

GOSPEL PEARLS

It is not lawful

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King Herod had heard about Jesus, since by now his name was well known. Some were saying, 'John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.' Others said, 'He is Elijah'; others again, 'He is a prophet, like the prophets we used to have.' But when Herod heard this he said, 'It is John whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead.' Now it was this same Herod who had sent to have John arrested, and had him chained up in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife whom he had married. For John had told Herod, 'It is against the law for you to have your brother's wife.' As for Herodias,

she was furious with him and wanted to kill him; but she was not able to, because Herod was afraid of John, knowing him to be a good and holy man, and gave him his protection. When he had heard him speak he was greatly perplexed, and yet he liked to listen to him. An opportunity came on Herod's birthday when he gave a banquet for the nobles of his court, for his army officers and for the leading figures in Galilee. When the daughter of this same Herodias came in and danced, she delighted Herod and his guests; so the king said to the girl, 'Ask me anything you like and I will give it you.' And he swore her an oath, 'I will give you anything you ask, even half my kingdom.' She went out and said to her mother, 'What shall I ask for?' She replied, 'The head of John the Baptist.' The girl hurried straight back to the king and made her request, 'I want you to give me John the Baptist's head, here and now, on a dish.' The king was deeply distressed but, thinking of the oaths he had sworn and of his guests, he was reluctant to break his word to her. So the king at once sent one of the bodyguard with orders to bring John's head. The man went off and beheaded him in prison; then he brought the head on a dish and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When John's disciples heard about this, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. (Mark 6, 14-29)

Those in power like Herod, who can do whatever they want, think they are free. On the other hand, John the Baptist locked up in prison appears to have lost his freedom. But the reality is different: even if the former seems free, he is really a prisoner of his own pride. Herod, in order not to go back on his word and fascinated by the daughter of Herodias, gives in to his concubine's desire to have John killed. Living without God does not bring freedom, but the loss of it. Instead John the Baptist, although he is in prison and then undergoes martyrdom, is truly free. He is free to say what he wants even to the point of reprimanding King Herod by saying: "It is not lawful for you to consider your wife as your brother's wife". Thus the saying comes true: "To serve God is to reign". Remember this when fear tries to dictate your actions and think of the freedom John the Baptist enjoyed despite persecution.