

The Commemoration of the Decollation of John the Baptist, 2020 A. ✠ D.

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

As Zacharias, husband of Elizabeth prophesied, his Prophet son would go before the Lord to prepare His way. John the Baptizer would make straight the paths in the desert. And the Forerunner would trod the sanguine path to the tomb before his Lord, the Lord who was before Him and came after Him.

The cost for John's faithfulness, and the cost for the sinful desires of Herod's heart, was John's head. Inebriated by lust, Herod promised the lascivious daughter of his adulterous wife "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." His sinful desire trapped him into making such a horrible promise. And the temptress seized the opportunity, joining her sin to that of Herod's and her mothers, demanding the head of John the Baptist.

Sin always leads to death. Sin always hurts others. There is no "victimless sin." Pride, a breaking of the First Commandment, compelled Herod, who in lust had broken the Sixth Commandment, to also break the Fifth Commandment. That's the way sin is. You've seen in it your own life also – one sin leads to another.

And by Herod's deadly transgression, Herodias and her daughter were taught that adultery and unchastity and murder are good and to be rewarded. But the temporal rewards they garnered were short lived, and the eternal consequences are quite horrible: the outer darkness, unquenchable fire, and the worm that does not die. So what began with one man's lust brought three to condemnation and one to physical death.

So it is with your sins. They are never victimless. They hurt you. They hurt those around you. And sins multiply. Fallen men try to cover up their sins by sinful lying and deceit, which only multiplies the transgression. Sin spreads, like a fatal virus, a global epidemic that knows no boundaries of time, 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 vengeance launched from stony hearts of unbelief. 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.

John paid a price for his faithfulness and Herod's sin. In that he was forerunner also. For John preached a Coming One that would pay the price for the sins of the world. His blood cries out from the ground against Herod. But while we learn from John's preaching, his faithfulness and his life, John's death avails you nothing.

But the death of the Lamb of God 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 emptied His tomb. He opened the way to heaven.

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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 baptize for 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 you receive the Promised Spirit, faith, and the forgiveness of sins.

Through His holy Prophets He promised of old that He would save us from our enemies. So believing in Him are you saved from the enemies that God alone can vanquish: sin, death and the devil. And the faith given you in Baptism, is hungry faith. It needs to be fed to grow. So the same Christ that died for you, the same Christ that rose and ascended for you, 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 One 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 your Lord will come again. Then the infant that leapt in his mother's womb will leap once more, as he is called forth from the tomb. Then will camel hair and leather be replaced by the gleaming white wedding vestment, locust no longer his food but heavenly sustenance will be his, and will be yours, for eternity, at the wedding feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end.

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