

**Homily**  
**Epiphany of the Lord - A**

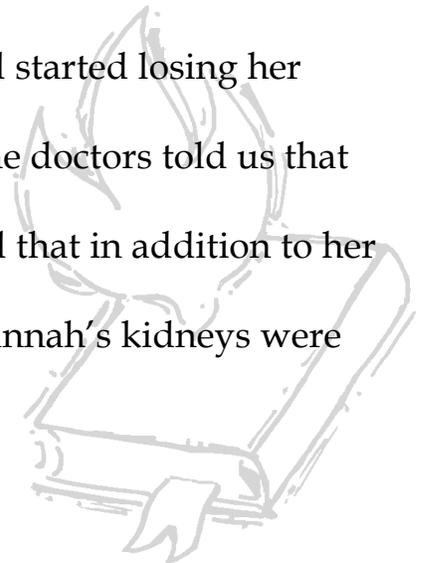
Rev. Peter G. Jankowski  
January 07-08, 2017

Is 60: 1-6  
Ps 72: 1-2, 7-8, 10-11, 12-13  
Eph 3: 2-3, 5-6  
Mt 2: 1-12

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If you attended the Christmas Masses which I celebrated this year, you heard me preach about the newest addition to the parish, a fourteen-week-old basset puppy named Hannah that the local rescue agency asked me to adopt. At the time I received her and unknown to the agency, Hannah was in need of great care, which my staff and I were most happy to accommodate. If you saw Hannah at the Masses at which I preached, most of you became very much attached to her and she loved to have everyone hold her in their arms. Hannah was a real sweetheart of a puppy.

Two days after I preached that Christmas homily, we noticed that Hannah was breathing quite irregularly and had started losing her appetite. After a few visits to the veterinarian, the doctors told us that Hannah's condition became grave. We were told that in addition to her suffering from the flu and being dehydrated, Hannah's kidneys were



functioning at a 35% capacity and that the prognosis for a long life were not good.

Knowing that I did not have the resources to pay for this dog's needed care, I contacted a few people that I knew, people who *did* have the resources to provide for that which I could not. Subsequently, Jim Smith and I drove Hannah to Aurora, where she was placed in an isolation ward of a pet hospital, the only one that would take her. The deal I made with these people of resource was that they would take possession of the dog under the condition that they would pay for her care as well (which would run into the thousands of dollars). I was assured that, even though Hannah would not have that long of a life, what little life she had would be filled with love and compassion and a promise that I would receive constant updates on her condition. For this care, I knew that Hannah eventually would have to be taken far away from where I lived and that if I truly loved this small creature of God, I would have to let her go so that others could provide for her.

Being a parent of creatures of the four or two-legged variety is difficult, and can apply to something as small as a dog owner or as significant as a parent who takes care of a child, a pastor who shepherds his flock or for anyone in a position of authority who takes care of those they serve. This is the covenant you have to make when taking on positions of service – people count on you to care for them and you make the promise to do what is right for them and the institution you lead. Sometimes those sacrifices come with heavy costs and those in leadership positions often have to suffer for the decisions they make, especially when those decisions are bad ones or difficult ones.

As my staff and parish council are well aware, some eleven years ago I was brought here with a mandate to take on some of those hard decisions, even though I was serving in my first pastorate. At the time I arrived at St. Patrick's, I was told of embezzlement issues and the fourteen checking accounts (including a school slush fund) that I was instructed to consolidate so that the parish could become transparent financially (this was all laid out in a diocesan audit of the parish in

2005). I was told that Bishop Joseph Imesch wanted a Spanish Mass started at this parish as early as 1990 and that our community had grown to such a point that this particular ministry became a necessity in order for the parish to survive. I came to find out that severe issues existed in the Protecting God's Children Charter that needed to be addressed immediately. I realized that confronting some of these issues might result in the closing of a school or the leaving of parishioners or the hating of a pastor. I am told by my staff that I am not hated as much as I think but I also know that great difficulties accompanied what I was asked to do.

In past homilies, I have shared with all of you that the demands placed on me to address these issues were quite testing but certainly ones that had to be confronted so that the future of this parish would continue. As a first-time pastor, I certainly had a steep learning curve in the manner in which I tried to handle these challenges, supported by my parish council and staff who have been aware of what I needed to do from the start and have supported me along the way. We have hit many

bumps in the road in the process, but eleven years later, we seem to have reached the other side of this mess and we have done what we could to do what was right for this multi-cultural community, the kids for whom we care very much and for all those who are part of the St. Patrick's neighborhood.

