Friday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time

Gospel text (*Mk* 6:14-29): King Herod heard about Jesus, 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.

“King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread”

Fr. Ferran BLASI i Birbe
(Barcelona, Spain)

Today, in this passage from Mark, we are told about Jesus' fame—known for his miracles and teachings. This fame was so great that some believed him to be John the Baptist, Jesus' relative and precursor, resurrected from the dead. And this is how Herod, who had ordered his execution, wanted to imagine him. But this Jesus was far more than other men of God: more than John; more than any of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Most High: He was the Son of God made Man, Perfect God and perfect Man. This Jesus—present among us—as a man, can understand us, and as God, can grant us everything we need.

John, the precursor, who had been sent by God before Jesus, also precedes him in his passion and death through his martyrdom. It was a death unjustly inflicted on a holy man by the tetrarch Herod, surely against his will, because he held him in high esteem and listened to him respectfully. But John was clear and firm with the king when he reproached him for his reprehensible conduct, since it was not lawful for him to have taken Herodias as his wife, the wife of his brother.

Herod had agreed to the request made by Herodias' daughter, instigated by her mother, when, at a banquet—after the dance that had pleased the king—he swore before the guests to give the dancer whatever she asked for. "What shall I ask for?" she asks her mother, who replies, "The head of John the Baptist" (Mk 6:24). And the petty king has the Baptist executed. It was an oath that in no way bound him, since it was an evil thing, against justice and against conscience.

Once again, experience teaches that one virtue must be united with all the others, and all must grow organically, like the fingers of a hand. And also, that when one indulges in one vice, a procession of others follows.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “St John gave his life for Christ who is the Truth. Precisely for love of the truth he did not stoop to compromises and did not fear to address strong words to anyone who had strayed from God’s path.” (Saint Bede the Venerable)

- “John does not fear human judgments, persecution, slander or death, because he has a clear conscience of his mission. The life of the Baptist is summarized on the need to obey God rather than men.” (Benedict XVI)

- “Following in the steps of the prophets and John the Baptist, Jesus announced the judgement of the Last Day in his preaching. Then will the conduct of each one and the secrets of hearts be brought to light. Then will the culpable unbelief that counted the offer of God's grace as nothing be condemned.” (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 678)