

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

Today's gospel text is a tragedy on every level. The tragic and horrible death of John the Baptist at the hands of King Herod is a story that will never go away. A foolish statement made to his daughter and a wish granted by pride (instead of rejected by faith) is the fuller version of the story. And still, the complete story is not likely revealed.

My dear friends, what is happening in our gospel text is [again] much more than meets the eye and goes far beyond a meaningless crime. For that matter, it has happened again and continues to happen today in the world around us. To understand what Jesus is revealing to us; what the Word of God is telling us, we must ask, we must knock, and we must seek for our faith to provide understanding when we hear the story of the 'Death of John the Baptist.'

One technique of preparing sermons is much like the forensics of reviewing a crime scene. We take away the names and focus on the actions (gains and losses), the issues, problems, or conflicts, the positions of power (and who holds them), and then analyze the results.

So, without names, an authority has spoken against the action of an unethical marriage. This has created a problem to be solved. Now it happens that another figure of authority has respect for the other in authority and places it in a position of safety. However, the problem remains. When the time is right, an opportunity to control authority is exercised and is authority is commanded to destroy the opposing authority.

Don't feel lost here, Salome, the daughter of Herod's wife's (not Herod's daughter) takes advantage of him. Through a conversation with her mother, Salome uses King Herod to destroy the authority that opposes her mother's and King Herod's marriage. John the Baptist was not the target of the crime here; John's authority was what Salome and her mother tried to destroy. My friends, we have God's word that John was a righteous man; John proclaimed the coming of Christ. John was the fulfillment of prophecy as the "voice of one who cried out in the wilderness; make straight the way of the Lord."

The issue King Herod and his wife had was not with John, but rather with the very authority John was granted by God alone. And when they killed John, they did not kill the authority, because we cannot destroy what we did not create.

The history of resisting and rebelling against authority is nothing new. Another famous King named Henry VIII of England also took issue with the authority of the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 (during the time of the Reformation) and created a new church with his authority as King. Martin Luther challenged the authority of the Roman Catholic Church with the authority of God's Word in Holy Scripture.

So far, we see a battle of authority against authority; kings against the righteous, the church against kings, the Holy Scripture challenging the actions within the church. My friends, these are struggles not between people, but battles between authorities. These conflicts are neither trivial nor passing; they remain as long as this world continues. These conflicts are the very essences of the battle of what is good and what is bad; the truth and deception.

The tradition of destroying authority has been alive and well in society as time moved forward, as civilizations advanced, and as problems and issues arose. Some matters were harsh while others were mild. Throughout our history people toppled authorities and other times the authorities remained strong forcing people to accept, change, or adapt.

The battle with authority is the message in the gospel text today, and there is also a message of Good News here as well. Simply put, there must be a message herein that provides us with hope, comfort and strength for today. The Good News for you and me today is the authority of this world's ruler has been destroyed for our sake.

You see it was the authority of this world's ruler that took the life of John the Baptist and it was the Authority of God's Word that destroyed the authority this world had over us. The very first prophetic statement in Holy Scripture is recorded in Genesis and foretells the destruction of the authority of this world when God says, "He will crush your head and you will strike his heel." We are no longer destined for death, but the **authority of Heaven has secured a position of eternal life for us through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

As we consider the authorities in the world today, Paul makes it clear to the Romans (and us) that we are subject to them. Paul states (Ch 13, v1), "Everyone must submit to governing authorities. For all authority comes from God, and those in positions of authority have been placed there by God." Authority is not something *we* can create or destroy and authority is very different than power.

Verse 4, "The authorities are God's servants, sent for your good." Authority is granted from God alone for the sake of our life-together. Jesus did not rebel against the authorities of the day, he submitted to them...even unto death and in doing so set us free from the authorities that held power over us.

God's authority is absolute and His promise of love and protection for us is eternal. When we begin to understand what God is doing for us throughout the history of the world, then we only begin to see the endless compassion, care, and love for us that He truly has. God has used His Authority to guide our rebellious lives, wants, and actions to a place of peace and comfort within His merciful keep.

God's authority continues to guide us in the world today and where it becomes corrupt; God will send the means to purify and correct it for the sake of our lives together dear friends. While it is difficult to see at times, we are in the very best of care because our Lord is the authority that all created beings answer to: both earthly and divine.

We live in the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God at the same time. The view of each is very different and the choice is ours on which we focus on. Jesus calls us to look at the divine side of life and live in the Kingdom that never ends. As we listen and follow the Authority of God's Holy Word, may the peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.