Saturday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mt* 14:1-12): Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus and said to his servants, “This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.”

Now Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, for John had said to him, “It is not lawful for you to have her.” Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for. Prompted by her mother, she said, “Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and the guests who were present, he ordered that it be given, and he had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who took it to her mother. His disciples came and took away the corpse and buried him; and they went and told Jesus.

“Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus”

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Today, our liturgy proposes that we contemplate an injustice: the beheading of St. John the Baptist; and, at the same time, to discover in God's Word the need for clear and concrete testimony of our faith in order to fill the world with hope.

I invite you to consider the person of Herod. Although this is a counter-testimony for us, it will help us to highlight some important details for our testimony of faith amid the world. Accordingly, today’s reading asserts that “Herod the tetrarch heard of the reputation of Jesus” (Mt 14:1). This assertion underlines an apparently correct, but not too sincere, attitude. This is the same kind of reality we find today in many people and, perhaps, even in ourselves. There are many who have heard of Jesus, but, who is He actually? What personal implication unites us to Him?

For our part, we must therefore give the correct answer. Notice that Herod's reply is but vague

information: “This man is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead” (Mt 14:2). What we are missing here is Peter's reply to Jesus' question: “He said to them, ‘but who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter said in reply, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Mt 16:15-16). And Peter’s assertion does not leave any room for fear or indifference; rather gives way to a testimony based in the Gospel of hope. This is how Saint John Paul II defined it in his apostolic Exhortation The Church in Europe: “Therefore, in union with the whole Church, I invite my brothers and my sisters in faith constantly to be open in trust to Christ and to allow themselves to be renewed by him, proclaiming to all people of good will in the power of peace and love that whoever encounters the Lord comes to know the Truth, discovers the Life, and finds the Way leading to it.”

Today, Saturday, let the Mother of God, the Mother of Hope, help us to really discover Jesus and to bear witness to him to our brothers and sisters.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “Saint John the Baptist gave his life for Christ, although he was not commanded to deny Jesus Christ; he was only ordered to keep quiet about the truth” (Saint Bede the Venerable)

- “St. John the Baptist reminds us too, Christians of this time, that with love for Christ, for his words and for the Truth, we cannot stoop to compromises. The Truth is Truth; there are no compromises” (Benedict XVI)

- The duty of Christians to take part in the life of the Church impels them to act as witnesses of the Gospel and of the obligations that flow from it. This witness is a transmission of the faith in words and deeds. Witness is an act of justice that establishes the truth or makes it known.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2,472)