

Mixing Church and State Twenty-first Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, August 29, 2017 8:15 AM Jer 1:17-19; **Mk 6:17-29** The Passion of St. John the Baptist
(Whenever the two are connected it is always *in* government that uses religion and faith and people's goodwill for their benefit, and that's why it's a bad thing.)

“Herod feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man, and kept him in custody.”

Herod sets the stage for the passion of John the Baptist, which sets the whole stage for the story and passion of Jesus. So Herod is the king of Galilee; he probably wanted to become the king of Judea. Judea at that time didn't actually have a king; it was ruled by the Roman governor in conjunction with the high priesthood. So the high priest in a ceremonial way, in a figurative way, served as king, but had no power. But **the high priest was a player in the game of that time along with Herod, the governor, and various other people in Rome. And it is probable that the inner workings of these various factors is what actually allowed Jesus the freedom to do what he did for a long time. And it's probably the realignment of these factors that ended Jesus' ministry with his crucifixion and death**, because people have often wondered: How did Jesus get away with, for example, cleansing the Temple? And it says that the guards stood there and did nothing; it says that in one of the texts. How was that? Well apparently at that moment this particular game was at a stage wherein the high priest had no real freedom; they were more afraid of either Herod or Pilate or somebody in Rome than Jesus. Later on when that shifted they became more concerned with Jesus and acted, again, in concert with Pilate and even Herod.

So what really was going on we can't know for sure, but it is the age-old story of **religion and state; and the two don't mix, but they are always mixed**. So in the time of Christ and before and after also often the temple and the palace were one big complex trying to unite church and state, religion and God, and government and king or ruler of some kind. That's the whole idea. Rome did

it too. Rome declared the emperor to be divine. The Egyptian pharaohs were thought to be from God. And so this is the way things go.

One of the great blessings of this country was the original founders thought that was a very bad idea **and tried to keep everything separate, so that actually faith can breathe. Whenever the two are connected it is always government that uses religion and faith and people's goodwill for their benefit, and that's why it's a bad thing.** It's bad in particular for faith and for religion. It's good for people in power; it's bad for the truth. So this is already what's going on at the time of John the Baptist. **What is good for people in power is bad for people who care about the truth.** John is one that cared about the truth. Herod cared about power. These two simply don't mix, and every time we celebrate this gospel we should remember that.