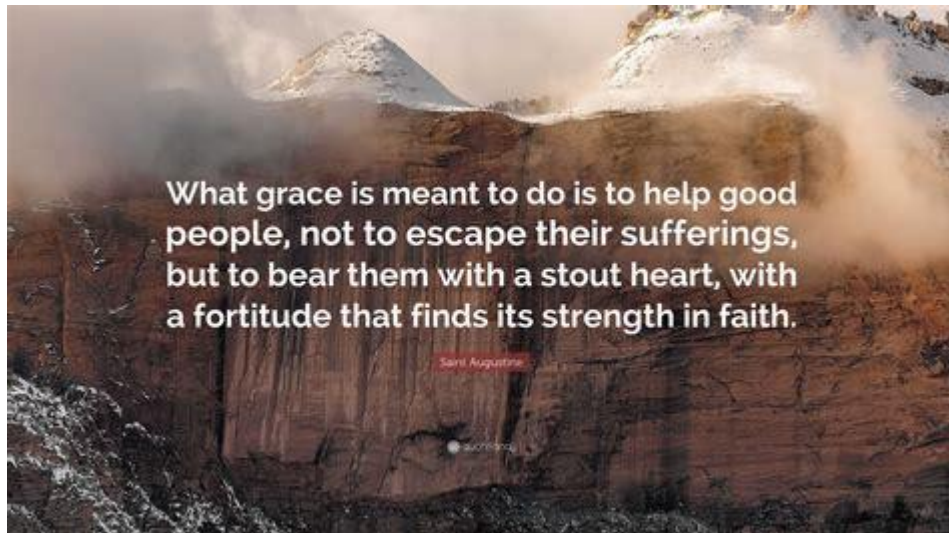


FROM FATHER JOHN: *“John [the] Baptist appeared in the desert proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins. John was clothed in camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey. And this is what he proclaimed: ‘One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; he will baptize you with the holy Spirit.’” (Mark 1:4 – 8)*



“King Herod heard about Jesus, for his fame had become widespread, and people were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead; that is why mighty powers are at work in him.’ Others were saying, ‘He is Elijah’; still others, ‘He is a prophet like any of the prophets.’ But when Herod learned of it, he said, ‘It is John whom I beheaded. He has been raised up.’” (Mark 6:14 – 16))

The word enigma comes from a Greek word meaning riddle. An enigma is more than what meets the eye. Or, we might say, an enigma confounds the eye. One of the more famous quotes from the great Catholic writer, G. K. Chesterton, is: ***“The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried.”***

‘Herod the Great’, the father of Herod we read about in the gospel passage above was married five times and had the dubious distinction of having killed everyone he ever loved. There was a saying, “It is safer to be Herod’s pig than to be his son.” Still, this son, his namesake, survived somehow, and continued the family tradition of lust and cruelty.

Josephus, the 1st-century Romano-Jewish historian, gave an account of the beheading of St. John the Baptist. Herod’s wife, whom he repudiated in favor of his brother’s wife, was the daughter of Aretas, king of Petra. Aretas took a dim view of this and waged war on Herod, and destroyed his entire army. Eusebius (c. 260-340) wrote: “He suffered this calamity on account of his crime against John [the Baptist].”

So, the enigma is, what can we possibly learn from Herod? What can people who are not tyrants learn from a tyrant? What could we possibly have in common with Herod? St John Chrysostom (347 AD – 407) wrote this about Herod and other great sinners. ***“Do not make this cold reply: ‘What does it matter to me? I have nothing in common with him.’ With the devil alone we have nothing in common, but with all humanity we have many things in common. All partake of the same nature with us. They inhabit the same earth. They are nourished with the same food. They have the same God.... Let us not say then that we have nothing in common with them.”***

Herod was foolish, vain, and easily manipulated. He knew that John the Baptist was an innocent man and a prophet of God, but he chose to kill him anyway. He lost his way. But instead of seeking the Lord and trying to find the path of righteousness, he lived in fear, numbed by the trappings of his earthly power. When he heard about our Lord Jesus, all he could think about was his own past sin and the fear he had of losing his earthly kingdom.

If we choose Herod’s path, we neglect the hope and joy of salvation that is offered to us by our God. Our Lord Jesus died to save sinners like us. He did this while we were yet sinners, rather than waiting until we manifested heroic virtues. Our Lord and God gives us a miraculous gift, the gift of eternal life and the grace to obtain it. Rather than be like Herod, we need to follow the path of St. John the Baptist, who accepted this gift from God and relied wholly upon the goodness, the mercy and the love of our Lord and God.

May God Bless you and all those who love the Lord.