Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Herod is going to search for the child to destroy him” (Matt 2:14).

1 Jn 1:5—2:2; Mt 2:13-18

For a second time, the joyful mood of the Christmas holiday is interrupted by another reminder of the cost of the Incarnation as a sign of contradiction. The coming of God in Jesus revealed what a human being is meant to be, and this has ironically been taken as a rebuke by those who deny this profile in themselves and

in others. Being told that you were made to love one another is a demanding goal for some who seek to dominate others.

Herod exercised standard practice by ordering the murder of many children to snare a single child who might grow up to be his rival. The genocides of the 20th and 21st centuries have always included children in order to obliterate memory and the possibility of future retribution.

From Armenia, Auschwitz and Cambodia to El Mozote, Srebrenica and Rwanda, this slaughter has revealed a total breakdown of humanity. The wanton killing in Ukraine defies any justification. Senseless gun deaths in the United States stagger us repeatedly. This is the slaughter of the innocents.

The attempted murder of the infant Jesus was stopped by a quick-thinking Joseph tipped off by an angel. The escape of the Holy Family to Egypt did not spare other children from becoming the first martyrs of the Christian era. They only prefigured the beheading of John the Baptist, the crucifixion of Jesus, the stoning of Stephen, and waves of victims after that.

What is it about the Gospel of love that so threatens power? If only love were as contagious as the fear that spirals out of control once violence is used to take power or get even. So many conflicts, once started, take generations to slow the cycles of revenge.

To proclaim Christmas is to expose the futility of force to move history forward instead of in circles. The greatest power humanity holds is the power to give life. Only the work of reconciliation and the hard labor of forgiveness can advance the common good of humanity and civilization for all.

The full power of the Gospel is inseparable from the tears of Rachel and the blood of martyrs, for they, too, are part of the Christmas story.