I have struggled with these issues for years and, at the advice of members from my parish council and staff, I chose to remain silent while behind the scenes helping this parish deal with issues that might not have been considered abuses in the past but in hindsight certainly are considered as such today. As we addressed these issues, I really did not wish to hurt anyone while protecting those who needed protecting - it is so much easier to tear down a house than it is to build it up and for this reason, I chose to take care of these issues without going public. This is the nature of being a parent, a priest and certainly a Lord who was presented with a gift of myrrh in today's gospel, a symbol of the baby's own death which was necessary for us to even have a chance of salvation. I tried to sacrifice my own reputation and allowed others to

keep theirs while at the same time trying to protect those who were vulnerable at the parish.

By acting in this manner, I may have hindered our ability to address our current financial woes and to enable some of the “chatter” that accompanies the difficult moves we have been instructed to do, specifically why I acted quietly in the ways that I have. Some of these lingering issues still bear on the future health of our parishioners, especially our children and the multi-cultural population that we nourish and those for whom we care very much at St. Patrick’s.

By acting in this manner, I have come to find out that I, too, have been in neglect of child protection issues to a degree, since I have not made these issues public. Making these issues public has been a difficult burden for me to bear, so recently I have consulted religious leaders and canon lawyers across the country as to what next steps I had to take to protect the vulnerable in our community. In this process, I was directed to Mr. Bernie Nojadera and Mr. Francesco Caesario, two lay members who lead the Child Protection Committee for the US Council of Catholic

Bishops. To them, I am most grateful for their help and direction concerning what I needed to do.

Recently, three specific individuals responded to my struggles, which served as the inspiration as to how I have decided to respond. One was a canon lawyer, who instructed me that if I continue to remain silent on Child Protection Issues, I could be held just as culpable as those who seriously violated the charter of the bishops. The second was Mr. Nojadera himself, who made clear to me that the issue at hand was *not* about me but about the protection of children (and, by extension, the multi-cultural community of this parish), who have an obligation to be protected, regardless of the consequences that might fall upon me. The third came from our Holy Father himself in his letter to the 5,000 bishops around the world on December 28<sup>th</sup> (the Feast of the Holy Innocents), where he wrote the following words to his episcopal brothers (the entire text can be found at the end of this homily) ...

(Pastors are asked to) be men attentive, and not deaf, to the voice of God, and hence more sensitive to what is happening all around us... Like Joseph, we need the courage to respond to this reality, to arise

and take it firmly in hand (cf. Mt 2:20). The courage to guard this joy from the new Herods of our time, who devour the innocence of our children.

(Pastores) seamos hombres capaces de escuchar y no ser sordos a la voz del Padre, y así poder ser más sensibles a la realidad que nos rodea... Y al igual que san José, necesitamos coraje para asumir esta realidad, para levantarnos y tomarla entre las manos (cf. Mt 2,20). El coraje de protegerla de los nuevos Herodes de nuestros días, que fagocitan la inocencia de nuestros niños.

Thus, after a good deal of prayer, reflection and consultation, I have come up with a plan on how I will deal with this situation, which will become evident quite soon. Knowing that my time is short at St. Patrick's, I pray that the journey I take will safeguard those I serve in the best manner possible and will prevent the abuses with which I have had to confront from ever happening at this parish again. I also realize that what I do has repercussions, both to me and to good people at this parish who have stayed with us during our time together, good folks who have done nothing wrong in trying to build a relationship with God. To reference the Holy Father, I have felt like a Herod over the last ten years through my silence and pray to God for courage so I could do

what I am doing today (and will need to have in the weeks and months ahead).

If I have done any wrong in the manner in which I have addressed these issues, or in the manner I *will* deal with them, I certainly apologize. As weak and sinful as I am, I am trying to do what I think best to protect those under my care, knowing I could have probably done much better. The only solace I have is that the person who cared for the children the most was nailed to a cross by all of us and that I am nowhere as good as he was, as he *is*.

Please pray for me, the children, the vulnerable and all the parishioners of St. Patrick's and the universal Church itself. It's a great Church and it's a perfect Church run by imperfect people who sometimes make mistakes on the journey. As we pray daily and weekly, we are obligated to forgive the trespasses of others as a prerequisite for God forgiving us of ours, while at the same time adhering to the laws of the state and the charter for protecting the vulnerable to the best of our ability. May you have patience with us,

have patience with *me*, and may we clerics strive to do good, in God's name, for both the people we serve in parish ministry and all people that we meet. This is our prayer.

