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Friday's Gospel: Martyrs Like John

Gospel for Friday in the 4th Week of Ordinary Time, and commentary.

Gospel (*Mk 6:14-29*)

King Herod heard of it; for Jesus' name had become known. Some said, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him." But others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

But when Herod heard of it he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been

raised.” For Herod had sent and seized John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; because he had married her. For John said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.” And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and kept him safe. When he heard him, he was much perplexed; and yet he heard him gladly.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias’ daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, “Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it.” And he vowed to her, “Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.”

And she went out, and said to her mother, “What shall I ask?” And she said, “The head of John the baptizer.” And she came in immediately with haste to the king, and asked, saying, “I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.” And the king was exceedingly sorry; but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard and gave orders to bring his head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.

When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

Commentary

In the gospel of Mark, the story of John the Baptist's martyrdom is framed by the sending out of the twelve apostles and their return, as if to make clear that martyrdom is a real possibility for an apostle of Christ.

But the details of the story also point to our Lord's future sacrifice on the Cross. Like the Master, John was not afraid to tell the truth: "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." And everyone, including Herod, thought that he was a just and holy man, like Jesus of whom people said: "He has done everything well" (*Mk 7:37*).

John's fate, like that of Jesus, fell into the hands of weak and fearful men like Herod and Pilate, who did not want to upset others, even to the point of betraying the truth to avoid problems for themselves. Both the prophet and the Messiah die a cruel

death, and in the end the disciples of both come to collect their bodies and place them in a tomb.

At that time so many people were talking about the martyrdom of John that some thought he was still acting: “John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why powers act in him.”

John is the first to imitate our Lord in “laying down his life for his friends.” That is why he is the only saint whose birth and death are celebrated liturgically by the Church.

As we reread the story of this holy man’s martyrdom, we can remember that we are all called to be martyrs, witnesses to the truth. As in the Baptist, everyone has to see in us a resemblance to Jesus.

We cannot be afraid to make God known to those around us, joyfully accepting the risks involved in giving

witness to our faith by living it with generosity. “We must bring into our life, to make them our own, the life and death of Christ. We must die through mortification and penance, so that Christ may live in us through Love. And then follow in the footsteps of Christ, with a zeal to co-redeem all mankind” (Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, XIV).

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