



1) Opening prayer

God our Father and protector,
without you nothing is holy,
nothing has value.

Guide us to everlasting life
by helping us to use wisely
the blessings you have given to the world.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 14,1-12

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the reputation of Jesus and said to his court, 'This is John the Baptist himself; he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Now it was Herod who had arrested John, chained him up and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had told him, 'It is against the Law for you to have her.' He had wanted to kill him but was afraid of the people, who regarded John as a prophet. Then, during the celebrations for Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and so delighted Herod that he promised on oath to give her anything she asked. Prompted by her mother she said, 'Give me John the Baptist's head, here, on a dish.' The king was distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he ordered it to be given her, and sent and had John beheaded in the prison. The head was brought in on a dish and given to the girl, who took it to her mother.

John's disciples came and took the body and buried it; then they went off to tell Jesus.

3) Reflection

•Today's Gospel describes the way in which John the Baptist was the victim of corruption and of the arrogance of the government of Herod. He was killed without a process, during a banquet of the king with the great of the kingdom. The text gives us much information on the time in which Jesus lived and on the manner in which power was used by the powerful of that time.

- Matthew 14,1-2. Who is Jesus for Herod. The text begins by informing about the opinion which Herod had of Jesus: "This is John the Baptist himself, he has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him". Herod tries to understand Jesus starting from the fear which assailed him after murdering John. Herod was very superstitious and hid his fear behind the ostentation of his riches and of his power.
- Matthew 14, 3-5: The hidden cause of the murdering of John. Galilee, the land of Jesus, was governed by Herod Antipas, the son of King Herod, the Great, from the year 4 BC until the year 38 AD, after Christ. Forty-three years in all! During the time of the life of Jesus, there were no changes of government in Galilee! Herod was the absolute Lord of everything, he did not render an account to anyone, he did whatever passed through his mind. Arrogance, lack of ethics, absolute power, without control from the people! But the one, who commanded in Palestine since the year 63 before Christ, was the Roman Empire. Herod, in Galilee, so as not to be dismissed, tried to please Rome in everything. Above all, he insisted on an efficient administration which would bring riches to the Empire. His concern was his own promotion and his security. For this reason, he refrained from any type of subversion. Matthew says that the reason for murdering John was because he had denounced Herod, because he had married Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip. Flavio Joseph, a Jewish writer of that time, says that the true reason for the imprisonment of John the Baptist was the fear of Herod that there would be a popular revolt. Herod like to be called the benefactor of the people, but in reality he was a tyrant (Lk 22, 25). The denunciation of John against Herod was the drop that caused the glass to overflow: "It is against the Law for you to have her". And John was put in prison.
- Matthew 14, 6-12: The plot of the murderer. An anniversary and a festive banquet, with dances and orgy! Mark says that in the feast were "the great of the court, the officials and the important people of Galilee" (Mk 6, 21). This is the environment in which the murdering of John the Baptist is planned. John, the prophet, was a living denunciation of that corrupt system. This is why, he was eliminated with the pretext of a problem of personal revenge. All this reveals the moral weakness of Herod. So much power accumulated in the hands of one man incapable to control himself! In the enthusiasm of the feast and of the wine, Herod makes a promise by oath to Salome, the young dancer, daughter of Herodias. Superstitious as he was, he thought that he had to maintain this oath, and respond to the caprice of the girl; and because of this he ordered the soldier to bring the head of John on a tray and give it to the dancer, who then gave it to her mother. For Herod, the life of his subjects was worthless. He disposes of them as he disposes of the staircases in his house!
The three characteristics of the government of Herod: the new Capital, large estates, and the class of functionaries:
a) The New Capital. Tiberiade was inaugurated when Jesus was only 20 years old. It was called like that in order to please Tiberius, the emperor of Rome. It was inhabited by the lords of the earth, the soldiers, the policemen, the unscrupulous judges (Lk 18, 1-4). The taxes and the products of the people were channelled toward it. It was there that

Herod made his orgy of death (Mk 6, 21-29). Tiberiades was the city of the palaces of the King, where those who wore soft, delicate dresses lived (cf. Mt 11, 8). It is not known by the Gospels that Jesus entered this city.

b) The large estates. Scholars say that during the long government of Herod, the large estates grew causing harm to community property. The Book of Henoch denounces the lords of the land and expresses the hope of the little ones: "And then the powerful and the great will no longer be the lords of the land". (Hen 38,4). The ideal of ancient times was the following: "Each one will peacefully sit under his vine and nobody will frighten them" (1 Mac 14,12; Mi 4,4; Zc 3,10). But the politics of the government of Herod made this ideal impossible.

c) The class of functionaries. Herod created a whole class of functionaries faithful to the project of the King: the Scribes, the merchants, the lords of the land, the officers of the market, the tax collectors, the militia, the policemen, the judges, the local heads,. In every village there was a group of persons which supported the government. In the Gospels, some Pharisees appear together with the Herodians (Mk 3, 6; 8, 15; 12, 13), and that shows the alliance between the religious power and the civil power. The life of the people in the villages was very controlled, both by the government and by the religion. Much courage was necessary to begin anything new, as John and Jesus did! It was the same thing as attracting to self the anger of the privileged ones, both from the religious and the civil powers.

4) Personal questions

- Do you know any persons who died victims of corruption and domination of the powerful? And here among us, in our community and in the Church, are there victims of authoritarianism and of the abuse of power?
- Herod, the powerful, who thought he was the lord of life and death of people, was a coward before the great and a corrupt flatterer before the girl who danced. Cowardice and corruption marked the exercise of the power of Herod. Compare all this with the exercise of religious power and civil orgy, in the different levels of society and of the Church.

5) Concluding Prayer

The humble have seen and are glad.

Let your courage revive, you who seek God.

For God listens to the poor,

he has never scorned his captive people. (Ps 69,32-33)