Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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“Ask of me whatever you wish, and I will grant it to you” (Mark 6:25).

Heb 13:1-8; Mk 6:14-29

Lord Acton, a 19th-century English historian, is famous for writing: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Acton had studied the effects of power on many rulers and knew why most of Shakespeare’s plays about rulers are tragedies. Power leads to paranoia that justifies brutal suppression of any perceived threat, and this ends with the death of conscience and any capacity for human empathy.

References to Herod in the New Testament include the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem by Herod the Great and the beheading of John the Baptist by his son, Herod Antipas. The Herodian dynasty was propped up by the occupying Romans for their own purposes, but history consigns these rulers to the monster category for their wanton cruelty and violence to protect their power.

Mark repeats the tabloid version of the drunken banquet Herod hosted for his sycophants, how the sexually provocative dance of his stepdaughter prompted the king to promise her anything as a reward. Her vengeful mother directs the girl to ask for the “head of John the Baptist, on a platter, at once!” Herod, like many powerful men, also craved approval, and he could not go back on his word. Despite his misgivings and, even realizing the spiteful hand of the girl's mother in the whole affair, he acceded to their bloody taunt to his pride and had John beheaded.

Evil deeds summoned up by the rich and powerful to satisfy their lust for self-aggrandizement are like prayers to the dark powers of death. Mark uses the language of prayer to recount Herod’s promise to Salome: “Ask of me whatever you wish and I will grant it to you.” Herod, imagining himself a little god who can do whatever he wants, in fact proves himself a fool manipulated by others, shamed for his venality and cowardice in the view of his guests and courtiers. John the Baptist will be honored as a martyr for the faith, while Herod will disappear like dust in the wind, another sorry example of Lord Acton’s principle. Half his kingdom will prove to be half of nothing.

God’s Word is the one power that does not corrupt, but makes whatever it touches holy. We should pray for that power and for the wisdom to use it wisely in whatever sphere of influence we have, small or great. When judgment comes, only justice and love will remain, so let us pray to be among those who pursued God's will in our

lives.