

A STRANGE COMBINATION OF FEASTS

Today is the Solemnity of the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary & Joseph. But the date is 28 December, which on any other day of the week would have been the Feast of the Holy Innocents. There is a tremendous irony in putting these two celebrations.

On one level, they dove-tail nicely (in terms of Scriptural flow): Mary and Joseph flee to Egypt to preserve their child, while Herod's butchers destroy all infants they can find. What does this suggest to us about the function of any family that desires to be "holy"? Protect the innocent, the vulnerable, the helpless.

Let's take this a step further. Can we commit to working to protect such children both within and outside the womb? After all, today's "double commemoration" has nothing at all to do, strictly speaking, with abortion, but it has everything to do with sanctity of life, and especially of protecting and defending the weakest and most marginalized among us. Today, that includes babies in the womb.

How many of you remember the days when no woman ever said she was "pregnant," but rather that she was "with child" or "expecting a child"? Can we see why our word-choices make a radical difference in our outlook?

This liturgical combination also takes us to Nazareth, where Joseph and Mary take their baby once things have calmed down. Respecting life in this context means providing a good home, a loving family, learning a trade, doing good work, and giving glory and thanks to God—all in an atmosphere of peace and quiet and solitude. These are lessons that Pope Paul VI especially celebrated in his 1964 address while visiting Nazareth (excerpted in our *Liturgy of the Hours*' "Office of Readings" for today).

Holiness of life will not spare us from attacks—sometimes, violent attacks. But holiness of life—a life of prayer, love, service, joy, contentment—will flood our hearts and souls with the grace, the Presence of God, that allows us to proclaim with St. Paul, "We are more than conquerors because of Him who has loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

We all have our Herods, our Egypts, our slaughtered innocents, our Nazareths. God, please give us the grace to endure and settle our souls in your love—help us to defend all that is sacred and holy, and most especially the sanctity and holiness of life.