

Weekly Musing † December 12, 2011

This week is completely bereft of Holy Days so I am going to talk about the feast of the Holy Innocents. When I was in high school I remember going to St. Stephen's church on the three Holy Days after Christmas- St. Stephen (Dec. 26), St. John the Evangelist (Dec. 27) and Holy Innocents (Dec. 28).



This sentimental Victorian painting by Holman Hunt shows the Innocents as suspiciously Nordic and healthy babies whose only sign of their martyrdom is the one in front who inspects some holes in his garment. Of course the story from Matthew is that Herod found out from the Wise Men about the birth of Jesus and the prophecy that he would be king. Though the Wise Men received a message in a dream not to return to Herod, Herod supposedly killed all male infants in Bethlehem under the age of two years.

Coin of Herod the Great (NOT the Herod at the time of Jesus' crucifixion- that was one of his sons) showing the helmet of his soldiers on the reverse. His name, in Greek, is on the obverse (HEPODY). Yes, of course I have one.



Most Biblical events of this era can be verified by extra-biblical sources, that is, writings outside of the Bible. Not so this one. There is no other evidence of such an event. The seminal book on Herod published in 1999 by a Canadian scholar named Richardson says that Herod had a total of eleven wives and had children by nine of them. A couple of them plotted against him (a not uncommon scenario) and he had them killed. This may well be the actual event that gave rise to the notion of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents.

You may say to yourself, well thank you so very much! Why do we even leave that on the calendar? Well, whether this event actually occurred or not, do you think there have been times in history when those truly innocent, that is, children,



have been murdered by venal adults for selfish reasons (as though there could be unselfish reasons for same)? Of course there have been. The killing of children is the apotheosis of evil and this does not take much reasoning, it is a reflexive sentiment and a true one. Christianity is haunted by sentimentalism which is sentimental about both good and evil. Sentimentalism imagines the true locus of good as the individual acts of an individual in terms of the conventions of society about "being nice" etc. Likewise, they imagine evil as mostly somebody incredibly rude and think of those who kill as "probably mentally ill or something." Alas, it is not so.

It seems to me very fitting for the church to commemorate and honor those who have been killed and unlike the rest of us, are truly innocent. When I was on the staff of the cathedral in Atlanta, one of the local parochial schools was Holy Innocents (day school) which now has kindergarten through the 12th grade and 1300 students.

Tuition is over \$20,000 if you are interested.

Contemporary Icon of the Holy Innocents. It is generally the case that martyrs are shown in their ascended state in icons, not their martyred state.

News from St. Luke's

Thanks to all of you who worked on the ECW bake sale, the Christmas Pageant, and the Christmas dinner. A special thanks to Noelle Kent, Tim Pray, Grace DeBoer, and Adrienne Funk.

Our youth group meets this Wednesday at 6 pm with the women of St. Stephen's cooking. The youth group will meet at Fr. Waddingham's house for a movie and Pizza on December 21. We'll be watching Steven Spielberg's Gremlins.

Christmas Services:

Christmas Eve Saturday, December 24

- 6 pm Eucharist with children's sermon
- 8:30 pm Hymn Sing
- 9 pm Eucharist with incense

Christmas Day Sunday, December 25

- 10 am Morning Prayer with music
(no sermon)

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