

Sermon 2010 The Martyrdom of St. John the Baptist
Text: Mark 6:14-29
Theme: "Zeal for Truth"
8-29-10

People love soap operas. Few admit it, especially men, but if it were not so they would not be some of the highest rated television programming in history. When I was in High School and College everyone watched "The Young and the Restless." Life almost came to a halt on my college campus at 11:00 am Monday through Friday. No professor wanted the 11:00 am time slot because attendance would be horrid and when you drew an 11:00 am time slot for a class that could not be skipped there was great wailing and gnashing of teeth because the VCR had just been invented and cost about \$800, a little out of our price range.

Today, kids laugh at "The Young and the Restless" (although it is still on – but no one admits to watching it). People are way too sophisticated for Soap Operas – now we have "Jersey Shore," which if you have not had the pleasure is like an x-rated version of any Soap Opera with no plot and even poorer acting (I know it says reality TV, but honest, it's scripted).

Well my friends, "Jersey Shore" has nothing on the Bible. If you want down and dirty voyeurism, just read the Gospel for today. See Herod Antipas in our Gospel for today, was the son of King Herod the Great who had been ruling when Jesus was born. Herod the Great had about 10 kids from five different wives. Three of his sons were Herod II, Aristobulus IV and Herod Antipas. Herod the Great executed both of his sons from his wife Mariamne I, grand-daughter of John Hyrcanus. This left Herodias, 8-year-old daughter of Aristobulus an orphan. Now in order for his heir to rule Palestine Herod needed the connection to John Hyrcanus so he had Herodias betrothed to Herod II, her uncle. However, when Herod II died she switched uncles and married Herod Antipas.

Enter John the Baptist. First John didn't much like Herod because he was a conveniently religious man who had two different halls in which to entertain guests. One hall was filled with images of god's when he met with Romans and one was empty of graven images for when he met with Jews. Second, it was against Jewish law to marry your uncle, besides being a little

creepy to do it with two different uncles. Third, Herod Antipas divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias. So John was being pretty vocal about the lack of piety in the Herod house and Herodias was pretty sick of hearing him and that is how John lost his head.

Like John the Baptist, you and I are called to stand for the truth and to take the consequences for doing so. Sometimes people do not like hearing the truth – I don't always like hearing the truth. But Jesus said in John 8

“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

So if we want people to be free we have to tell them the truth. That Hindu neighbor needs to hear of the love, forgiveness and peace that Jesus offers if he has any chance of being free. That drunk needs to hear that alcohol only numbs pain but we have a God who takes it away, over time with enough Word and Sacrament to heal it. That head-over-heels in love teenager needs to hear that love is about commitment not sex or looks or money but about learning about God's complete commitment to

us by experiencing our commitment to another; and we even learn of God by our failures at commitment when things get too difficult or complicated. These are the truths that unfetter our lives and allow us to live as truly free human beings.

More than telling people anything, however, is showing people what we believe. John did not just speak what he believed, he lived it. That's what the camel's hair clothing and eating wild honey was all about. He lived as one who believed that this life is not the prime objective and that was what Herodias objected to most. John's whole life was an indictment of her life for she had lived the soap opera of the Herodian Dynasty.

What I object to most about shows like "Jersey Shore: is not the drinking, cursing and infidelity. Those of you who know me know that I am no pious saint myself. I have, at times, caved in to the temptations of this world. What I object to is the premise of the show that this life is all that matters. These shows teach people that all that really matters is having a good time and grabbing all the pleasure you can before you die and when you die, these people fall apart because they have nothing to hold on

to. They think they are free. They think they can do whatever they want. But they are slaves to their own belief system.

John would irritate them too because while they were spending every night in drunken revelry, he would be studying God's Word, seeking the lost and putting his wants and needs second to the people around him who need Jesus. He was a walking example of one who decreases the view of himself in order to increase the view of Christ.

We often do not have to say a word if our lives proclaim our freedom and where our lives do not proclaim our freedom; our words are empty and meaningless. Standing for the truth is not being legalistic and guessing at who is going to hell and telling him so. Standing for the truth is being kind to the person who does not know Christ and being patient with him and recognizing that our own journey has been one of two steps forward and one step back. Standing for the truth is having absolute confidence in the power of God's Word and his Sacraments and knowing that these are the tools through which the Holy Spirit works regardless of our abilities or lack thereof.

John's zealous tactics will not work today. I'm not sure how well they worked then since he ended up dying young and having his head served to Herodias on a platter. But we admire his absolute, resolute stand for God's Word and, although he did not get to see Jesus complete his work; he had confidence that God would deliver him in the end and that real life would begin then.

That's another thing I don't like about any reality television. It's not real. This life is a poor shadow of that for which we are headed. This life is a training ground where we will make mistakes and have failures. That's why God sent Christ to purchase forgiveness for us and why he offers his body and blood, the cleansing waters of Baptism and his Holy Word to strengthen our faith in that promise that we are completely forgiven for every offense. That is what is real. That is a reality that matters in the long run and long after the drunks on "Jersey Shore" are in rehab or jail or dead, those who cling to this reality will live forever in paradise with John the Baptist and Christ Jesus. AMEN