

ΟΙΚΟΥΜΕΝΙΚΟΝ ΠΑΤΡΙΑΡΧΕΙΟΝ  
ΙΕΡΑ ΑΡΧΙΕΠΙΣΚΟΠΗ  
ΘΥΑΤΕΙΡΩΝ & Μ. ΒΡΕΤΑΝΝΙΑΣ



ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
ARCHDIOCESE OF  
THYATEIRA & GREAT BRITAIN



## ΛΟΓΟΣ ΚΥΡΙΟΥ THE WORD OF OUR LORD

ΚΥΡΙΑΚΗ ΜΕΤΑ ΤΗΝ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ ΓΕΝΝΗΣΙΝ SUNDAY AFTER THE NATIVITY OF CHRIST

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Ἰωσήφ μνήστορος, Στεφάνου πρωτομάρτυρος & ἀρχidiaκόνου, Θεοδώρου τοῦ Γραπτοῦ  
Joseph the Betrothed, Stephen the Protomartyr and Archdeacon, Theodore

### ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΝ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Πράξ. στ΄, 8-15, ζ΄, 1-5, 47-60

**Ε**ν ταῖς ἡμεραῖς ἐκείναις, Στέφανος πλήρης πίστεως καὶ δυνάμεως ἐποίει τέρατα καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα ἐν τῷ λαῷ. Ἀνέστησαν δὲ τινες τῶν ἐκ τῆς συναγωγῆς τῆς λεγομένης Λιβερτινῶν, καὶ Κυρηναίων, καὶ Ἀλεξανδρέων, καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ Κιλικίας καὶ Ἀσίας, συζητοῦντες τῷ Στεφάνῳ. Καὶ οὐκ ἴσχυον ἀντιστῆναι τῇ σοφίᾳ καὶ τῷ πνεύματι ᾧ ἐλάλει. Τότε ὑπέβαλον ἄνδρας λέγοντας ὅτι Ἀκηκόαμεν αὐτοῦ λαλοῦντος ῥήματα βλάσφημα εἰς Μωϋσῆν καὶ τὸν θεόν. Συνεκίνησάν τε τὸν λαὸν καὶ τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους καὶ τοὺς γραμματεῖς, καὶ ἐπιστάντες συνήρπασαν αὐτόν, καὶ ἤγαγον εἰς τὸ συνέδριον, ἔστησάν τε μάρτυρας ψευδεῖς λέγοντας, Ὁ ἄνθρωπος οὗτος οὐ παύεται ῥήματα βλάσφημα λαλῶν κατὰ τοῦ τόπου τοῦ ἁγίου καὶ τοῦ νόμου· ἀκηκόαμεν γὰρ αὐτοῦ λέγοντος ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ὁ Ναζωραῖος οὗτος καταλύσει τὸν τόπον τοῦτον, καὶ ἀλλάξει τὰ ἔθνη ἃ παρέδωκεν ἡμῖν Μωϋσῆς. Καὶ ἀτενίσαντες εἰς αὐτὸν ἅπαντες οἱ καθεζόμενοι ἐν τῷ συνεδρίῳ, εἶδον τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡσεὶ πρόσωπον ἀγγέλου. Εἶπεν δὲ ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς, Εἰ ἄρα ταῦτα οὕτως ἔχει; Ὁ δὲ ἔφη, Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ καὶ πατέρες, ἀκούσατε. Ὁ θεὸς τῆς δόξης ὤφθη τῷ πατρὶ ἡμῶν Ἀβραὰμ ὄντι ἐν τῇ Μεσοποταμίᾳ, πρὶν ἢ κατοικῆσαι αὐτὸν ἐν Χαρράν, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτόν, Ἐξέλθε ἐκ τῆς γῆς σου καὶ ἐκ τῆς συγγενείας σου, καὶ δεῦρο εἰς γῆν ἣν ἄν σοι δεῖξω. Τότε ἐξελθὼν ἐκ γῆς Χαλδαίων κατῴκησεν ἐν Χαρράν· κάκειθεν, μετὰ τὸ ἀποθανεῖν τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ, μετόικισεν αὐτὸν εἰς τὴν γῆν ταύτην εἰς ἣν ὑμεῖς νῦν κατοικεῖτε· καὶ οὐκ ἔδωκεν αὐτῷ κληρονομίαν ἐν αὐτῇ, οὐδὲ βῆμα ποδός· Σολομῶν δὲ ὠκοδόμησεν αὐτῷ οἶκον. Ἄλλ' οὐχ ὁ ὕψιστος ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ, καθὼς ὁ προφήτης λέγει, Ὁ οὐρανὸς μοι θρόνος, ἡ δὲ γῆ ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν μου· ποῖον οἶκον οἰκοδομήσετε μοι; λέγει κύριος ἢ τίς τόπος τῆς καταπαύσεώς μου; Οὐχὶ ἡ χεὶρ μου ἐποίησεν ταῦτα πάντα; Σκληροτράχηλοι καὶ ἀπερίτμητοι τῇ καρδίᾳ καὶ τοῖς ὠσίν, ὑμεῖς αἰεὶ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ ἀντιπίπτετε ὡς οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν, καὶ ὑμεῖς. Τίνα τῶν προφητῶν οὐκ ἐδίωξαν οἱ πατέρες ὑμῶν; Καὶ ἀπέκτειναν τοὺς προκαταγγείλαντας περὶ τῆς ἐλεύσεως τοῦ δικαίου, οὗ νῦν ὑμεῖς προδόται καὶ φονεῖς γεγέννησθε· οἵτινες ἐλάβετε τὸν νόμον εἰς διαταγὰς ἀγγέλων, καὶ οὐκ ἐφυλάξατε. Ἀκούοντες δὲ ταῦτα, διεπρίοντο ταῖς καρδίαις αὐτῶν, καὶ ἔβρυχον τοὺς ὀδόντας ἐπ' αὐτόν. Ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου, ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανόν, εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ, καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ εἶπεν, Ἴδού, θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς ἀνεωγμένους, καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ. Κράζαντες δὲ φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, συνέσχον τὰ ὦτα αὐτῶν, καὶ ὤρμησαν ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐπ' αὐτόν· καὶ ἐκβαλόντες ἔξω τῆς πόλεως, ἐλιθοβόλουν· καὶ οἱ μάρτυρες ἀπέθεντο τὰ ἱμάτια παρὰ τοὺς πόδας νεανίου καλουμένου Σαύλου. Καὶ ἐλιθοβόλουν τὸν Στέφανον, ἐπικαλούμενον καὶ λέγοντα, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ, δέξαί το πνεῦμά μου. Θεὸς δὲ τὰ γόνατα, ἔκραζεν φωνῇ μεγάλῃ, Κύριε, μὴ στήσης αὐτοῖς τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ταύτην. Καὶ τοῦτο εἰπὼν ἐκοιμήθη.

