

## Thought for the Day

*Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.*

*For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>*

*Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)*

*Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.*

### **28<sup>th</sup> December**

#### **The Holy Innocents**

Matthew 2.13-18

This appalling story is a lesser-known aspect of the Nativity narratives. The slaughter of the innocents – of children under 2 in Bethlehem and area – is not attested in history books, but it is entirely believable given Herod the Great's record of violence, paranoia and murder. He even had some of his own children killed when he felt that they threatened his authority. So the news of a king of the Jews being born would certainly arouse his paranoid reactions. Joseph escaped into Egypt with his family and wisely remained there until Herod was dead. Well that was terrible but a long time ago and it couldn't happen now.

Unfortunately we are only too aware that it can – that children die in even larger numbers in today's world, from mistreatment, neglect, natural disaster and political upheaval. Very often children are the innocents who suffer as a result of adult evil, just as in Herod's time. The worse humanitarian crisis today is in Yemen, where 12 million children are desperate for assistance. Covid on top of the existing crisis has made it a living hell. Malnutrition rates among children are the highest ever recorded there. The conflict kills and maims children as well as closing schools and hospitals.

Across the world, over 700 children die every day from diarrhoea caused by unsafe water, sanitation, and poor hygiene. Over half the world's population uses sanitation services that leave human waste untreated, threatening human health. Meanwhile an estimated 367 million children attend a school with no sanitation facility at all.

Perhaps one step forward today is that we are aware enough of these appalling abuses to have drawn up lists of human rights and applied them to children.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has 54 articles that cover all aspects of a child's life. It also explains how adults and governments must work together to make sure all children can enjoy all their rights.

Every child has rights, whatever their ethnicity, gender, religion, language, abilities or any other status. They include for example, the right to relax and play, and the right to freedom of expression, the right to be safe from violence and the right to education. The UNCRC is also the most widely ratified human rights treaty in the world. The Convention came into force in the UK in 1992.

There is potential, then, for things to be better today. Much depends on how much we act to implement those rights. And at present, coronavirus has worsened every situation of suffering around the world. I recommend the Unicef website where you can find out what they are doing for the world's children in this crisis. As they explain, coronavirus is the biggest global crisis for children since World War Two. Unicef is launching its largest-ever appeal to help tackle the impact of coronavirus on children and families around the world.

With schools closed, Unicef has already reached 224 million children with distance or home-based learning, and they want to reach millions more. Perhaps you might consider a donation to Unicef, or another children's charity, today in memory of the Holy Innocents.

Statistics from the Unicef website: <https://www.unicef.org.uk/>

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.  
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;  
that we may rejoice in your comfort,  
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love  
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*