



# Boston Catholic Journal



NIHIL NISI IESUM

Dedicated to Mary, Mother of God

Salus Animarum Suprema Lex Esto (Canon Law 175)

The Salvation of Souls is the Supreme Law in the Church

## HOLY INNOCENCE

### Feast of St. Stephen, first Martyr

“All those who sat in the Sanhedrin looked intently at him and saw that his face was like the face of an Angel.” (Acts 6.15)

*Jesus innocens Patri ...*  
**Jesus, the Innocent of the Father**

— and Saint Stephen, innocent of the world ...

**Holy innocence** stands, as it were, in perplexity before the clamor of the world.

We see this in children. They do not know the ways of the world, only the promptings of their hearts and the irrepressible joy borne of total simplicity and untrammelled trust. Children do not distinguish between appearances and realities. To them, appearances are the only realities. There is nothing of guile in the world, and nothing of malice. Childhood is that brief stage in our lives in which we most closely approximate something of that sinless and happy state that our first parents, Adam and Eve, had enjoyed prior to the Fall. Our instincts had not been honed to survive, but simply to exist. In this state of the *simplicity* of our existence, we most closely conform to our created nature as the *imago Dei*, the Image of God — for it is the image of the God Whose existence is simplicity itself and whose simplicity is existence itself. We become then, like unto our First Parents in their original state of felicity, or happiness, and like unto the God in Whose image our first parents (and subsequently, we) were made. It is, in a manner of speaking, a living the Prologue of life, after which the chapters succeeding the Introduction (to life) become more complex, and the plot, as it were, more oblique and potentially sinister. It is not without warrant that childhood is often spoken of in terms of a Garden; a Garden into which as yet no serpent obtruded itself.

Childhood engages the world with wonder — a wonder that too quickly vanishes before the ways of the world, and in direct proportion to its familiarity with the ways of the world ... and finally devolves to either suspicion or cynicism. We learn that

the world is manipulative, deceptive, untruthful, and in the end, largely corrupt. We enter adulthood. Are we then forevermore “banished” from that First Garden of beautiful innocence — an innocence to which we can never return? It appears to us much like asking if an erstwhile virgin can be a virgin once again. Because we are worldly, sophisticated ... we laugh. Or should we?

## Innocence Re-acquired

### All things are possible with God <sup>1</sup>

Christ Himself tells us that, “*omnia enim possibilia sunt apud Deum*” — “all things are possible with God.” It *is* possible to reacquire lost innocence — and, yes, it is even possible to reacquire lost virginity. We scorn the notion because we know the ways of men, and not the ways of God ... Who has insistently told us that His ways are not our ways. Indeed, they are better. Far better. Supremely better. “So”, you ask, “how am I, steeped in sin — and what is more, with no discernible way out — to reacquire this innocence of which you speak, this innocence that I myself once possessed long ago, and which, in a sad trade, I had exchanged for the allure of “sophistication”? Much like Nicodemus, you effectively ask, “*How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb, and be born again?*” <sup>2</sup> *It is not possible!*” And you are absolutely correct. It is not possible

— to you ... to man ... but it *is* possible to God! And we have countless instances of it — in the lives of the Saints ... both known and unknown; enrolled in the Martyrology of the Church — or the Book of Life in Heaven itself.

## **Holy innocence? It is not so far from you**

Holy innocence is estrangement from this world through the soul's utter immersion in Christ ... in a sense, the innocent stand beneath the unceasing cataract of the Baptismal Font that perpetually anoints their hearts — and in pouring upon them the unremitting love of Christ, removes even the rumor of malice from their minds. They have been washed clean in the Blood of the Lamb. They have died with Christ, and with Christ live anew. There are even those ... full of years ... who have the innocence of newly Baptized children! We have all known at least one. To be in their presence is to be under the breath of God.

And the world knows not what to make of them! Within them is a beauty for which the world has no metaphor — and therefore cannot pervert to its own ends.

Oh, yes ... the world can — and does, ever day — exploit innocence, seduce it, corrupt it, trample it under foot! Utterly of God — unable to conform to the world, it *can* — *it must* — be stamped out *by the world* as a reproach *to* the world! And it was always so:

It was radiant on the face of Stephen before the Sanhedrin — as it was radiant on the face of Christ before Caiaphas, Herod, and Pilate — a silent witness and testimony to the enormity of sin.

Provoking deadly outrage, innocence is extirpated from our midst. We hang it on a Cross, tear it from the womb, bury it beneath stones. It is a reproach to us, the living dead, by the dead yet living. We would stifle — were it possible we would bury — their reproach ... but we cannot lay rest to our lies. St. Paul tells us that, “we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses.”<sup>3</sup> They are the innocent, whom we have as surely put to death by our outrage as the stones that fell upon Stephen.

### YOU HAVE LOST THIS INNOCENCE ... AND SO HAVE I

You have lost this innocence ... and so have I. But both of us can reclaim it, be clothed once again in this beauty that has no metaphor — even knowing that we will be immolated in it, crucified for it, through that same outrage of the world that first crucified Christ. Indeed, the servant is not greater than his Master. The world hated Him. It will hate you. Christ promised this. Because we are not of this world.<sup>4</sup> Our true citizenship is Elsewhere and everlasting.

But we fear this; fear the rancor of the world, and the tribute in pain that it will attempt to exact from us as Christians, as Catholics. In one way or another, under one guise or another, we are summoned to choose Christ before the menacing face of the world that will not tolerate Him ... and if we follow Him, us.

Knowing the price, we politely demur.

We may not persecute the innocent — but we allow the cloaks of those who have lost it to be placed at our feet.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Mark 10.27

<sup>2</sup> St. John 3.4

<sup>3</sup> Hebrews 12.1

<sup>4</sup> St. John 15.19-20

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