

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife”. That is true. And it is godly counsel. Had Herod heeded John’s inspired Word, it would have gone better for him in his earthly life. Had he heeded John’s preaching, forgiveness, salvation and eternal life could have been his. But he would not listen. His heart was hard, his flesh rose to the temptation of lust. And so in sin he rejected the Word of the Prophet, the one who was promised of old, the one of whom his father prophesied.

For Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit. He prophesied, saying of his son “You, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest, for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways.” So Zacharias’ son John was the forerunner, ordained of God, a Prophet of the Old preaching repentance in the desert. And John saw the New, as He pointed from the Jordan’s stony banks to the fulfillment of his preaching and his baptism: the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And John touched the New, as He baptized the Messiah to fulfill all righteousness.

As Zacharias prophesied, his Prophet son went before the Lord to prepare His way. He made straight the paths in the desert. And he trod the path to the tomb before his Lord. The forerunner went before the Christ into death. The cost for John’s faithfulness, and the price for Herod’s lust, was John’s head. Blinded by desire, Herod promised the lascivious daughter of his adulterous wife “Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” His sinful craving drove him to make such a horrible promise.

Sin always leads to death. Sin always hurts others. There is no “victimless sin.” Pride, a breaking of the First Commandment, compelled Herod, who had broken the Sixth Commandment, to also break the Fifth. That’s the way sin is. It is an inescapable matrix of lies and deceit. And by his great transgression, Herodias and her daughter were taught that adultery and unchastity and murder are good and to be rewarded, and those who spoke God’s truth were hated. So from one sin were all four harmed.

So it is with your sins. They are never victimless. They hurt you. They hurt those around you. All sin is a breaking of the First Commandment. And sins multiply. By sinful lying and deceit men attempt to cover up their wrongdoing, lying even to themselves, which only multiplies the transgression. Sin spreads like cancer, as retaliation and retribution are mounted in response to trespass. Perceived slights are answered with sharp words, and soon the sins fly in volleys of hatred and anger, the fruits of unbelief.

So, in the end, we are all victims and we are all perpetrators. We are all victims of the devil’s lie, victims of Adam’s sin, and perpetrators of our own. Repent. Bear fruits worthy of repentance, for the ax is laid to the root of the trees, and every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

But do not despair. For John preached a Coming One that would pay the price for the sins of the world. It is through the shedding of blood that remission comes. While we learn from John’s preaching, faithfulness and life, and while today we commemorate his death, John’s death avails

you nothing. But the death of the Lamb of God, the Coming One to whom John pointed, avails much. The Christ followed John in death, but then did what no man before or since could do – He defeated death. He made straight a path that John could not. He opened the way to heaven.

As horrible as beheading is, it is swift. But for the Christ, such a death was too easy. For His faithfulness, and for your sins, He was arrested, tortured and crucified. His agony exceeded that of any other. For while John could cling to Christ as he faced Herod's blade, the Christ was abandoned by God and by men.

In a great Trinitarian Mystery, the beloved Son, pleasing to the Father, was forsaken by the same. On the cross He paid the price for Herod's sin, for Herodias' sin and for her daughter's, for John's sin, and for your sin. It cost His suffering and death and separation from the Father. But for you it avails joy, life, and reconciliation with God.

The Lord of Life overcame death and rose to new life. He is the Forerunner of all those who die in faith. He is the Firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For now Christ is risen from the dead, and those who are Christ's shall rise at His coming.

John baptized with water. But He preached One who would come after him, One who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire, One who would bring the forgiveness of sins. And so did the Promised Christ send that Spirit which proceeds from the Father and the Son, that in your baptism in His Name there is forgiveness and life.

Through His holy Prophets He promised of old that He would save us from our enemies. Believing in Him are you saved from your greatest enemies: sin, death and the devil. And the Christ that died and rose for you brings you His life-giving Gift, as He feeds you this day of His Body and His Blood.

By this Holy Sacrament, you have Communion with Christ and all the saints. You are united to the true Head. In His Communion you who eat His Body are made His Body, the Holy Church, that the saints not be made perfect apart from you. And the Blood of the Lamb shed for you avails for your forgiveness and for your eternal life.

Soon He will come again. Then the infant Prophet that leapt in his mother's womb will leap once more, as he is called forth from the tomb into which his disciples placed him. Then will camel hair and leather belt give way to the gleaming white wedding vestment, locust no longer his food but heavenly sustenance will be his, and will be yours, for eternity.

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