

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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DIOCESE OF GRAND FALLS

NATIVITY OF THE LORD – 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As you know, the Celebration of Christmas is too great a feast to be limited to a single day. Instead, in the tradition of the Church, the Celebration of Christmas is an Octave – eight days of celebration. On the fourth day of the Octave, we honour the Holy Innocents whose lives were taken by the ruthless and evil King Herod.

Scripture scholars debate the historical accuracy of the account of the slaughter in the Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2:13-18). However, we do know that King Herod was capable of such evil, after all, he killed one wife and three sons because he thought they were plotting to overthrow him and take his throne. Could he not have unleashed similar evil when he heard from the Magi that a child was born in Bethlehem who was destined to be the 'King of the Jews'?



It may seem strange to us that this horrific event is remembered by the Church in the midst of our celebration of the Birth of Jesus. The two events seem completely at odds with each other – and they are. Could that be the point? Is it possible that we are being asked to consider that the birth of one sacred child can remind us that every life is sacred?

All of this has come to my mind this Christmas because we seem to be surrounded daily by slaughter of innocent people around the world. In the war in Ukraine and the war in the Holy Land we are witnessing children, women and the elderly killed every day. People who are fleeing persecution are being killed while seeking refuge in safe countries. Unborn children are dying because they are unplanned and unwanted. Lives are being ended out of fear for the painfulness and difficulties of the future. Homelessness, starvation, children living in poverty; all these evils lead to the deaths of innocent people.



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The slaughter of the Holy Innocents is shocking and horrific proof that the people living at the time of Mary, Joseph and Jesus needed a saviour. Jesus came to bring new and eternal life to those killed by Herod. Jesus also came to teach people to value and protect all life. Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus demonstrated by his words and action his deep and unwavering love for everyone – especially the poor, outcast, and those living on the

What we are seeing in our world and in our communities reminds us that we too need a Saviour. Our celebration of the birth of Jesus is not about a nostalgic look at the past. Our celebration of Christmas must be about re-presenting the teachings and actions of Jesus here and now – especially about the sacredness of all life.

We can make a difference. We do have a role to play in promoting the sacredness of life and standing up for the lives of the most innocent and vulnerable among us.

This Christmas we remember that, of all the gifts we have received throughout our lives, the greatest gift is the Birth of Jesus. Can we find ways to give the gift of life?

Merry Christmas

Most Reverend R. Anthony Daniels
Bishop of Grand Falls