a long look inside ourselves, we should see the same problems as well. We too seek our own good first and foremost. We too get angry and nurse resentment. We too have lashed out at others, physically or verbally. We all have the same sinful nature as Herod and the worst of this world.

No, we Christians should not be surprised at the evil in this world. We should see it in ourselves. When the London Daily News asked its readers what is wrong with the world, the great Christian author, G. K. Chesterton gave the insightful answer: “In one sense, and that the eternal sense, the thing is plain. The answer to the question, ‘What is Wrong?’ is, or should be, ‘I am wrong.’ Until a man can give that answer his idealism is only a hobby.” We all should see our corruption. Even though we may not have committed great crimes, we should see that the same urges are in us, and if allowed to run free, would have us committing terrible things.

The thing that is really surprising is not that a jealous king would give the insane order to kill all baby boys in an area; the thing that is truly shocking is that the Holy God would enter this messed-up world.

Jesus came into this sinful world, and He came to die at the hands of sinful men. His whole plan hinged on selfish, arrogant, sinful people calling for His cruel death. But Jesus came to die on His timing and according to His plan. He would not die under the deranged Herod the Great, or his equally deranged son Archelaus. No, He would die under the rational, calculating Governor, Pontius Pilate.

Most of all, Jesus came to die under the wrath of God. The wrath of God against sinful, rebellious mankind – including you and me – was poured out on the innocent Jesus. And in Jesus’ death, God forgives you for your sinful rebellions against Him. This is wonderful, good news!

But we still need to live in this crazy world of Herods who kill the innocent and commit other such atrocities. We still live where people suffer as a Christian. Muslim soldiers and the Chinese Communist Party still kill Christians, specifically because they are Christians. Charlie Kirk was killed, at least in part, because of his clear Christian witness.

So, how are we to live in this insane world?

Let's look at the hero of the faith in our Gospel text. The hero is a man we know little about, named Joseph. And what did Joseph do? He did his duty in the vocation God placed him. Joseph was nothing more than a faithful husband and father of the child God entrusted to him.

Joseph had the benefit of being warned in a dream and followed God's lead. But what makes Joseph the hero is that he did the right thing. He didn't say, “but what about my career here in Bethlehem? I'm just getting settled into doing carpentry here!” He didn't hit snooze and wait until a better hour. When the angel warned him “Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.” He got up and did what he had to do. Joseph then used his judgment to avoid Archelaus and move back to Galilee rather than return to Bethlehem.

What we have here is the story of the craziness of sin in this world, and a faithful man simply doing the right thing to protect his family.

Of course, we all wish we too could be warned by God in a dream of what to do. We need to go through the messier process of praying, seeking advice from others, weighing choices and doing what seems best. But know that you have the comfort that God is no less with you than He was with Joseph. As Psalm 119:105 says, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” God does give you guidance in His word as to what is right and wrong.

God also gives us freedom to choose options in this world. So, there is not a narrow set of things you or I must do or else we are outside of God's will. And He gives us the assurance of His forgiveness in Christ whenever we misstep.

But He still calls for you to live in this Insane World by living in service in the vocations He has placed you. Just as Joseph was a faithful husband and father. In the same way, you serve God as a parent, spouse, child, worker, volunteer, etc., wherever God has placed you.

It is the nexus of these two things that guides us as to how to live in a world insane with sin. Live in faith, in your vocations, serving those around you. And know that the true victory over the sin in this world and in you has been won by Jesus.

Is the world still insane? Of course! But Jesus came to restore God’s sanity. And He calls for us to live in peace, in the peace Jesus has won, even as the world continues to be raving mad around us.

When we follow Joseph’s example, we have the right recipe: do the right thing where God has placed you, all the while keeping your eyes on Jesus.