

Grace's Last Stand and Ultimate Victory

Daily Gospel / Liturgical Cycle A

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Mark 6:14-29

King Herod heard about it, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him." Others were saying, "He is Elijah"; still others, "He is a prophet like any of the prophets." But when Herod learned of it, he said, "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up." Herod was the one who had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, whom he had married. John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Herodias harbored a grudge against him and wanted to kill him but was unable to do so. Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him. She had an opportunity one day when Herod, on his birthday, gave a banquet for his courtiers, his military officers, and the leading men of Galilee. Herodias's own daughter came in and performed a dance that delighted Herod and his guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you." He even swore (many things) to her, "I will grant you whatever you ask of me, even to half of my kingdom." She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" She replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The girl hurried back to the king's presence and made her request, "I want you to give me at once on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was deeply distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests he did not wish to break his word to her. So he promptly dispatched an executioner with orders to bring back his head. He went off and beheaded him in the prison. He brought in the head on a platter and gave it to the girl. The girl in turn gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Introductory Prayer: Lord, I believe in you and all that you taught as it has been passed down to us through your Church. I hope in you, knowing that you will never send me out of your presence. Only by sin could I cut myself away from your loving hands. Although I am weak, I trust that you will keep me close. Lord, I love you and long for my love for you to grow, for you deserve so much better than my measly offering. Yet I know, too, that you are pleased with my desire for you.

Petition: Grant me, O Lord, an honest and sincere heart.

1. "It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up": The verdict of conscience always makes itself known. Herod's guilt regarding John the Baptist's murder is projected into the present as a haunting memory. Those who have radically rejected God, though they might possess great power or wealth, great intelligence or ability, are ultimately the most insecure people on earth. When true goodness appears in their life, it presents itself as a threat. It condemns them, and alienates them from themselves. All this is but a reflection of their state of soul is before God. Such is the power of man's conscience as: it imposes its painful sentence long before the person ever reaches the ultimate tribunal of justice. Like Christ, we can only remain silent before the Herods of the world, praying that they break their resistance to grace.

2. "He was very much perplexed yet he liked to listen to him": "Fear the grace of God that passes never to return." In the lives of all persons, even the wicked, enough goodness is given them to be saved, enough such that God can offer them the truth of salvation within the scope of their freedom. Such graces last for only a time, not forever. These moments cannot be treated as a moments that temporarily pacify our conscience, only to permit us to continue in our sin and resistance to living a holy life. Herod feared John, knew he was a holy man, and felt the attraction of his words, but he did nothing to respond to it. You cannot play around with God and win. Herod

loses, and attacked what he knew he should love. This tragedy must teach us to be sincere and never imprison the voice of God in our soul, but to let it reign in our life. We must use our freedom to respond to God's voice, breaking the chains of human respect or fear of sacrifice that bind me us to darkness.

3. He Was Beheaded in Prison: The last honor Christ could offer a faithful apostle, who has stood firm in the truth against the twisted provocations of evil around him, is—in some sense—a “full” participation in his Paschal Mystery. What began as testimony by proclaiming conversion, John now concludes with testimony to the victorious hope the blessed possess in Christ. This is never clearer than by in a martyr's death as is intimated in this .

Passage from the Book of Wisdom

For though in the sight of men they were punished,
their hope is full of immortality.
Having been disciplined a little,
they will receive great good,
because God tested them and found them worthy of himself;
like gold in the furnace he tried them,
and like a sacrificial burnt offering he accepted them (Wisdom 3:14-6).

May we accept today the hard road of fidelity so as to be “disciplined a little” and be found worthy of the hope that is “full of immortality.”

Conversation with Christ: Let me experience, dear Jesus, the glory of your martyrs through many small acts of fidelity— to my conscience, to my mission, and to the service to souls. Heroic and filled with hope, may I accept a sentence of love and not fear any path you set before me today. May I be like one who has died and yet lives the blossom of a holy life that will never end.

Resolution: I will work to be sincere in all I do, and use the sacrament of confession as a place of constant conversion and openness to God's will.