

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus nor John the Baptist are not present in today's Gospel. Rather, Mark, writing to folks that believe in Christ's resurrection focuses on the death of John the Baptist and makes it clear that John was not raised from the dead, like Christ. He tells about a prophet that is to come before the Messiah and to him this is John, although others were expecting the appearance of Elijah. Mark then describes the now famous birthday party. A party is normally a joyous event but what happened at the party gives reason to mourn. Years ago, or *The Washington Post* quoted a lavishly paid lobbyist: "There are only two engines that drive Washington: One is greed, and the other is fear." That would be a good description of Herod's birthday party. The Jewish historian Herod Antipas (ca. 21 B.C. — post-A.D. 39) mentioned John had imprisoned John for preaching against adultery. Herod was the son of Herod the Great but was not really a king but yet a powerful tetrarch of Galilee and Perea. He is still powerful since he is just below Emperor Tiberius on the organizational chart. Remember, Rome was all about Pax Romana or Roman peace and would go to any extent to silence those questioning them, including killing people to keep the peace. John the Baptist and Jesus are clear examples of this, but more of that later.

Now, back to the party. This party has a plot worthy of today's R rated movies - it has an interesting story line and is a thriller with plus both sex and violence.

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Tiberius on the organizational chart. Remember, Rome was all about Pax Romana or Roman peace and would go to any extent to silence those questioning them, including killing people to keep the peace. John the Baptist and Jesus are clear examples of this, but more of that later. Back to the party which has a plot worthy of today's R rated movies - it has an interesting story line plus the requisite sex and violence.

John the Baptist spoke the truth to Herod - his marriage to his sister-in-law Herodias went against the Torah. Like Amos, who was exiled for speaking the truth to King Jeroboam as he described to Northern Israel that God was using a plumb line for them. A *plumb line* was used by builders to ensure a building is perfectly vertical. Today we refer to a wall being on or off plumb. In our vernacular we can also say someone is left of plumb. Our covenant with God is one such plumb line that calls us to straighten up. Our plumb line swings one way to the other in our lives as we attempt to be in right relationship with God with the line being perfectly vertical. Yet, thanks be to God, there is another plumb line that saves: the cross of Christ. As children of God, marked with the seal of the Holy Spirit, and receiving wisdom from God, we are able to work for justice and peace, renouncing the powers of this world that rebel against God.

He called out both Herod and Herodias but believing John to be both righteous and holy. Not many people spoke the truth to someone this powerful, to tell them something that was true but something they did not want to hear so Herod respected and admired John. However, Herodias had a grudge and she wanted John to be killed but she did not have that power to do this. The plot thickens. Herod comes up with what he thinks is

a good compromise. He thinks, I will jail John and I can still listen to the things he says that I enjoy and protect him while he is under my protective custody. But Herodias still wants John to be killed so she crafts her own plan.

During this dinner, her young daughter Salome “danced and pleased Herod and his guests”. He was so aroused by her seductive dance that Herod promised her whatever she had asks for and as a man of wealth he had many riches from which to choose. Salome consults her mother and then springs the trap: You can hear this young woman say, “I want John’s head on a silver platter—now” This is unequivocal. Herodias would settle for nothing less. We do not like to hear the truth when we are called on the things we do wrong and can react in many ways. Herod was caught. He was thinking he has to save face by fulfilling what he is offering and he has to answer to the Emperor. Plus defaulting on an oath is the same as taking God’s name in vain. Herod ordered a soldier of the guard to behead John in his cell, bring, bring his head on a platter, and gave it not to Herod but to Salome, who immediately gave it to her mother. His disciples heard about it, and they came and laid his body in a tomb. Speaking truth to authority can have dire consequences. Mark foreshadows the execution of Christ who was also laid in the tomb after speaking truth to authority and warns the early Christian community that their fervent preaching may lead to martyrdom.

This is the Jesus who hosts the second party in the wilderness thousands of nobodies with nothing to offer except five loaves and two fish.

At that feast greed and fear have no place. There all are fed to the full, with leftovers beyond comprehension.

Both John and Jesus speak to us today, even though they were martyred so long ago.

We are called to speak to power and speak out against injustice in our community and the world knowing we are safe. The Holy Spirit leads us and our belief in Christ assures we will have eternal life where the plumb line is straight.

Amen.