

Mass for the Burial of Unborn Children  
Lamentations 3:22-26;  
Rev 2:1a, 3-5a;  
Mt 2:13-18

St. Mary Cathedral, Lansing, Nov 20, 2010 11:00am.

In the twenty-seventh chapter of the Gospel of Matthew we hear that the leaders of the people persuaded the crowds “to ask for the release of Barabbas and to destroy Jesus.” That same verb is used in today’s gospel, where Herod seeks to “destroy” the child, Jesus. To do this, Herod orders the death of boys under two years of age. Christian commentary on this text over the ages have ranged from twenty killed to 144,000, in imitation of the Book of Revelation. No matter the number, we know that even one is too many.

Matthew then finds this event to be a fulfillment of the prediction of Jeremiah 31:15, where Rachel weeps for her children, which was probably originally a reference to the exile of the children of Israel. Let us keep Rachel in mind here. She stands for all of us today.

The second chapter of the Gospel of Matthew is thus an account of acceptance and rejection of Jesus. The magi and shepherds (the foreigners and the lowly) accept Jesus just prior to our reading today in the first part of chapter two. The leaders (the powerful) reject Jesus in the section of chapter two which we just heard proclaimed. But Jesus is not really destroyed, either here at the beginning of his earthly life nor even at the end, because God used Joseph to rescue him and in the end used the resurrection from the dead to glorify him.

From Matthew 25, we know that how we treat the least of our brothers and sisters is how we treat Jesus himself. Thus today we mourn, like Rachel weeping for her children, we mourn for how some seek to destroy Jesus in these his least brothers and sisters. Yet, not only for the hurt to the Lord, we also mourn for these children themselves, whose very lives were desired by God, whose dignity was given by God, whose purpose and destiny are known only to God. We mourn them and we commend them to the mercy of God, their creator and redeemer. In doing this we rely completely on the words of the Book of Lamentation: “The favors of the Lord are not

exhausted, his mercies are not spent.... My portion is the Lord, says my soul, therefore will I hope in him.”

Yet, today as we pray for and bury these young sisters and brothers of ours, we are also mindful of others. We have concern and care for them: the mothers and fathers of these infants, those who provided the services which led to the deaths of these children, those of us who have not done enough to assist parents who see the demise of another as their only recourse, and our whole society which looks upon the death of another as our way out of difficulties. Our prayers today are for a change of heart and mind. We pray for conversion. Here too our reading from the Book of Lamentations is so helpful: “Good is the Lord to one who waits for him, to the soul that seeks him; it is good to hope in silence for the saving help of the Lord.”

Whenever we gather for a funeral, we do so because we really do have faith in what God can do, especially when we find ourselves boxed in and limited. God can raise the dead; God can free me from darkness and sin; God can change our hearts.

Jesus reminds us today, in his Letter to the Church at Ephesus as found in the Book of Revelation, that what is really needed is love. While finding so much good in that Church at Ephesus, Jesus also knows that they do not have the love which they once had. We must measure all that we do and think and say by that love. Jesus gives us all a path back. He tells us to remember our first love, our love of God, our love of neighbor. Bring that to mind; dwell on it. Then he urges us to conversion by practicing the works of love.

So, my sisters and brothers, let these our young sisters and brothers, whom we bury today, be a silent witness to us, challenging us to love, even as Jesus has shown us the incredible love of God. And may our love help us be brought to the conversion we need and be a summons to all in our society to the conversion that they need.

God bless you all.