

# Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist

St. Mark 6:14-29

August 29, 2021

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

**“It happened in the spring of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle, that David sent Joab and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the people of Ammon and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem”** (2 Sam. 11:1). So opens the eleventh chapter of 2 Samuel. It’s **“the time when kings go out to battle.”** But this king did not. **“David remained at Jerusalem.”**

Things had been going well. 2 Samuel opens with the death of King Saul. Saul foolishly mistrusted David, and sought many times to kill him. But God protected David, and made him king. He defeated the Philistines, brought the ark to Jerusalem, and was governing wisely.

But then, **“at the time when kings go out to battle... David remained at Jerusalem.”** This is when temptation strikes: when we let our guard down, stop doing our jobs, stop doing the basics.

**“But David remained at Jerusalem. Then it happened one evening that David arose from his bed and walked on the roof on the king’s house. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing, and the woman was very beautiful to behold”** (2 Sam. 1b-2).

David wasn’t with his army. He wasn’t doing what the king does. That’s when a woman catches his eye. **“And the woman was very beautiful to behold.”** What rises now within David is temptation. The thoughts and impulses he feels are part of the sinful nature, the old Adam. Now he has a choice: turn away from the temptation, or proceed.

This is each of our lives every day. The choices are rarely so dramatic. Kings can sin in dramatic ways, peasants sin in little ways. But sin destroys peasant and king alike.

Every day is a battle, a battle against the darkness, a battle against the lie, a battle against our own impulses. But David had not gone out to the battle. He had already put himself in a position to sin.

When we skip our prayers and Bible reading, when we take the drink we know we shouldn't, when we go out when we should go home, a thousand times a day we have opportunities to put ourselves in a position to sin, or a position to do what God has called us to do.

**"So David sent and inquired about the woman..."** (2 Sam. 11:3a). Her name was Bathsheba. And if you don't know the story, it's more interesting and more horrible than you are imagining. It starts with desire and ends with murder, and the death of a child. Pervading it all is the lie. Not just the deception of others, but the lie that my desires justify my actions, and I won't suffer for them.

But in my desires—and even in my good deeds—there is no justification. **"By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in [God's] sight"** (Rom. 3:20).

That was the heart of John the Baptist's preaching. You cannot be justified—found righteous before God—on your own. Therefore repent and be baptized. And then John points to Christ, saying, **"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the world's sin!"**

Sexual sin is a great problem of our age. It seeks us out, and especially on social media. You should delete all of your accounts. You don't need them, and you'll be happier.

But as we can see with David, and also with Herod in today's Gospel, sexual sin is nothing new. When Herod visited his brother Philip in Rome in AD 26, Herod was filled with desire for his brother Philip's wife. Her name was Herodias. Herod and Herodias plotted to each divorce their spouses, get married, and take Herodias' daughter Salome to Jerusalem. Now it's a little complicated, but Herodias was the daughter of *with them*

Aristobulus, Herod's older brother. So Herodias is Herod's niece and at the same time his sister-in-law. But hey, "Love is love," right?

You'll get in trouble if you disagree with that. Today they might take the cake ... shop. For John, they took his head. Because John called Herod and Herodias to repentance.

Herodias took it harder than Herod did. Our text, from the NKJ translation, says she "**held it against him.**" A less formal way to say it is, "She held a grudge." Sin begets sin. David went from lust to adultery to murder. Herodias went from lust to divorce to grudge-bearing and then to murder.

Well, thank God we're not like her, right? "I thank you, Lord, that I'm not like other people." I would never commit adultery, or murder, or ... hold a grudge ... Wait? "Are we the baddies?" Against whom are you holding a grudge? What are you going to *do* about it? What are you going to do to reconcile?

Herodias held a grudge against John "**and wanted to kill him.**" Haven't you considered how life would be different, how life would be better, if such-and-such person was gone? Against whom do you hold a grudge? Do you wish that person gone?

Do you think we would escape John the Baptist's call to repentance if he were preaching to us today? Perhaps by the time he was done us we'd be ready to throw him in jail, too.

Are we any better than Herod, or Herodias, or David? Or have we just not had the same opportunities to sin catastrophically like kings and queens? No, you go in for the sins of upper-middle-class respectable people.

Repent of your grudges, repent of your lust, repent of not doing what you've been given to do, and so succumbing to the noon-day devil, acedia: spiritual listlessness.

Repent, and listen anew to John the Baptist, focus on the One to Whom he pointed: Behold Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the world's sin - and yours. +INJ+

*The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

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