



Was Herod tricked into killing John the Baptist? Was he forced into giving in to Salome? Would his friends and guests have turned on him or mocked him if he refused her? It seems highly unlikely. Who would offer something to a child, and then follow through no matter how unreasonable the demand? After all, Herod was not just a nobody - he was the king. The power was his - the power over John's life was his, and the power over his family was his alone as well. Herod held all the cards in his hand.

So why does he give in to Salome, knowing that she cannot really force his hand? Why does he follow through and execute John, knowing, as we read, that John was a righteous and holy man? The truth is that Herod feared John most because of John's message. He was dazzled by John, yes, intrigued. But he did not want to hear John's message. Hearing John's message would mean changing his life. So, in the end, it was easier for Herod to have John put to death. He wanted John's message put to death, and what better way to do that than to kill the messenger?

That's where Herod got things wrong though, and that's why he was upset when he heard about the work of the disciples. He'd thought that ending John's life would end John's message. But he didn't count on Christ being the message. He didn't understand that John was simply a messenger whose message would continue even after John's death.

So where do we come in with this story? We know our role too, as John knew his. Like John, we are the messengers. We are not God. We are not the message. We are the messengers, set with the task of spreading the Good News that God is here and with us, to all those we meet. But like John, our truth telling can come at a price.

Under what conditions are we willing to speak up, set the record straight, or speak our minds? When we see injustice, as John did, are we willing to call wrong out for what it is?

We proclaim a message bigger than the messenger, like John the Baptist proclaimed the message of Christ. But sometimes we forget our role, acting like King Herod, closing ourselves to the word of truth, turning away when we see injustice, suffering, abuse, and hurt, instead of speaking up. We ignore those who would call our attention to what is going on around us. We must not fall into this trap, we must not be swayed from our role. We are sent out like the disciples, and like John we are appointed as messengers, messengers of the Good News.

Herod eventually understood that God had something to say to humanity that could not be stopped by the death of one man. Let us also realize that God has something to say, and that we can be messengers through whom God can speak. We are called to proclaim a message bigger than the messenger. Let us stand up speak out.