

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 Mark's passage we are told about Jesus' reputation —known by his teachings and miracles. His fame was such some were saying He actually was John the Baptist, Jesus' relative and precursor, who had resurrected from the dead. This is what Herod, who had ordered John's death, also thought. But this Jesus was much more than the other men of God: much more than John; much more than any of the prophets who spoke in the name of the Almighty: He was the Son of God, become Man, Perfect God and Perfect Man. This Jesus —present amongst us—, as a man, can understand us and, as God can grant us all we need.

John, the precursor, who had been sent by God before Jesus, with his martyrdom also preceded Jesus in His passion and death. It had also been an unfair death inflicted to a man who was a saint, by Herod, the tetrarch, possibly against his own will, because he respected him and liked to listen to him. Though, John was clear and firm with the king when John criticized his behavior deserving vituperation, because it was not licit to have married Herodias, his brother's sister.

Herod had accepted Herodias' daughter request, induced by her mother, when, at a banquet —after a dance that had delighted the king— he had promised her with many oaths, in front of his guests, to give her what she would ask. “What shall I ask for?” She told her mother, who replied: “The head of John the Baptist” (Mk 6:24). And the petty kinglet had the Baptist beheaded. It was certainly an oath that did not oblige him in any way, as it was an evil thing, against any justice and any conscience.

Experience teaches us, once more, that each virtue has to be always joined to all the others, and all together have to grow organically like the fingers of the hand. And, by the same token, when one incurs in some vice, soon others will follow.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

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“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)

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“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)

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“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, N° 678)