

A Grave Weakness The Passion of St. John the Baptist Wednesday, August 29, 2018
Jer 1:17-19; **Mk 6:17-29** (Wanting to please people)

“When he heard him speak he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him.”

Herod, and there were various men named Herod, a line of kings, but Herod, this **Herod**, was a man very much **like most of us: drawn to the good, but with some very grave weaknesses**. When he heard John the Baptist he was drawn to his words because his words were truthful, and we are drawn to the truth. We do rejoice in the truth. We are drawn to the good. The good and the true are the same, but we can have certain weaknesses.

Herod’s greatest weakness, it seems from this story, was **he wanted to please people**. Pleasing people can be a terrible trap. It’s related to wanting to be well thought of, which of course is one of the great idols, the four great idols, **fame**: wanting to be well thought of, wanting to be popular, **wanting to be liked**. It’s a form of idolatry, according to St. Thomas and many of the saints. So poor Herod, we can actually sympathize with him, he has this great desire and need even, in his own mind, to be liked, to be honored, to be well thought of. And because of that he creates this monstrous thing, beheaded John the Baptist in prison without a trial, without anything just because he wanted his wife and his wife’s daughter to like him. And he wanted his courtiers to think well of his promises even if the promises were utterly rash and preposterous in the first place.

Now what if the daughter had asked for half of his kingdom? Would he have given half the kingdom? I personally doubt it. Even there, **there are limits to what people will do to be well thought of. I don’t think he would have given up half his kingdom**. He would have said, “Oh, my Dear, I was being rash. I didn’t really mean it.” Well **he could have said that about beheading John the Baptist too, but he didn’t**. Therein lies, you might say, a moral lesson.