

Sermon for the First Sunday after Christmas December 28, 2025 jj
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It was a terrible, heinous crime. It couldn't be better described than as a senseless act of terrorism. This shameful, inhuman slaughter was truly a low point in the administration of justice that God has entrusted to fallen mankind. However, in God's eyes it was considered necessary that His Son would be handed over to sinful men to be crucified. Jesus was truly the only completely innocent victim in the history of the whole world. His painful, shameful death on the cross is a picture of unfairness to the highest possible degree.

But when you hear the story of King Herod sending his soldiers into the quiet little town of Bethlehem, about an hour's march away from Jerusalem, in order to kill all the baby boys under age 2, when you even think of this unspeakable act, you cannot believe that anything could be any worse. Only a miserable madman obsessed with keeping hold over his little corner of the vast Roman Empire could issue such a bloody order against defenseless children. I personally put more blame on the chief priests and other religious leaders serving in Jerusalem, because they knew their king would be intent to kill even the promised Messiah; but they loved their power too much. Intoxicated as they were by their own Jewish teaching that one earns God's favor by carefully following man-made rules, they wanted nothing to do with this free forgiveness of sins stuff.

And so, because the Word made flesh came unto His own and His own did not receive Him, the Child born to us at Christmas would be the Man of Sorrows, the Suffering Servant of Good Friday. Today as you are still in the afterglow of the beginning of the Christmas season, remember that the Baby Jesus was

marked for death, even before He was learning to walk. Satan and his followers, yes, this is a spiritual battle in the greater perspective, the devil himself worked hard right from the start to get Him out of the way. And finally, when the hordes of evil do get their way, the Lord's death on the cross would be the greatest injustice of all, even greater than when these young martyrs, called the Holy Innocents, gave up their lives simply for their proximity in location and age to the Savior of the world.

I want to make something very clear, though. I'm not speaking of this dark chapter in the Christmas story today to garner any pity from your hearts, pity either for Jesus, being wrongly sentenced to death or for the mothers in Bethlehem who suffered a tragedy, whom the prophet Jeremiah described poetically as Jacob's wife Rachel, weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, for they are no more. To put it very bluntly, your pity is not welcome. You and your sins caused this whole thing to happen, and there's no way to skirt around that fact. As a poor, miserable sinner, your heart is in no better shape before God's absolute righteous judgment throne than King Herod's. For you, not a day goes by that you don't insist on what you deserve, or build yourself up at the expense of others, or lash out in frustration and anger against your own family. It's probably worse around holidays and particularly stressful occasions. Take it from someone who knows the same for himself. You think so highly of your man-made traditions and taking responsibility for your actions, and yet the whole time you breeze through this Christmas story that you've heard year after year. You even know very well that Jesus is the "reason for the season," and still no guilt strikes at your heart.

Repent. The Lord does not need pity from you. Rather, you, fellow Christians, need pity to come to you, from Him.

And that is exactly what you get. Merry Christmas! Thankfully, pity from God is not just a shallow sorry feeling. He did something about your injustice to Him, your sin toward others, their sin against you. He continues to do something about it. Whether your sinful heart is as evil as King Herod or as indifferent as Pontius Pilate, your Lord Jesus, the truly Innocent Victim, has had divine pity upon you. Because of His great love for you, your heavenly Father called forth His beloved Son out of hiding in Egypt, under the care of His earthly parents, so that the death He escaped as a little child would eventually catch up to Him as an adult in the fullness of time and make full payment for your sins and hurts. Though it was an injustice, the greatest injustice, His death on the cross was not a lost cause. In that shameful, wicked death, He accomplished His mission as your Savior and destroyed death, sin and Satan forever. Even your sins and mine were wiped out that day, when Jesus reversed forever the injustice you placed upon Him, forgave you of everything, and the Father is delighted to claim you back as His own dear child. For when the Son rose from the dead on the third day, He made it clear that He was the victor, no longer the victim. And that victory He gives to you, His precious Holy, Christian and Apostolic Church.

Weep no more, Rachel, you who mourn the tragic death of your babies. Keep your eyes from tears, Mary, sitting at the foot of the cross looking up at your brutally wounded and expired Son. Though you here today either have had, or will have death and tragedy stain the fabric of your earthly life, remember through your tears that the death of Jesus not only was more tragic, but at the very same time was also the final end of your sorrows.

Remember that just as His death led to His resurrection from the dead, so also you, the Holy Innocents, and your departed loved ones shall soon rise together to enjoy the blessed presence of the Holy Trinity in eternity. They are in Christ, just as you are, because of your Baptism, and they are here in the unseen assembly of heaven that we mention in the weekly Communion liturgy. The Body and Blood of Jesus you are about to eat and drink place you in that Holy Communion of Saints where there is no more crying or pain.

As the prophet Jeremiah was directed to preach during his sad and often discouraging tenure, there is hope for your future, declares the Lord. Should a fiery trial or painful injustice come your way, rejoice as much as you share in Christ's sufferings. Pray for your pastor, his family, and other fellow members of Christ's body, and see to the best of your ability that no one goes through this valley of sorrow alone. Entrust your souls and all you are and have to your faithful Creator while you glorify His name, and your Savior will bring His eternal reward for you when He comes again. Cling to His one death that can fight for you on that spiritual battlefield, His one death and resurrection that transforms all other death and make it an entry into eternal life. And continue having a Merry Christmas season!

In the Name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.