

**Friday of the Fourth Week in Ordinary Time Lectionary: 327**  
**IHM Motherhouse Chapel**  
**Feb. 7, 2020 +**

*Sirach 47:2-11*

*Psalm 18:31, 47 and 50, 51*

*Mark 6:14-29*

Herod Antipas is a very interesting and complex figure in the Christian Scriptures. The son of Herod the Great, Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea from about year 1 to 36 of the common era.

We encounter Herod in two significant stories during Jesus' lifetime.

- The first is what we heard proclaimed in Mark's Gospel today: Herod wonders about who Jesus is and has a flashback to when he had imprisoned John the Baptist and had him beheaded (also Luke 3:19-20).
- We meet Herod a second time in Luke's Gospel at Jesus' trial where Herod questions and tortures Jesus but finds no guilt in him and sends him back to Pilate (Luke 23:7-12, 15).

In both stories, the Gospel writers present us with a complex character.

- We see a man who was likely angry that John called him out for marrying his brother's wife and who also "feared John, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. ... When he heard him speak, he was very much perplexed, yet he liked to listen to him." (Mark 6:20)
- We also see a man who was conflicted and "deeply distressed" when faced with executing John. Herod was overwhelmed with fear – fear of breaking his word to his daughter, especially in front of all the honored guests. Imagine what would have happened within his family, his military and his reputation in Galilee had he said no.

What then happened when Herod heard that maybe John had been raised from the dead?

- Did Herod fear the vengeance of John the Baptist and want to finish what he had started? Possibly. We hear in Luke 13:31 that the Pharisees told Jesus that Herod wanted to kill him.
- Or could Herod have had a tiny rush of hope? Hope that maybe this person who both challenged him and delighted his heart was alive once again.

What we know is that Herod was always curious about Jesus.

- In that second story when Pilate sends Jesus before Herod, Luke writes, "When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had been wanting to see him for a long time, because he had heard about him and was hoping to see him perform some sign." (Luke 23:8)

- Without doubt, there was something Jesus that very much reminded him of John the Baptist. Still he tortured him and returned him to Pilate – but did not find him guilty.

A complex figure indeed.

- Clearly Herod did not become celebrated like King David, whom we hear about in the first reading and the psalm (though David had his own problems as well).
- We cannot condone Herod's actions. Yet perhaps we can find a bit of ourselves in him.

Each day, we are faced with choices that can be overwhelmed by our own fear, by social or political pressure.

- Each day, we may have fear but we also have the capacity to discern and truly seek God's call. It may be we are a lone voice in the wilderness; it may mean we are misunderstood and criticized.
- It may even mean suffering.

Let us not condone but rather turn our eyes of compassion upon Herod and pray for each of us and our leaders to *stay true to that tiny rush of hope*, faith and love even in this midst of fear.