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29 MONDAY

Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> Week Ordinary Time

Beheading of St John the Baptist

Jeremiah 1: 17 - 19

Ps 70: 1-6, 15,17

Mark 6: 17 - 29

Jesus once said about His cousin John that there was no greater human being than him. What exactly did He mean ? Was He referring to John's austere life-style, his integrity and courage, his human qualities and characteristics ? John was certainly a remarkable man. We forget, perhaps, that John knew Herod and was admired by the king, who liked listening to him. Or was Jesus thinking of John's unique position in history, the last of the great prophets of Israel, the 'bridge' between the Old Testament and the New ? Yet the least in the Kingdom would be greater than him. John himself said that he had to grow smaller while Jesus would grow greater.

How much John had to "decrease" is seen in the dramatic and horrific story of his murder, as told in St Mark's gospel today. He forfeited his life, not in any heroic way but because of the loves, hates, jealousies, and weaknesses of human beings. His death, like the sufferings of so many anonymous people around us, came about because of the sins of our world, our sins. He who had pointed to Jesus as the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world gave his own life because of the sins of the world. There is something of Salome, of Herodias and of Herod in all of us. And perhaps the most dangerous is not, after all, the 'big' sins, great evil and viciousness, but the weakness of a man like Herod. It was his pride, his fears, his 'face', his self-indulgence and self-interest that allowed John to be murdered.

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Text wordcount: 271