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28 Tuesday

Feastday of the Holy Innocents

1 John 1:5 – 2:2  
Ps 123: 2 – 5. 7. 8  
Matt 2: 13 - 18

“A voice was heard..... Rachel weeping for her children”.

There's a place near Bethlehem which is venerated as the tomb of Rachel, a holy site still for people of different religions. Her story, and her inconsolable weeping for her descendants is told in the prophecy of Jeremiah. Maybe because the place is close to Bethlehem suggested to St Matthew to quote her story in his gospel. For he makes Rachel the “fulfilled prophecy” in his account of the grief and lamentation of the mothers whose children were murdered by King Herod.

In truth, the voices of women weeping and lamenting the deaths of their children have echoed around the world, most likely ever since human life began. For some children do die young or unexpectedly. The grief and torment is still there even when those children may have passed beyond infancy. But the horror of the violent death of an infant must be a terrible torment for any mother.

Newspapers and TV have maybe made the tears of mothers an “ordinary” piece of news in today's world. Childrens' deaths may not always be murderous, but there are too many that virtually are such, where there's neglect or starvation.

Today's celebration of the martyrdom of those children who died because they might have been Jesus Christ should be a forcible reminder for us that the harsh realities and the pains of the real world we live in are part of the Christmas story. May the children who were blessed by being mistaken for Christ Himself give us greater compassion and care for children who suffer, and for all mothers who grieve.