## LETTER FROM POPE FRANCIS TO THE BISHOPS AROUND THE WORLD...

Dear Brother,

Today, on the feast of the Holy Innocents, as the words of the angel to the shepherds still resound in our hearts – “I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people; for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior” (Lk 2: 10-11) – I feel the need to write to you. We do well to listen to that proclamation again and again; to hear over and over again that God is present in the midst of our people. This certainty, which we renew each year, is the source of our joy and hope.

In these days we experience how the liturgy leads us to the heart of Christmas, into the Mystery which gradually draws us to the source of Christian joy.

As pastors, we are called to help foster this joy among the faithful. We are charged with protecting this joy. I ask you once again that we not let ourselves be robbed of this joy, for we can be disillusioned at times, not unreasonably, with the world around us, with the Church, or even with ourselves, and feel tempted to indulge in a certain melancholy, lacking in hope, which can lay hold of our hearts (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium* 83).

Christmas is also accompanied, whether we like it or not, by tears. The Evangelists did not disguise reality to make it more credible or attractive. They did not indulge in words that were comforting but unrelated to reality. For them, Christmas was not a flight to fantasy, a way of hiding from the challenges and injustices of their day. On the contrary, they relate the birth of the Son of God as an event fraught with tragedy and grief. Quoting the prophet Jeremiah, Matthew presents it in the bluntest of terms: “A voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children” (2:18). It is the sobbing of

mothers bewailing the death of their children in the face of Herod's tyranny and unbridled thirst for power.

Today too, we hear this heart-rending cry of pain, which we neither desire nor are able to ignore or to silence. In our world – I write this with a heavy heart – we continue to hear the lamentation of so many mothers, of so many families, for the death of their children, their innocent children.

To contemplate the manger also means to contemplate this cry of pain, to open our eyes and ears to what is going on around us, and to let our hearts be attentive and open to the pain of our neighbors, especially where children are involved. It also means realizing that that sad chapter in history is still being written today. To contemplate the manger in isolation from the world around us would make Christmas into a lovely story that inspires warm feelings but robs us of the creative power of the Good News that the Incarnate Word wants to give us. The temptation is real.

Can we truly experience Christian joy if we turn our backs on these realities? Can Christian joy even exist if we ignore the cry of our brothers and sisters, the cry of the children?

Saint Joseph was the first to be charged with protecting the joy of salvation. Faced with the atrocious crimes that were taking place, Saint Joseph – the model of an obedient and loyal man – was capable of recognizing God's voice and the mission entrusted to him by the Father. Because he was able to hear God's voice, and was docile to his will, Joseph became more conscious of what was going on around him and was able to interpret these events realistically.

The same thing is asked of us pastors today: to be men attentive, and not deaf, to the voice of God, and hence more sensitive to what is happening all around us. Today, with Saint Joseph as our model, we are asked not

to let ourselves be robbed of joy. We are asked to protect this joy from the Herods of our own time. Like Joseph, we need the courage to respond to this reality, to arise and take it firmly in hand (cf. Mt 2:20). The courage to guard this joy from the new Herods of our time, who devour the innocence of our children. An innocence robbed from them by the oppression of illegal slave labor, prostitution and exploitation. An innocence shattered by wars and forced immigration, with the great loss that this entails. Thousands of our children have fallen into the hands of gangs, criminal organizations and merchants of death, who only devour and exploit their neediness.

To illustrate this point, there are at present 75 million children who, due to prolonged situations of emergency and crisis, have had to interrupt their education. In 2015, 68% of all persons who were victims of sexual exploitation were children. At the same time, a third of all children who have to live outside their homelands do so because forcibly displaced. We live in a world where almost half of the children who die under the age of five do so because of malnutrition. It is estimated that in 2016 there were 150 million child laborers, many of whom live in conditions of slavery. According to the most recent report presented by UNICEF, unless the world situation changes, in 2030 there will be 167 million children living in extreme poverty, 69 million children under the age of five will die between 2016 and 2030, and 16 million children will not receive basic schooling.

We hear these children and their cries of pain; we also hear the cry of the Church our Mother, who weeps not only for the pain caused to her youngest sons and daughters, but also because she recognizes the sins of some of her members: the sufferings, the experiences and the pain of minors who were abused sexually by priests. It is a sin that shames us. Persons responsible for the protection of those children destroyed their dignity. We regret this deeply and we beg forgiveness. We join in the pain of the victims and weep for this sin. The sin of what happened, the sin of failing to help, the sin of covering up and denial, the sin of the

abuse of power. The Church also weeps bitterly over this sin of her sons and she asks forgiveness. Today, as we commemorate the feast of the Holy Innocents, I would like us to renew our complete commitment to ensuring that these atrocities will no longer take place in our midst. Let us find the courage needed to take all necessary measures and to protect in every way the lives of our children, so that such crimes may never be repeated. In this area, let us adhere, clearly and faithfully, to “zero tolerance”.

