

DECEMBER 28, THE HOLY INNOCENTS: MORNING PRAYER

The First Lesson. The Reader begins

A Reading from the Book of Isaiah

Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing! For the LORD has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his afflicted. But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me. Your builders outstrip your destroyers, and those who laid you waste go forth from you. Lift up your eyes round about and see; they all gather, they come to you. As I live, says the LORD, you shall put them all on as an ornament, you shall bind them on as a bride does. “Surely your waste and your desolate places and your devastated land—surely now you will be too narrow for your inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up will be far away. The children born in the time of your bereavement will yet say in your ears: “The place is too narrow for me; make room for me to

dwell in.” Then you will say in your heart: ‘Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; whence then have these come?’” Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I will lift up my hand to the nations, and raise my signal to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders. Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the LORD; those who wait for me shall not be put to shame.”

The Reader concludes The Word of the Lord.

The Second Lesson. The Reader begins

A Reading from the Gospel according to Matthew

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, “Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but

whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened round his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the man by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

The Reader concludes The Word of the Lord.