SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS MEMORY OF DAVID, JOSEPH, & JAMES

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Christ is Born!

Today, on the first Sunday after the Lord's Nativity, we remember the people close to the Savior's flesh, His family, Joseph the Betrothed, King David, from whose lineage the Savior's ancestors descended through the line of the Mother of God, and James, his cousin, who was the first Bishop of Jerusalem.

Each of us calls Christmas a family holiday because we celebrate it with family. It carries with it great joy, which is shrouded in Divine silence, inner peace, and tranquility.

As we listened to today's Gospel reading, we should think about why the evangelist Matthew emphasizes that when the wise men departed, an angel of the Lord immediately appeared and said to Joseph, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him" (Matthew 2:13). "And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt" (Matt. 2:14). Joseph did not hesitate to do as God's messenger told him. It was not easy for him, because in his old age he left his land and went to another land with the Baby and His Mother. "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20).

The Blessed Virgin Mary, who at that time saw no danger either for herself or for the Child, agreed to go to a foreign land to unknown people, because she clearly saw the will of God. "For he will give his angels charge of you to guard you in your ways" (Ps. 90:11). The trip to Egypt lasted one week and was difficult and dangerous. There are many pious legends that poetically describe this path, birds sang to cheer the hearts of the Holy Family, and when Herod's warriors approached them, they miraculously became invisible.

Meanwhile, Herod was furious and ordered to kill all boys up to the age of two in and around Bethlehem. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah came true, "A voice is heard in Ra'mah, lamentation and a bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not" (Jer. 31:15). According to Tradition, at Herod's command, fourteen thousand innocent children died in Bethlehem, and the Church honors them as saints because they died for Christ.

King Herod was a cruel person. He did not trust anyone and was often suspect of even his friends. At the beginning of his reign, Herod killed hundreds of government officials, then killed his wife Mariamna, and three sons, Antipater, Alexander, and Aristobulus. Moreover, Herod knew that the people would rejoice on the day of his death, so during his mortal illness he ordered the imprisonment of two hundred prominent men and told them to be killed on the day of his death, so that Palestine would weep that day. Obviously, this order was not carried out on the day of his death, the residents were very happy.

The phrase "Herod died" is the finale of every executioner and enemy of God. The Church utters the words of the psalmist David, "As smoke is driven away, so drive them away; as wax melts before fire, let the wicked perish before God" (Ps. 67:2).

Herod thought he would kill Christ, but God's providence ruled otherwise. Historian Josephus aptly wrote that Herod "crept into power like a fox, ruled like a tiger, and died like a dog."

After Herod's death, the Holy Family returned to Palestine and "…dwelt in a city called Nazareth" (Matthew 2:23).

Let us turn our attention, dear brothers and sisters, to the modern society in which we live, which seems to have accepted Christian principles, but how many Herodian murders take place in it. Millions of innocent people die every year. Statistics show that in large cities, the killing of unborn children by the thousands exceeds the number of births.

Our modern age offers us tremendous freedoms but at the same time offers us, under the guise of this freedom, denial of Divine truths. We have reached a time when pseudo-culture, which has become a servant of sin, has entered the flesh and blood of modern man's life and challenges the family itself. All this happens simply by the pleasing one's own passion. But every sin and every crime must be explained, and then justified. And we hear today how the destruction of the family is explained and justified - by human freedom, misunderstood by love. No one really condemns what is happening - moreover, politicians pass destructive sinful laws, television picks up these terrible ideas, justifies them, introduces it into some order of life, and presents it as a possible free choice of a free person.

Today, the Church turns our attention to Christian families. Because it is the family that is called to share the sorrows and joys of each of its members. Back in paradise, the eternal institution of family life was founded. Everything in human history has changed, places of some empires have changed, political systems have crumbled, the borders of the earth have been cut every millennium, only the family has been preserved as God's institution, revealing people's love for one another, serving one another for life.

Although man often turns away from God, He always thinks of mercy. Here the question arises, if God does not want the death of the sinner, but only his conversion, then why did He not send the Savior immediately after the fall of the ancestors, but waited so long? First of all, in order for a person to see for himself, what great misfortune has caused him to turn away from God. What wonderful ways of God! God is ready for even the greatest sacrifice to save people.

Any destruction of the family is a sin, because it is in the sacrament of marriage that the words that God has united are heard - let no man separate.

Today we pray for our families that the Lord will protect them as he protects the holy Church. May the Eternal God, through the prayers of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Joseph the Betrothed, King David and James, the brother of the Lord, send love, humility to one another, patience and long life to families.

Fr. Serhii Deiak