

Reading : Mt 2,13-23

¹³ Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “Get up, 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.” ¹⁴ Then Joseph^[h] got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, ¹⁵ and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, “Out of Egypt I have called my son.”

¹⁶ When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men,^[i] he was infuriated, and he sent and killed all the children in and around Bethlehem who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had learned from the wise men.^[i]¹⁷ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah:

¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more.”

¹⁹ When Herod died, an angel of the Lord suddenly appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt and said, ²⁰ “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead.” ²¹ Then Joseph^[k] got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel. ²² But when he heard that Archelaus was ruling over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And after being warned in a dream, he went away to the district of Galilee. ²³ There he made his home in a town called Nazareth, so that what had been spoken through the prophets might be fulfilled, “He will be called a Nazorean.”

Sermon :

Warned by an angel of the massacre ordered by Herod, Joseph took Mary and Jesus to Egypt.

There is something paradoxical here when you know the history of Israel:

the people of Israel who constantly remember that God saved them from slavery in Egypt.

And it is Joshua who, on the death of Moses, allows Jacob's people to enter the Promised Land having crossed the Jordan.

And as you may know: Jesus is the same name as Joshua, and this name means, God Saves.

So, once Joshua saves the people in allowing them to enter the Promised Land, and when God reveals himself to us in his incarnation in Jesus, it is he who must be saved by crossing the Jordan in the other direction.

The reversal of the situation is very interesting.

For centuries, the people of Israel built their identity around this Land that they considered their due, promised, and their faith was built around the God of Moses who had liberated them from Egypt.

And then, when God manifests himself, he must leave this land and seek refuge in the land of an ancient enemy.

Just born, Jesus already succeeds in upsetting the established order. Just incarnate, God behaves in the opposite way to that which the confessions of the established faith attributed to him.

The Israelites had built their whole society, their whole religion, in particular relation to the land promised by God to

Moses: they attributed the towns by tribe (each tribe descended from a son of Jacob); they had made a sanctuary of Jerusalem around the Temple, housing the Ark of the Covenant there in a permanent manner, the Ark of the Covenant which was supposed to be carried about; they had established a Holy of Holies so that God could only manifest himself in a particular place, and no longer randomly in bushes as he was wont to do. From a people of faithful nomads, travellers, linked together solely by faith, little by little they became a nation whose main link was the land, belonging to the territory.

They changed their religion into nationalism, their faithfulness into politics.

Moreover, they no longer really waited for a Messiah who would be a holy man who would bring them nearer to God, but for a revolutionary leader, who would give them back full possession of their land.

So when this Messiah comes, when God himself comes to meet his people, he is forced to flee. Flee first of all before a king imbued with political and military power; and then , throughout his life, he will have to flee before the crowds who will not accept his message of love, preferring to wait for a Messiah of popular report who would lead an armed revolt.

This massacre of innocents shows us to what point the 'chosen people' had gone astray. It shows us the line between the religious and the political, between communion in faith and nationalism.

This people of God who burn so much incense, consume so many animals in sacrifice, cover their temple in so much gold, cannot simply welcome their God. Every year at Easter they remember the escape from Egypt, and sacrifice bulls in gratitude to their God who had allowed them to leave Egypt, but they force God to seek refuge there. They commemorate the crossing of the Jordan under Joshua, but they send Joshua to the other side of the Jordan. They wait for a Messiah who will set them free, but they put to death the God who saves...

With Jesus, all the old beliefs are upset, opposed, turned upside down. The idea of a people of God is totally transformed, and we understand that the love of God is not limited to one tribe, but is open to those faithful like the wise men coming from afar. The people of God is not those who rest their certainties in a covenant that they constantly break, but is made up of all those who welcome God, as in this case the Egyptians who allow him to take refuge. «The enemy of yesterday becomes the protector... . » : the end of the endless litany of the people saved from Egypt, here it is Egypt who saves God. The end therefore of the endless rancour, here too, the baby Jesus opens the way of forgiveness by putting his trust in a foreign enemy people. The end of ideas of belonging based on ethnicity, race, tribe, confession: brotherhood begins where children are welcomed, and ends where they are massacred.

I say 'the end', but we know very well that it is not the end; these ideas still exist, some people still claim to be the owners of the land of divine right, some people still kill in the name of

God, some people still prevent families from seeking refuge with their children because they are born elsewhere...

But in all cases, it should be the end for us, people of God, not descendants of Judas, but faithful, that is, trusting in Christ, and listening to the Word of God. People of God who are neither Israelite, nor Egyptian, nor Jew, nor Greek; people of God to whom belongs no kingdom of this world, no land, no river or mountain, but who are united by faith and obedience to this one commandment: « you will love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength, and

y
o
u
r

n
e
i
g
h
b
o
u
r

a
s

y
o
u
r