

Homily December 28, 2025. *Still, Still, Still* William D Glenn+

The German Carol, *Still, Still, Still*, which was sung at the recent beautiful liturgy of Lessons and Carols, might be even more appropriate a song for today.

Since the beginning of the Season of Advent, if you are a super-regular churchgoer, you may well have attended 16 distinct liturgies. Incarnation has been a vessel for prayer of many kinds, of songs of many seasons, of silence and rapturous music, of Taizé and organ preludes. We have had an SRO crowd in the pews of the Church on more than one occasion, smaller groups of parishioners huddled together for others. We have welcomed worshippers from away and from here. The Advent wreath with tall tapers lit numerous times, O Come, O Come Emmanuel hastening us to worship on several different days, both Sundays and Wednesdays. Gorgeous, sublime, moving, candle-lit, welcoming, focused, penetrating. Us.

Today marks the First Sunday after Christmas, and I suspect you may not be hankering for yet another homily to focus you, to anticipate the coming feast of the Epiphany, perhaps provide a glimmer of light on today's somewhat mysterious Gospel. Because today's Gospel from John is almost identical to the one proclaimed on Christmas Day.

But I do want to speak, if briefly, about three feast days in the season that do not get the attention I believe they deserve, understandably so, what with the jammed liturgical calendar of the month of December.

Friday, the day after Christmas, was the feast of St. Stephen. In addition to being the name day of the rector, Stephen Shaver, it is also the feast of the Church's protomartyr, Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew and a deacon in Jerusalem who angered some members of the local synagogue with his errant teaching about this new preacher-teacher-healer-luminous presence, Jesus.

Convicted of blasphemy, he was publicly stoned to death, *stoned to death*, and among the onlookers was the Pharisee and Roman citizen, Saul, of Tarsus. When Saul was later knocked off his steed on the road to Damascus, the Lord asked him, perhaps referring to Stephen's astonishingly cruel murder, *Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?* You know how that story turns out.

It is not coincidence that the compilers of the calendar of saints places Stephen's feast on the day after the birth of the Savior. The cost of discipleship is inherent from the very beginning.

Following Stephen, yesterday the Church celebrated the feast of St. John, the evangelist, the beloved disciple, the youngest of Jesus' inner circle, author of the Book of Revelation. John, the intimate friend to whom Jesus entrusted his mother to at the foot of the cross. Legend has it that he took Mary to Ephesus in modern Turkey, where he lived with her until her death. The spare cottage, revered as Mary's house on a mountain top outside Izmir is a place of

pilgrimage, yet on the day we were there several years ago, we were the sole pilgrims. The affection between John and Jesus is widely acknowledged, and in medieval and Renaissance paintings, he is often portrayed with his head resting on Jesus' bosom. His Gospel, as you know so well, is poetic, mystical, prophetic and elegant, as today's Gospel reading on Jesus as the Word illustrates.

And third in the tryptic of saints are the Holy Innocents, mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, depicting the slaughter of all boys two years and under in the regions of Bethlehem. Herod, the puppet king of Judea, feared, because of what the Magi told him, that in that insignificant place, this boy-king would emerge to save the people of Israel. Herod had heard enough! Hence the ripping of children from the arms of their parents, and the mayhem and mass slaughter of these innocents proceeded.

Like all potentates and dictators and supreme grifters, and sometime us, Herod operated in the dark, often like us, whether our treacheries are great or small, hiding from the Light, at all costs.

Yet John, this one Jesus whelmed with love, wrote with profound intuition and an abiding presence, of the majesty of this boy-king grown to towering adulthood.

*The Word—divine communication and relationship— the Word was in the beginning—perhaps a big Bang—in the beginning with God—and what has come into being with Him is Light, the true is life, and the life was the Light of all people.*

*The Word is made flesh and dwells among us, dwells in us. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it.*

Nor does it now. The church juxtaposes the poetic birth of the Word, of the Light, this glorious continuous outpouring of Love, with these two dark martyrdoms.

As N.T Wright writes, the Word made flesh takes the pain and the paradox and the awfulness of the world onto himself. Into himself.

I would suggest, the very cost of discipleship is in the deep grace we are given in this divine paradox, to spread this message of hope, forgiveness, and love. To everyone, beyond the red doors we entered this morning. And to do so at all costs. A difficult hope, a demanding forgiveness, and an encompassing love.

These are the gifts of the Word, the One wrapped in swaddling, near the cattle lowing.

Still, still, still.