## EPISTLE READING

Acts 6: 8-15 ; 7: 1-5, 47-60

**I**n those days, Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders and signs among the people. Then some of those who belonged to the synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called), and of the Cyrenians, and of the Alexandrians, and of those from Cilicia and Asia, arose and disputed with Stephen. But they could not withstand the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke. Then they secretly instigated men, who said, «We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God». And they stirred up the people and the elders and the scribes, and they came upon him and seized him and brought him before the council, and set up false witnesses who said, «This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place, and will change the customs which Moses delivered to us». And gazing at him, all who sat in the council saw that his face was like the face of an angel. And the high priest said, «Is this so?» And Stephen said: «Brethren and fathers, hear me. The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran, and said to him, 'Depart from your land and from your kindred and go into the land which I will show you.' Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land in which you are now living; yet he gave him no inheritance in it, not even a foot's length, but promised to give it to him in possession and to his posterity after him, though he had no child. «But it was Solomon who built a house for him. Yet the Most High does not dwell in houses made with hands; as the prophet says, 'Heaven is my throne, and earth my footstool. What house will you build for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand make all these things?' «You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it». Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, «Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing at the right hand of God». But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together upon him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him; and the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, «Lord Jesus, receive my spirit». And he knelt down and cried with a loud voice, «Lord, do not hold this sin against them». And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

