

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Sep 26th 2013

"Consider your ways!" Haggai 1

Herod the Tetrarch Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great, who was the cruel king at the time of the Nativity story - the butcher of the children of Bethlehem. The son inherited a quarter of his father's kingdom (making him a tetrarch - ruler of a fourth) and he is a contemporary of the adult Jesus. In this scene, he is puzzled and curious about the stories he is hearing about Jesus. We will later hear that John, the Baptist, is challenging this Herod's adultery with his brother's wife, Herodias. "Now Herod the tetrarch, who had been censured by him because of Herodias, his brother's wife, and because of all the evil deeds Herod had committed, added still another to these by also putting John in prison." [Luke 3:19] We know the rest of the story: that Herod has John beheaded, due to a drunked promise he makes to Salome, Herodias' daughter. And, finally, it is this Herod to whom Pilate sends Jesus, in an attempt to avoid the problem. Jesus won't even speak to him.

Sometimes, confusion and curiosity are moments of great importance for us. In this case, Herod becomes both curious and threatened. Sometimes, that's what happens to us. We hear about Jesus, and we hear about various things he says and does, and we are very curious. At times, we are also confused and threatened. The closer Jesus comes to us, to our hearts, the more likely it will be that we will be vulnerable to putting up some defenses. The questions come up, "What will this cost me? What will I have to change?" Sometimes it is easy to deflect the whole encounter with a simple defense, like, "Oh, I'm doing a lot already. I pray every day. I ..."

Sometimes, we have this paradoxical attraction to Jesus and, at the same time, an arms length relationship with him. We let him be our Savior, as long as we don't get too close to that reality - that he died for my sins and won for me freedom from my sin and death, earning me the gift of eternal life. We hear what he says in the gospels, and accept it, as long as it doesn't really result in my choosing to not judge others, die to myself, loving my enemies, turning the other cheek, taking up my cross with him, for others. We turn to him in prayer, and are grateful, usually, as long as our prayers are answered, even though we rarely ask to be transformed in our loving others who don't love us back, in our giving of ourselves to dismantle unjust social structures, in our complete trust in the gift of eternal life.

This brief encounter with Herod's curiosity with Jesus can be a powerful invitation to us all to open our hearts to a deeper relationship with Jesus, right where we are, right in the midst of discovering our defenses, our fears, and our distrust.

Dear Jesus, I so want to surrender more and more to your love for me. I'm tasting my fear and resistance but I want to let you in more now. Let me fall into your loving embrace and trust your care for me. Let me love more boldly and more fearlessly. You tell me that fear is useless. I know that apart from you I can do nothing. Give me your love and your grace and I will trust you and your path and ask for nothing more.

Andy Alexander, S.J.