

The Feast of the Holy Innocents & the Reproductive Health Act

by Lisa A. Honkanen, M.D.

King Herod was a master politician. In his quest for absolute power, however, he was consumed with fear, going so far as to execute his own family members who might jeopardize his kingship and control. When he felt *threatened* by the birth of the Christ Child (Who is Truth personified), he sought to kill Him, too. But the Magi, whom he had cunningly commissioned to visit and report back with the newborn Messiah's location, were warned by an angel not to return with this information. Furious at the failure of his plan and feeling ever the more threatened, Herod commanded the slaughter of all male children in Bethlehem who were under two years of age, expecting that the baby Jesus would be among them. These young boys, martyred so that Christ might be spared from the hands of Herod, are known as the Holy Innocents, and their collective massacre is commemorated each year on December 28, which is known as the Feast of the Holy Innocents.

If we reflect on recent events in New York State, we see a distinct and disturbing parallel with this biblical account. Both the executive and legislative branches of the state government include many masterful politicians who are (erroneously) convinced that abortion is a woman's "right." To placate the electorate and to ensure their political futures, they will do anything they can to protect the so-called "right" of a woman to abort her unborn child, even when they sometimes claim opposite personal convictions.

However, over the last few years there have been numerous pro-life victories at the local, state and federal levels. Recent polling indicates a growing trend among the American people in favor of pro-life legislation. Consequently, many pro-abortion politicians and advocates are worried that unfettered access to abortion is now at risk. Like Herod, they have felt *threatened*. Like Herod, to protect their selfish political interests, their response has been to fight back by authorizing death: as the 2019 legislative session opened, the New York State Legislature quickly passed, and the Governor promptly signed into law, the "Reproductive Health Act," recognized as the most aggressive abortion law in the country to date.

This law removes all restrictions on abortion up to birth; allows non-physicians to perform abortions and loosens other safety measures to protect the health of the mother; allows for withholding medical treatment for babies who survive failed abortions (amounting to the legalization of infanticide); and decriminalizes acts of violence committed against an

unborn child. So, in order to secure their own political interests, elected officials in our state voted in favor of a law that not only radically expands abortion rights that kill unborn children, but which also places their mothers at risk.

On January 22, 2019, the 46th anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, legalizing abortion in America, this heinous bill was signed into law by Gov. Cuomo. Its passage was celebrated by lighting up several New York landmarks in pink – perhaps unintentionally but more accurately symbolic of the sanitized, yet still bloody sacrifice, of these unborn victims, the Holy Innocents of today.

The story of King Herod's murder of the Holy Innocents of Bethlehem some two-thousand years ago is remembered and retold each year at this time, and still causes anger and outrage at its wanton cruelty. Yet, the number of children who died in that massacre pales in comparison with the sixty million babies who have been aborted legally in America since 1973. In the nearly half-century since abortion was legalized, we have seen its catastrophic effects not just on the children who have died, but on men, women, and children, on marriage and the family, and on society as a whole. And, as with Herod, this has all come about because some have felt threatened by the "Truth."

Our Lord told us: "Let not your hearts be troubled." [Jn 14:1] Lest we lose heart, we should look to the Holy Family for guidance and courage. Each year, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday following Christmas, always close to the Feast of the Holy Innocents. When Herod issued his infamous decree, Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt with the Christ Child. They left their "comfort zone." Their love for Him was greater than the sacrifice they made by leaving their country, relations, work, home and everything they had known and loved, in order to protect this most precious Child: He Who is the "light [that] shines in the darkness" that the darkness cannot overcome. [Jn 1:5]

We, too, are called to make the sacrifice to leave behind our "comfort zone" and to defend the sacredness of every human life from its first moment of conception to its natural end. We must fight to enact and to uphold laws which support this most important truth. We must work to bring others from the darkness into the light of this truth and declare steadfastly that:

- No unborn child should ever be considered a threat. We have support services and adoption to help mothers and fathers protect life, even when it is difficult.

- No law or action to protect the unborn should be viewed as a threat. After all, each of us is here only because our right to live was not violated. Past mistakes can be healed.
- Defending the gift of life must be appealing, and not threatening. In this, we should be mindful of our source of strength: God Himself. This is His work and we undertake it with joy. Proclaim the truth with confidence, holy optimism, and authentic mercy.
- Finally, do not lose hope! "Let not your hearts be troubled"! Pray, fast, fortify yourself with the Sacraments, most especially the Holy Eucharist, and join us in the new Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics, as we journey out of our comfort zones to build a Culture of Life in our Diocese of Rockville Centre and beyond.

Lisa Honkanen, M.D., is the Director of the Office of Human Life, Family and Bioethics of the Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York. A physician specializing in geriatric medicine, she is a graduate of the Medical School of the State University of New York at Stony Brook, and is a member of, and has her certification from, the National Catholic Bioethics Center.