Christian joy does not arise on the fringes of reality, by ignoring it or acting as if it did not exist. Christian joy is born from a call – the same call that Saint Joseph received – to embrace and protect human life, especially that of the holy innocents of our own day. Christmas is a time that challenges us to protect life, to help it be born and grow. It is a time that challenges us as bishops to find new courage. The courage that generates processes capable of acknowledging the reality that many of our children are experiencing today, and working to ensure them the bare minimum needed so that their dignity as God’s children will not only be respected but, above all, defended.

Let us not allow them to be robbed of joy. Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of joy, but guard it and nourish its growth. May we do this with the paternal fidelity of Saint Joseph and guided by Mary, Mother of tender love, so that our own hearts may never grow hard.

With fraternal affection, FRANCIS

[http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20161228\\_santi-innocenti.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/letters/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20161228_santi-innocenti.html)

## TEXTO COMPLETO DE LA CARTA DEL SANTO PADRE FRANCISCO A LOS OBISPOS

Querido hermano:

Hoy, día de los Santos Inocentes, mientras continúan resonando en nuestros corazones las palabras del ángel a los pastores: «Os traigo una buena noticia, una gran alegría para todo el pueblo: Hoy, en la ciudad de David, os ha nacido un Salvador» (Lc 2,10-11), siento la necesidad de escribirte. Nos hace bien escuchar una y otra vez este anuncio; volver a escuchar que Dios está en medio de nuestro pueblo. Esta certeza que renovamos año a año es fuente de nuestra alegría y esperanza.

Durante estos días podemos experimentar cómo la liturgia nos toma de la mano y nos conduce al corazón de la Navidad, nos introduce en el Misterio y nos lleva paulatinamente a la fuente de la alegría cristiana. Como pastores hemos sido llamados para ayudar a hacer crecer esta alegría en medio de nuestro pueblo. Se nos pide cuidar esta alegría. Quiero renovar contigo la invitación a no dejarnos robar esta alegría, ya que muchas veces desilusionados –y no sin razones– con la realidad, con la Iglesia, o inclusive desilusionados de nosotros mismos, sentimos la tentación de apegarnos a una tristeza dulzona, sin esperanza, que se apodera de los corazones (cf. Exhorta. Ap. Evangelii Gaudium, 83).

La Navidad, mal que nos pese, viene acompañada también del llanto. Los evangelistas no se permitieron disfrazar la realidad para hacerla más creíble o apetecible. No se permitieron realizar un discurso «bonito» pero irreal. Para ellos la Navidad no era refugio fantasioso en el que esconderse frente a los desafíos e injusticias de su tiempo. Al contrario, nos anuncian el nacimiento del Hijo de Dios también envuelto en una tragedia de dolor. Citando al profeta Jeremías, el evangelista Mateo lo presenta con gran crudeza: «En Ramá se oyó una voz, hubo lágrimas y gemidos: es Raquel, que llora a sus hijos» (2,18). Es el gemido de dolor de las madres que lloran las muertes de sus hijos inocentes frente a la

tiranía y ansia de poder desenfrenada de Herodes.

Un gemido que hoy también podemos seguir escuchando, que nos llega al alma y que no podemos ni queremos ignorar ni callar. Hoy en nuestros pueblos, lamentablemente –y lo escribo con profundo dolor–, se sigue escuchando el gemido y el llanto de tantas madres, de tantas familias, por la muerte de sus hijos, de sus hijos inocentes.

Contemplar el pesebre es también contemplar este llanto, es también aprender a escuchar lo que acontece a su alrededor y tener un corazón sensible y abierto al dolor del prójimo, más especialmente cuando se trata de niños, y también es tener la capacidad de asumir que hoy se sigue escribiendo ese triste capítulo de la historia. Contemplar el pesebre aislándolo de la vida que lo circunda sería hacer de la Navidad una linda fabula que nos generaría buenos sentimientos, pero nos privaría de la fuerza creadora de la Buena Noticia que el Verbo Encarnado nos quiere regalar. Y la tentación existe.

¿Será que la alegría cristiana se puede vivir de espaldas a estas realidades? ¿Será que la alegría cristiana puede realizarse ignorando el gemido del hermano, de los niños?

San José fue el primer invitado a custodiar la alegría de la Salvación. Frente a los crímenes atroces que estaban sucediendo, san José – testimonio del hombre obediente y fiel– fue capaz de escuchar la voz de Dios y la misión que el Padre le encomendaba. Y porque supo escuchar la voz de Dios y se dejó guiar por su voluntad, se volvió más sensible a lo que le rodeaba y supo leer los acontecimientos con realismo.

