

AUGUST 29, 2019
Memorial of the Passion of St. John the Baptist
Mk. 6: 17-29

COURAGE IN PERSECUTION

One of the great saints in the modern times is Sir Thomas More (7 February 1478 – 6 July 1535). He was an English lawyer, social philosopher, author, statesman, and noted Renaissance humanist. He was also a councilor to Henry VIII, and Lord High Chancellor of England from October 1529 to 16 May 1532. He opposed the Protestant Reformation, in particular the theology of Martin Luther, John Calvin and William Tyndale. But what made him martyr was when he opposed King Henry VIII's separation from the Catholic Church, refusing to acknowledge Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England and the annulment of his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. After refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy, he was convicted of treason and executed. Of his execution, he was reported to have said: "I die the King's good servant, and God's first". Pope Pius XI canonized More in 1935 as a martyr. St. John Paul II in 2000 declared him the patron saint "of Statesmen and Politicians". Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia

My brothers and sisters, are we prepared to be witnesses, and if necessary, a martyr for Jesus Christ? How do you deal with your everyday trials and problems? Are we tired of our lives because of hardships, difficulties and challenges?

In our gospel there are two opposing personalities: one standing for principles and truth even facing one's death, and one pleasing others and making friends at the expense of the truth, of what is right and just. John the Baptist was the bridge between the Old and New Testaments: the last of the Old Testament prophets who pointed to Jesus as the Lamb, the Messiah, and the first of the New Testament witnesses and martyrs. St. John the Baptist suffered violence for Christ. While King Herod, the most powerful and wealthy

man in Judea, and had everything he wanted but has no clear conscience and peace with God. He respected and feared John the Baptist as a great prophet and servant of God even if John rebuke Herod for his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. Only because of Herodias' jealousy, John the Baptist was arrested, imprisoned and beheaded.

My brothers and sisters why did Herod put John to death when he knew him to be a righteous and holy man? The power and influence of Herod were badly defective, self-centered and greedy. Herod was more on pleasing others and making friends than on doing what was right, true, fair and just in the sight of God. He could take a strong stand on the wrong things when he knew the right, but he was more on pleasing himself and others than God.

Since the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist to the present time, Christians and those who are following Christ, the Church and the kingdom of God has suffered violence and persecution at the hands of violent people. There's a lot of Christian martyrs throughout the ages who bear witness to this fact. But we know, the testimony of their martyrdom to the truth of the Gospel and their willingness to suffer and die for their faith prove triumph, great accomplishment and victory rather than downfall and defeat for the kingdom of God. Why these people faced suffering, persecution, and death with faith and courage? Because they knew and believed that nothing in this present world can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. This is what St. Paul said: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor

height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our LORD.” Romans 8:35-39 Catholic Bible Press

My sisters and brothers, we don't need to fear those who oppose the Gospel, and our faith because the love of Jesus Christ is powerful and stronger than fear and death itself. Christ's love always conquers all even our own fearfulness in the face of opposition and persecution and assured us of his grace and help. So, let us ask ourselves: Am I ready to make the Lord Jesus known and loved, and if necessary, to suffer for his sake and the sake of the Gospel? Let us take the example of St. John the Baptist and let us pray for courage and perseverance to face trials and persecution for the sake of Christ any where and everyday of our lives.