



The Word...

In those days, King Herod laid hands upon some members of the Church to harm them. He had James, the brother of John, killed by the sword, and when he saw that this was pleasing to the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter
(Acts 12:1-11).

“I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith.
From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me...
The Lord stood by me and gave me strength,
so that through me the proclamation might be completed...
The Lord will rescue me from every evil threat
and will bring me safe to his heavenly Kingdom”
(2 Tim 4:6-8, 17-18).

Pondering the Word...

Are our actions to please human beings or to please God?

We hear Herod continues with his murderous ways since he saw it *“was pleasing to the Jews.”* This is Herod Agrippa I, the grandson of Herod the Great, who we may remember, was despised by the Jews because of his mixed-race heritage and collusion with the Romans. This sentiment applied to his offspring as well. The Herodian family were treacherous opportunists, following whatever path seemed the most advantageous for them at the moment, no matter who or how many they needed to imprison, torture, or murder.

Juxtapose Herod with St. Paul whose commitment to the Kingdom of God never wavered, at least after his conversion. (One could argue his focus before it was singular as well—he was sure he was serving God by serving the Kingdom of Israel with his repression of the followers of Jesus.) As we read throughout Acts and in Paul’s letters, his one desire was to bring both Jews and Gentiles to the knowledge of God’s plan and God’s love that he himself had experienced. He suffered beatings, threats, and imprisonments at the hands of both Gentiles and Jews. He wasn’t out to “win friends,” but to “influence people” to accept God’s heavenly Kingdom. He knew what he stood for, and he kept the faith.

*“It’s important that people know what you stand for.
It’s equally important that they know what you won’t stand for”*

(Mary H. Waldrip).

Living the Word...

It is appalling to watch US elected officials reverse their positions on political and moral issues based solely on the whims of those in charge. They follow the path of Herod and his scions. Juxtapose their actions with those who risk arrest and abuse by standing with immigrants being rounded up, without due process, by the current police state. Or, even more courageous, Christians in other countries sacrificing their lives to proclaim and practice their faith. Consider this today: Do we act to please humans or to please God? Are we willing to take an unpopular stance to do what is just and right? *“Never, for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience or convictions”* (Dag Hammarskjöld).

Personal Reflections and Ideas ... _____

Mon, Jun 30: *“Suppose there were fifty innocent people? Would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it?... Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty...What if there are ten there?”* (Gn 18:16-33).

Scholars assume that no, there were not fifty innocents; in fact, God exceeds Abraham’s plea for ten by sparing Lot and his family, the four innocents in the place. (This is after Lot offers his daughters to be raped!?)

Provision: Pray for the innocent. There is archaeological evidence an asteroid or some major disaster occurred where Sodom was thought to exist. And we know the Israelites looked at natural phenomena as signs from God, so this is a story, not historical fact. It’s a tough read, nonetheless, knowing that innocents all over the planet are dying along with those who bring about war and violence. One could also look at those dying because of climate change brought about by human excess (in which I am a participant). So, what lesson can we take from this? Like Abraham, we need not be afraid to question God and to advocate through prayer that God spare the innocent people caught up in the web of terror and death. Pray today for the innocent.

Tue, Jul 1: *“Lord, save us! We are perishing!” He said, “Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?”* (Mt 8:23-27).

I think the disciples deserve some credit here. They turn to him to save them—that shows faith, doesn’t it? Maybe that’s the “little faith” Jesus refers to! But a little faith is often all we can muster when faced with sorrow, fear, or desolation. **Provision: Call out for rescue in faith.** Jesus understands our weakness when faced with fear. It is part of our humanity, and it was part of his as well (don’t forget his fear at Gethsemane). By calling out to God for rescue, we confirm our faith, but like Jesus, we are also called to accept God’s will, and that takes a lot of faith and prayer. Don’t be afraid to call out for rescue, worried that God will doubt our faith. God will take that little bit of faith and will strengthen it so we can face what’s ahead.

Wed, Jul 2: *The demons pleaded, “Send us into the herd of swine...” The whole herd rushed down the steep bank into the sea where they drowned. Thereupon the whole town came and begged [Jesus] to leave their district* (Mt 8:28-34).

Jesus does what the townsfolk ask and sails back to Capernaum. But what happens to the two former demoniacs? Are they welcomed back into the community or do the townspeople blame them for the loss of the town’s livelihood? Are they skeptical about their healing? **Provision: Be open to Jesus’ healing hand.** Maybe it took time for the townspeople to reflect on what happened. Some likely remained mad about the loss of the swine, but there were some who came to realize the miracle in their midst. Do you know someone who has been freed of an addiction or the throes of mental illness? Do you doubt their healing? Does the change frighten you? Do you resent what was lost? Put yourself in this scene. How would you react?

Thu, Jul 3: *Thomas said, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe”* (Jn 20:24-29).

“Doubting” Thomas gets a bad rap for dismissing the Apostles’ claims of seeing Jesus—the same Apostles who doubted the claims of the women returning from the tomb a few days earlier! **Provision: Seeing Christ in what is.** Proof for Thomas was experiencing what “was” — the marks of the suffering Jesus endured. The key to our faith is experiencing the Risen Christ in what is. Look today for “the marks” of Jesus’ Risen presence!

Fri, Jul 4: *“Go and learn the meaning of the words, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice’* (Mt 9:9-13).

Provision: Do as Jesus says. Jesus quotes the prophet Hosea to the Pharisees who tend to be more concerned with “gnats” than the desires of God (Mt 23:24). Do you know the meaning of the word “mercy?” Have you ever experienced it? Have you granted mercy to someone else? Mercy goes beyond forgiveness. We sacrifice our desire for groveling repentance, revenge, personal comeuppance, and in some cases, even justice, in favor of compassion. Just like God does for each of us every day!

Sat, Jul 5: *“People do not put new wine into old wineskins. ...Rather, they pour new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved”* (Mt 9:14-17).

As we age, it is natural to be challenged keeping up with the pace of change. And the pace of change these days can be mind-blowing for everyone. New wine barely has time to ferment! Notice that Jesus doesn’t tell us to discard the old wine and wineskins—that can still be enjoyed, but we also must recognize that new wine—change—is inevitable. The Spirit makes all things new! **Provision: Look for God’s hand in change.** Instead of dismissing all that is new, see if you can discern the Spirit at work. Find one new thing today to celebrate!