## ΕΥΑΓΓΕΛΙΚΟΝ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑ

Ματθ. β', 13-23

**Α**ναχωρησάντων τῶν μάγων, ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος Κυρίου φαίνεται κατ' ὄναρ τῷ Ἰωσήφ λέγων· ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ φεῦγε εἰς Αἴγυπτον, καὶ ἴσθι ἐκεῖ ἕως ἂν εἶπω σοι· μέλλει γὰρ Ἡρώδης ζητεῖν τὸ παιδίον τοῦ ἀπολέσαι αὐτό. Ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ νυκτὸς καὶ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς Αἴγυπτον, καὶ ἦν ἐκεῖ ἕως τῆς τελευτῆς Ἡρώδου, ἵνα πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου διὰ τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· ἐξ Αἰγύπτου ἐκάλεσα τὸν υἱόν μου. Τότε Ἡρώδης ἰδὼν ὅτι ἐνεπαίχθη ὑπὸ τῶν μάγων, ἐθυμώθη λίαν, καὶ ἀποστείλας ἀνείλε πάντας τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς ἐν Βηθλεὲμ καὶ ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ὄροις αὐτῆς ἀπὸ διετούς καὶ κατωτέρω, κατὰ τὸν χρόνον ὃν ἠκριβώσε παρὰ τῶν μάγων. τότε ἐπληρώθη τὸ ῥηθὲν ὑπὸ Ἱερεμίου τοῦ προφήτου λέγοντος· φωνὴ ἐν Ῥαμᾷ ἠκούσθη, θρήνος καὶ κλαυθμὸς καὶ ὄδυρμος πολὺς· Ῥαχὴλ κλαίουσα τὰ τέκνα αὐτῆς, καὶ οὐκ ἤθελε παρακληθῆναι, ὅτι οὐκ εἰσίν. Τελευτήσαντος δὲ τοῦ Ἡρώδου ἰδοὺ ἄγγελος Κυρίου κατ' ὄναρ φαίνεται τῷ Ἰωσήφ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ λέγων· ἐγερθεὶς παράλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύου εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ· τεθνήκασι γὰρ οἱ ζητοῦντες τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ παιδίου. Ὁ δὲ ἐγερθεὶς παρέλαβε τὸ παιδίον καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἦλθεν εἰς γῆν Ἰσραὴλ. ἀκούσας δὲ ὅτι Ἀρχέλαος βασιλεύει ἐπὶ τῆς Ἰουδαίας ἀντὶ Ἡρώδου τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ, ἐφοβήθη ἐκεῖ

ἀπελθεῖν· χρηματισθεὶς δὲ κατ’ ὄναρ ἀνεχώρησεν εἰς τὰ μέρη τῆς Γαλιλαίας, καὶ ἐλθὼν κατώκησεν εἰς πόλιν λεγομένην Ναζαρέτ, ὅπως πληρωθῇ τὸ ῥηθὲν διὰ τῶν προφητῶν ὅτι Ναζωραῖος κληθήσεται.

## GOSPEL READING

Matt. 2: 13-23

**W**hen the wise men departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, «Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there till I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him». And he rose and took the child and his mother by night, and departed to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, «Out of Egypt have I called my son». Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time which he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: «A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they were no more». But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, «Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child’s life are dead». And he rose and took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaos reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee. And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, «He shall be called a Nazarene».

## ΕΡΜΗΝΕΙΑ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΑΝΑΓΝΩΣΜΑΤΟΣ

**Δ**ύο ἡμέρες ἀμέσως μετὰ τὴν χαρμόσυνη ἔλευση τοῦ Σωτῆρος καὶ τὸ κοσμοσωτήριο γεγονός τῆς γεννήσεως τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἡ Ἐκκλησία μᾶς καλεῖ νὰ ἐορτάσουμε τὴν ἀνάμνηση τοῦ ἔμπονου μαρτυρίου τοῦ Ἀρχιδιακόνου Στεφάνου, πού καλεῖται καὶ Πρωτομάρτυς, καθὼς ἦταν ὁ πρῶτος στὴν ἱστορία τῆς Ἐκκλησίας πού μαρτύρησε γιὰ τὸ ὄνομα καὶ τὴν δόξα τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Ἄραγε πρόκειται γιὰ ἓνα τυχαῖο γεγονός, καὶ μάλιστα ἴσως ἀταίριαστο λόγω τῶν ἡμερῶν θὰ μπορούσε κάποιος νὰ σκεφθεῖ, ἢ στὴν πραγματικότητα θέλει ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας καὶ ἡ σοφία τῶν Πατέρων πού ὄρισαν τὸ ἐκκλησιαστικὸ ἡμερολόγιο νὰ μᾶς εἰσαγάγουν σὲ ἓνα βαθύτερο μυστήριο;

