

SUNDAY WITHIN THE CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

HOLY INNOCENTS

(Mt 2:13-18) (Audio Year A Track 007)

(Poem Vol. 1, pp. 179-82, – Gospel Vol. 1, pp. 220-3);

(The scene is a house in Bethlehem, about a year after the Birth of Jesus, and following soon after the visit of the three Magi...)

It is night. Joseph is sleeping in a little bed in his very small room... He is lying on one side, and is smiling at some vision he sees in a dream.

But his smile turns into an expression of anxiety. He is now sighing deeply - as if he had a nightmare - and he awakens with a start. He sits up, rubs his eyes and looks around... It is the dead of night. He grasps his robe... puts on his sandals...and goes towards the door facing his bed...

He knocks very gently... with the tips of his fingers. He must have heard a voice asking him to enter, because he opens the door carefully... and goes in. The room is a little larger than his own, and there is a low bed in it, near a cradle, with a night lamp in a corner...

But Mary is not sleeping. She is kneeling near the cradle in Her light dress, and is praying, watching Jesus Who is sleeping Peacefully. Jesus is the same age as I saw Him in the vision of the Magi: a Child about one year old, beautiful, rosy and fair haired. He is sleeping with His curly head sunk in the pillow, and a clenched fist under His chin.

'Are You not sleeping?' Joseph asks in a low surprised voice. 'Why not? Is Jesus not well?'

'Oh, no! He is all right. I am praying. Later I will sleep. Why have you come, Joseph?'

Joseph speaks in a very low voice lest he should awaken the Child, but it is an excited voice. 'We must go away from here at once. It must be at once. Prepare the trunk and a sack, with everything You can put in them. I'll prepare the rest, I'll take as much as I can... We will flee at dawn. I would go even sooner, but I must speak to the landlady...'

'But why this flight?'

'I will tell You later. It's because of Jesus. An angel said to me: "Take the Child and His Mother, and escape into Egypt." Don't waste any time. I'm going to prepare what I can.'

There is no need to tell Mary not to waste time. As soon as She hears Joseph mention an angel, Jesus, and flight, She understands that Her Creature is in danger and jumps to Her feet. Her face is whiter than wax, and She is holding one hand against Her heart, completely distressed. Then She begins to move about, quick and agile, laying the clothes in the trunk, and in a large sack which She places on Her bed [which is] still untouched. Although She is disheartened, She does not lose Her head: She acts quickly, but orderly. Now and again, when passing near the cradle, She looks at the Child Who is sleeping peacefully...

Only when Her sack is full - and it is obviously very heavy - She calls Joseph to help Her to close it and take it off the bed...

'Shall I take the woollen blankets too?' asks Mary.

'Take as much as You can. We will lose the rest. Do take as much as You can. Things will be useful because... because we will have to stay away for a long time, Mary!...' Joseph is very sad in saying so. And one can easily imagine how Mary feels...[...]

Joseph comes back. 'Are you ready? Is Jesus ready? Have You taken His blankets and His little bed? We can't take His cradle, but He must at least have His little mattress: poor Baby, Whose death they are seeking!'

'Joseph!' shouts Mary, while She grasps his arm.

'Yes, Mary, His death. Herod wants Him dead... because he is afraid of Him, [that filthy beast]... because he is afraid of this innocent Child. I don't know what he will do when he realises that He has escaped. But we will be far away by that time. I don't think he will revenge himself by searching for Him as far as Galilee. It would be very difficult for him to find out that we are Galileans, least of all that we are from Nazareth, and precisely who we are... But... if that should happen... God will help us just the same. Don't cry, Mary. To see You crying is a greater pain for me than having to go into exile.'

(Jesus comments to Maria Valorta:) 'The angel, in saying: "The Child and His Mother", proves to you that Mary was His real Mother. But She was not a wife of Joseph. She remained for ever: "The virgin betrothed to Joseph".'