

7 S. after Pentecost 7/11/21
Mark 6:14-29 10B

APPOINTED GOSPEL READING FOR THIS SUNDAY, 6TH CHAPTER OF MARK'S GOSPEL

When we were visiting the Tower of London on our trip across the pond a few years back, we were regaled with the story of James Scott, the 1st Duke of Monmouth, by our Beefeater guide. His story goes back to the days after King Henry VIII, when the Catholics and Protestants were contending for power in England. The Protestant James Scott attempted to seize the throne from the Catholic king, Charles II, who just happened to be his uncle. His scheme to get the crown from his uncle didn't work out very well, and he was captured and sentenced to death. On July 15, 1685, he was beheaded.

Which is really when the story of James Scott begins. After he was beheaded and buried, it was discovered that being he was a royal, there was no official portrait of him. Undaunted, his corpse, complete with detached head, was dug up, some poor soul was tasked with sewing his severed head back onto his body, and his portrait was painted, which hangs in the royal gallery to this day. Our Beefeater guide couldn't wait to get to the punch line of the story: Which is why in his official portrait he's not smiling, but looking rather glum.

In our Gospel for today, John the Baptist lost his head. No, he didn't lose it for rebelling against the king; he was beheaded for confessing Christ. In our time and day, we are not in danger of having our head chopped off for confessing Christ. But, dead in our sin and trespasses, we are headless.

That is, because in the fall into sin, we lost Christ, who is our head. In the Garden, God spoke to Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Ge 2:16-17). Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden tree and it appeared to human eyes and reason that they did not die. But, they did – they died spiritually; and, as we all know too well, physical death followed. We were created in the image of God, knowing God as He wanted to be known and perfectly able to do His will. But in the fall, we lost the ability to know and please God.

Maybe the best way to think of it is by this example: Have you ever seen a chicken with its head chopped off? Chop the head off the chicken, and what does the chicken do? It runs around and looks like it is alive. But, is it alive? The answer is: No; it doesn't have a head. So it is that after the fall, we look like we are alive, we pretended to be alive – we can build a skyscraper, do surgery on the human brain, and put a man on the moon -- but we cannot please God because we are dead in sin. And, we show the death of our sin in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Exhibit A: King Herod. He had a wife. But he burned with lust for another, who just happened to be his own brother's wife, so he just took her to be his wife. And, there's more to the story – along comes John, not telling itching ears what they wanted to hear, but faithfully proclaiming the Word of God, telling Herod that what he had was not a God-pleasing thing. So when opportunity arose, Herodias, cherishing her grudge and hatred of John, cried for his head. Herod, seeking to please sinful humanity rather than God, had him beheaded.

That mean Herod, you cry! Before you cry too loudly, I invite you to take a look in the mirror -- the mirror of God's Law. Know what you see? A little Herod, because there's a little Herod in each and every one of us.

God says, "You shall have no other gods." We say, "I will create a god in my image; a grandfatherly kind of god who will wink and nod at my sin, and say its ok." God says, "You shall not murder." We would never think of ending someone's physical life, but we keep a record of wrongs your neighbor has done, bear grudges, and refuse to forgive. God says, "You shall not commit adultery" and we laugh our silly heads off at off-color jokes. God says, "You shall not steal," but we see nothing wrong with trying to get rich by playing the lottery. God says, "You shall not give testimony against your neighbor," but we defame and slander our neighbor, especially when it makes us look all-the-better.

The 10 Commandments teach us what God's thoughts are, how He wants us to live our lives. Are God's thoughts your thoughts? Are His ways your ways? Quite the opposite, our refrain is "Who are you to tell me how to live my life?"

Remember the saga of James Scott? Yes, he had his head reattached, but he didn't live again. The Good News for us, Dear Saints of God, is that we have been raised from the death of our sin and Jesus Christ is our head again.

The devil had one chief weapon to hold us hostage and in terror -- sin. Because we could not free ourselves, Jesus came, born of a Virgin, to free us from sin and its wages of death. Our Epistle says it this way, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace" (Ep 1:7). Jesus redeemed us, bought us back, from sin, death, and the devil "with His holy,

precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom” (2nd Article).

Paul teaches us this in our Epistle with these words, “to unite all things in Him (that is, Christ), things in heaven and on earth” (v. 10). “Unite” means to “head it up again”. The Good News of the Gospel is that WE LIVE BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN REATTACHED TO CHRIST, OUR HEAD.

You guys know this from the 23rd Psalm, “He restores my soul” (v. 3). That means God makes us a new creation in Christ, God makes my soul like it was in the Garden before sin came along and we lost Christ, our head.

“Use your head!” You’ve heard that expression. It means cover the furniture *before* you paint the walls, or took off your muddy boots *before* you walk across the freshly mopped floor. “Use your head” means to think.

Baptized into Christ, the Bible says of us, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Co 1:16). Raised from the death of sin to life in Jesus, we think the thoughts of Christ; we use our “Head.”

When the woes of life overtake us, in the midst of upheaval, stress, anxiety, we have the peace of Christ which passes all human understanding.

When the devil haunts and taunts you with shame and guilt of your sin; when the world throws your past transgressions in your face, we are of good cheer, because we have the forgiveness of Christ, which means God remembers our sin no more.

In the darkness of this valley of death, when despair and sadness fill our hearts and souls, we have the joy of Christ, knowing all things work together for our good.

Even in the hour of death and before the grave: we see what Jesus sees, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall He live and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (Jn 11:25-26).

Look at the words of our prayer for this Sunday, "Give us pure hearts and minds to follow Your Son faithfully even into suffering and death". As we hear and learn His Word and eat and drink His life-giving Body and Blood, God does His work in us -- giving us pure hearts and minds that we may think the thoughts of CHRIST, OUR HEAD even in the midst of things we cannot understand, until that time that acquire our possession of our inheritance of heaven, when we will no longer walk by faith, but by sight.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.