Στὴν ζωὴ ἐν Χριστῷ ἡ χαρὰ τῆς γέννησης συνδέεται βαθειὰ μὲ τὴν ὀδύνη τοῦ θανάτου, ἢ ὅποια ὡστόσο δὲν εἶναι παρά ἡ προσωρινὴ ὀδύνη ἢ ἀνοίγουσα τὶς πύλες τῆς αἰώνιας ζωῆς στὴν βασιλεία Του. Ἄς ὑπενθυμίσουμε στοὺς ἑαυτοὺς μας ὅτι μετὰ τεσσαράκοντα ἡμέρας ἀπὸ τὴν γέννησιν τοῦ Κυρίου, ἡ θεία Πρόνοια λειτούργησε τρόπο προφητικῶς τῶν ὀδυνῶν, ὅταν μίλησε διὰ τοῦ δικαίου Συμεῶνος στὴν ἴδια τὴν Μητέρα τοῦ βρέφους Χριστοῦ, πού πρόσφερε τὸ Παιδίον εἰς τὸν Ναὸν (θὰ ἐορτάσουμε αὐτὸ τὸ γεγονός στὶς 2 Φεβρουαρίου, στὴν Ὑπαπαντὴ τοῦ Κυρίου). Τὰ προφητικὰ ἐκεῖνα λόγια ἦταν τὸ «καὶ σοῦ τὴν καρδίαν διελεύσεται ρομφαίαν» (Λουκ. 2, 35), δηλαδὴ ὅτι μετὰ τὴν μεγάλην χαρὰν τῆς γεννήσεως, μετὰ τὴν συνταρακτικὴ καὶ κοσμογονικὴν γέννησιν τοῦ Σωτῆρος, θὰ ἐπέλθει θλίψις καὶ πόνος μέγας, ὡσὰν νὰ διαπερνοῦσε τὴν καρδίαν σου λόγῃ. Ὡστόσο ὅλα αὐτὰ εἶναι παροδικὰ, καθὼς τὸ φῶς τῆς Ἀναστάσεως θὰ γεμίσει καὶ πάλι τὶς καρδιὰς καὶ τὸν κόσμον ὅλον.

Μέσα σὲ αὐτὴν τὴν παράδοξη δυναμικὴ τῆς ἐναλλαγῆς τῆς χαρᾶς καὶ τῆς μεγάλης θλίψις, πού θὰ ξαναδώσει τὴν θέση τῆς στὴν ἀναστάσιμη χαρὰ, ἡ Ἐκκλησία μας σήμερα, Κυριακὴ μετὰ τὴν Γέννησιν τοῦ Κυρίου μας, ἐορτάζει τὸν ὀδυνηρὸ θάνατο τοῦ Πρωτομάρτυρος καὶ Ἀρχιδιακόνου Στεφάνου, πού πρῶτος ὁμολόγησε τὸν Χριστὸ στοὺς ὁμοεθνεῖς του. Μᾶς ὑπενθυμίζει ἡ ζωὴ τοῦ Πρωτομάρτυρος τὴν ἴδια τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ ὁποῖος γεννώμενος ἄνθρωπος προσέλαβε τὸ πλήρωμα τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως, ἀκόμη καὶ τὰ ἀδιάβλητα πάθη τῆς δίψας, τῆς πείνας, τοῦ πόνου καὶ ἐν τέλει τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ ὀδυνηροῦ θανάτου, πού ὡστόσο δὲν ἦταν ἀποτέλεσμα φθορᾶς καὶ ἁμαρτίας ὅπως στὸν ἄνθρωπο, ἀλλὰ ἀπόλυτη κένωση ἀγάπης γιὰ τὴν ἀνθρώπινη σωτηρία. Ἐπομένως καὶ δὲν πρέπει νὰ ἐρμηνεύσουμε τὴν ζωὴ τοῦ Πρωτομάρτυρος Στεφάνου ὡς μία ἱστορία θλίψεως καὶ ἀδικίας, ἀλλὰ ὡς μία εἴσοδο στὴν

