

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL

MARTYR

EXPLORING NEXT SUNDAY'S THEME

Introducing the Gospel

Death of John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29)

After the twelve had been sent out on their missionary journey, Mark tells us nothing about their experiences until they return to Jesus. Instead Mark inserts this account of the death of John the Baptist. The point Mark makes is this. Just as John suffered martyrdom through preaching the Gospel, and just as Jesus suffered death on the cross, so the disciples can expect the same reception for their ministry.

Our image to stimulate reflection on Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist is *martyr*.

Core extract from the Gospel (Mark 6: 22-24; for reflection throughout the week)

When his daughter Herodias came in and danced,
she pleased Herod and his guests;
and the king said to the girl,
'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.'
And he solemnly swore to her,
'Whatever you ask me, I will give you,
even half of my kingdom.'
She went out and said to her mother,
'What should I ask for?'
She replied,
'The head of John the Baptist.'

Gospel prayer (for use throughout the week)

Lord Jesus Christ,
John the Baptist suffered martyrdom
in your service.
Stand alongside all those
who suffer in your service today,
that they may witness to your glory;
now and always.
Amen.

READING NEXT SUNDAY'S GOSPEL

Mark 6: 14-29

The Death of John the Baptist

King Herod heard of it, for Jesus' name had become known. Some were saying, 'John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; and for this reason these powers are at work in him.' But others said, 'It is Elijah.' And others said, 'It is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.' But when Herod heard of it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.'

For Herod himself had sent men who arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because Herod had married her. For John had been telling Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him, and wanted to kill him. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he protected him. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed; and yet he liked to listen to him. But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his courtiers and officers and for the leaders of Galilee. When his daughter Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it.' And he solemnly swore to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What should I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the baptizer.' Immediately she rushed back to the king and requested, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' The king was deeply grieved; yet out of regard for his oaths and for the guests, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent a soldier of the guard with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl. Then the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard about it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb.

ENGAGING WITH THE THEME

Dwelling with the text (Mark 6: 14-29)

Begin exploring Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist by employing the SIFT approach of Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking. You may find that one of these approaches comes easier to you than the others. But it is worth trying all four.

- What details in the passage catch your attention (Sensing)?
- What big ideas in the passage spark in your mind (Intuition)?
- What most touches your heart in the passage (Feeling)?
- What most stretches your mind and makes you think in the passage (Thinking)?

Thinking and talking

Identify topics within the passage that can get you thinking and talking. Here are some ideas to get you started.

- Why was John in prison?
- Why does Herod behave in this way?
- Why has Mark placed this story where he does in his Gospel?
- What is your idea of a martyr?
- What does this narrative say for us today?

Using your Bible

Explore how Matthew and Luke use this narrative from Mark so differently.

- Matthew 14: 1-12
- Luke 9: 7-9

Explore what else is said about Herod in the Gospels.

- Matthew 2: 13-19
- Luke 23: 6-12

Explore images of royal feasting in the Old Testament.

- Genesis 40: 20-22
- Esther 5: 1-5

Exploring online

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY (YEAR B) Sunday 14 July 2024

Widen your exploration of Mark's account of the martyrdom of John the Baptist by looking up some of the following themes and others of your own choosing.

- Meaning of the word martyr as 'witness'
- Martyrdom of John the Baptist
- Icons of martyrs in the Orthodox Church

Drawing on experience

The image to stimulate reflection on Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist is *martyr*. The root of the word martyr means witness.

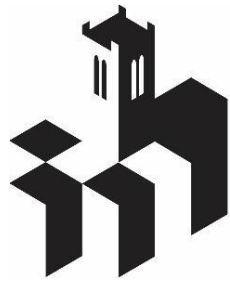
- When has your Christian witness led to rejection and pain?
- Have you seen other Christians persecuted because of their faith?
- How difficult is it to witness to Christ in today's society?

What have you learned about witnessing and martyrdom?

Creating and making

This section offers pointers to some creative activities that may be inspired by Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist or by the image of martyr.

- Create a poster about the death of John the Baptist.
- Create a collage celebrating Christian martyrs.
- Make a mural showing the persecution of Christians today.
- Create a reflection, poem, or prayer on the theme of Mark's account of the death of John the Baptist or on the image of martyr.



**Liverpool
Cathedral**

EXPLORING THE SUNDAY GOSPEL AT HOME

Each week we are inviting people in their homes to look forward to those Sunday services that follow the Revised Common Lectionary Gospel readings. We employ the SIFT approach (Sensing, Intuition, Feeling, and Thinking) to encourage reflection on the Sunday Gospel. We are suggesting a variety of ways in which people of all ages, and households working together, may engage with the Gospel reading and celebrate that engagement with shared activities.

Our invitation then is for you to share your reflections, prayers and photos of your creative work with the Cathedral by emailing them to smc.lesliefrancis@gmail.com.

These materials have been developed by the Canon Theologian of Liverpool Cathedral working in collaboration with the staff team here at the Cathedral, and with sponsorship and support from the St Mary's Centre in Wales.



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