

Commentary on the Gospel for Fri, Feb 5th 2016

Memorial of Saint Agatha, Virgin and Martyr

Herod was a weak man, one whose interaction with John was a disaster for the king and whose interaction with Jesus was not much better, and so we tend not to look very closely at this dissolute pagan.

But one passage in today's gospel intrigues me: "Herod feared John, knowing him to be an upright and holy man, and kept him in custody. When he heard him speak he was very much disturbed, yet he felt the attraction of his words." This sounds to me like a man who would very much profit from what we Jesuits refer to as "discernment," as Herod feels both the Spirit in the attraction of John's words and the disturbance the evil spirit introduces to keep him from listening to that Holy Spirit and following Its guidance.

We know the result: in his lust for Herodias and his need for the good opinion of others he lets himself be manipulated into committing what amounts to no more and no less than simple murder.

We have each of us felt those moments when we are torn in the same two directions, between God and sin, or maybe when we face two good possibilities, one significantly better than the other but which would "cost" us more even if the promised reward was also far greater. Can we blame Herod when we look at our own record in dealing with discernment?

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