αίωνια δόξα. Ἐξάλλου ὁ ἴδιος εἶδε μὲ τὰ ἴδια του τὰ μάτια τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ ὅπως περιγράφουν οἱ Πράξεις τῶν Ἀποστόλων: «Αὐτός ὁμῶς γεμάτος ἀπὸ τὸ Ἅγιο Πνεῦμα, ἀτένισε τὸν οὐρανὸ καὶ εἶδε τὴν δόξα τοῦ Θεοῦ καὶ τὸν Ἰησοῦ νὰ στέκεται στὰ δεξιά τοῦ Θεοῦ· καὶ εἶπε: «Νά, βλέπω τὸν οὐρανὸ ἀνοιχτὸ καὶ τὸν Υἱὸ τοῦ Ἀνθρώπου νὰ στέκεται στὰ δεξιά τοῦ Θεοῦ». (Πράξ. 7, 55-56).

Αὐτὴ ἡ ἐνατένιση τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ, θὰ μπορούσε κατάληξη τῆς ἔμπονης πορείας κάθε ἀνθρώπου πὸ ἐρχεται μὲ χαρὲς στὴν γῆ, ἀλλὰ ἀγωνίζεται μέσα σὲ πόνους καὶ ὀδύνας. Ἐὰν ἀναφέρουμε τὴν ζωὴ μας στὸν Θεὸ καὶ στὴν Πρόνοια τῆς θείας ἀγάπης Του, καὶ ὑποστοῦμε αὐτὲς τὶς δυσκολίες μὲ πίστη καὶ ἐλπίδα, τότε μπορούμε νὰ μετάσχουμε κι ἐμεῖς στὴν αἰώνια δόξα τῶν μαρτύρων καὶ τῶν ἁγίων, πάντοτε στὸ μέτρο πὸ ἀγωνισθήκαμε καὶ πραγματώσαμε τὶς ἐντολὲς τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ ζωῆς.

Ἄρχιμ. Χρυσόστομος Τύμπας

## SERMON ON THE GOSPEL READING

**T**oday's Gospel reading appears far from festal. We hear how the coming of the Saviour was accompanied by a horrific slaughter of children in Bethlehem. Yet we incorporate even this reading in our Christmas joyous celebration. This is in itself a strong message. With the coming of Christ and with the dawn of eternity and everlasting life, the world was transformed dramatically. Evil, even in its ugliest and strongest form, can no longer prevail over good, and this is the eternal victory that Christ has brought with His coming. Death, however horrific it may be, is no longer an end, but the beginning: it is from this perspective that we are able to rejoice for the innocents slaughtered by Herod. Their story prefigures Christ's victory that is not temporal, but eternal.

From a point of view of eternal life these innocents were privileged to suffer for Christ's sake: they are the youngest martyrs ever known to the history of Christianity. They prefigure the martyrdom of Christ and set the tone of the whole journey for us Christians: "*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*" (2 Tim. 3:12). Just as with those children, from the very first days of His life Christ suffered unending persecution, His life was under a constant threat that continued until the very end of His ministry when He was finally nailed to the Cross. Yet the end of this journey is the beginning of eternal glory and universal authority: "*All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth*". (Mat. 28:16). Through earthly humiliations – to heavenly glory, through weakness in the face of human authorities – to almighty divine power, through universal rejection – to God's Kingdom of love: "This is the lot of those of our kin (i.e. Christians), – St Theophan writes. Those who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus have their paradise not here, on earth, but there in heaven. The Earth gives them nothing but deprivations, afflictions and persecutions. It is because Christians are led by principles that are different to those who rule the earth and live for the Earth and want to have their paradise here on Earth. These two kinds of people cannot live in harmony: the earthly people, as masters of this world, persecute those 'strangers' who look for the heavenly Kingdom. But the goodness of God turns all these afflictions into everlasting good, so that we can call with confidence and courage: "Glory to God for everything" (see: St Theophan the Recluse's commentary on 2 Tim 3:16).

Christ and His Gospel have transformed our vision of reality, of human history, of human values. This new has started with the story of children. In a remarkable way it prefigures Christ's resurrection and with Him the resurrection of all of us. The slaughter of the children allows us to look at the tragedy of death from a new perspective. Yes, this story is a part of our Christmas celebration as we sense profoundly that with the coming of Christ "*the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death*" (1 Cor. 15:26).

This story at the outset of the Gospel points to the end of the Gospel, which the faithful celebrate with the words: "*Christ is risen from the dead, by death He has overcome death and to them in the graves has He given life*".

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