Hoy también a nosotros, Pastores, se nos pide lo mismo, que seamos hombres capaces de escuchar y no ser sordos a la voz del Padre, y así poder ser más sensibles a la realidad que nos rodea. Hoy, teniendo como modelo a san José, estamos invitados a no dejar que nos roben la alegría. Estamos invitados a custodiarla de los Herodes de nuestros días. Y al

igual que san José, necesitamos coraje para asumir esta realidad, para levantarnos y tomarla entre las manos (cf. Mt 2,20). El coraje de protegerla de los nuevos Herodes de nuestros días, que fagocitan la inocencia de nuestros niños. Una inocencia desgarrada bajo el peso del trabajo clandestino y esclavo, bajo el peso de la prostitución y la explotación. Inocencia destruida por las guerras y la emigración forzada, con la pérdida de todo lo que esto conlleva. Miles de nuestros niños han caído en manos de pandilleros, de mafias, de mercaderes de la muerte que lo único que hacen es fagocitar y explotar su necesidad.

A modo de ejemplo, hoy en día 75 millones de niños –debido a las emergencias y crisis prolongadas– han tenido que interrumpir su educación. En 2015, el 68 por ciento de todas las personas objeto de trata sexual en el mundo eran niños. Por otro lado, un tercio de los niños que han tenido que vivir fuera de sus países ha sido por desplazamientos forzosos. Vivimos en un mundo donde casi la mitad de los niños menores de 5 años que mueren ha sido a causa de malnutrición. En el año 2016, se calcula que 150 millones de niños han realizado trabajo infantil viviendo muchos de ellos en condición de esclavitud. De acuerdo al último informe elaborado por UNICEF, si la situación mundial no se revierte, en 2030 serán 167 millones los niños que vivirán en la extrema pobreza, 69 millones de niños menores de 5 años morirán entre 2016 y 2030, y 60 millones de niños no asistirán a la escuela básica primaria.

Escuchemos el llanto y el gemir de estos niños; escuchemos el llanto y el gemir también de nuestra madre Iglesia, que llora no sólo frente al dolor causado en sus hijos más pequeños, sino también porque conoce el pecado de algunos de sus miembros: el sufrimiento, la historia y el dolor de los menores que fueron abusados sexualmente por sacerdotes. Pecado que nos avergüenza. Personas que tenían a su cargo el cuidado de esos pequeños han destrozado su dignidad. Esto lo lamentamos profundamente y pedimos perdón. Nos unimos al dolor de las víctimas y a su vez lloramos el pecado. El pecado por lo sucedido, el pecado de

omisión de asistencia, el pecado de ocultar y negar, el pecado del abuso de poder. La Iglesia también llora con amargura este pecado de sus hijos y pide perdón. Hoy, recordando el día de los Santos Inocentes, quiero que renovemos todo nuestro empeño para que estas atrocidades no vuelvan a suceder entre nosotros. Tomemos el coraje necesario para implementar todas las medidas necesarias y proteger en toda la vida de nuestros niños, para que tales crímenes no se repitan más. Asumamos clara y lealmente la consigna «tolerancia cero» en este asunto.

La alegría cristiana no es una alegría que se construye al margen de la realidad, ignorándola o haciendo como si no existiese. La alegría cristiana nace de una llamada –la misma que tuvo san José– a tomar y cuidar la vida, especialmente la de los santos inocentes de hoy. La Navidad es un tiempo que nos interpela a custodiar la vida y ayudarla a nacer y crecer; a renovarnos como pastores de coraje. Ese coraje que genera dinámicas capaces de tomar conciencia de la realidad que muchos de nuestros niños hoy están viviendo y trabajar para garantizarles los mínimos necesarios para que su dignidad como hijos de Dios sea no sólo respetada sino, sobre todo, defendida.

No dejemos que les roben la alegría. No nos dejemos robar la alegría, cuidémosla y ayudémosla a crecer. Hagámoslo esto con la misma fidelidad paternal de san José y de la mano de María, la Madre de la ternura, para que no se nos endurezca el corazón.

Con fraternal afecto, FRANCISCO

Vaticano, 28 de diciembre de 2016 - Fiesta de los Santos Inocentes, Mártires

[http://es.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/02/carta\\_papa\\_francisco\\_-\\_obispos\\_-\\_santos\\_inocentes\\_-\\_28\\_dic/1283218](http://es.radiovaticana.va/news/2017/01/02/carta_papa_francisco_-_obispos_-_santos_inocentes_-_28_dic/1283218)