

## **Sunday, July 11<sup>th</sup>. Trinity 6.**

### **Amos 7. 7-15, Psalm 85. 8-13, Mark 6. 14-29**

In the name of God, father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

If we are in a position of authority, we can sometimes make a wrong decision, which may affect other people adversely. We may not mean to do wrong, but it may happen by giving in to pressure from someone else or by trying to save face when we have got ourselves in a mess. And then we make it worse!

Today's Gospel reveals an interesting problem. Here, the title King didn't belong to this Herod. He was tetrarch, Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great. He is in something of a fix, but he isn't the only guilty one. Who is to blame?

Perhaps Herodias, as she seems to have started it. Actually, according to the historian, Josephus, she wasn't Philip's wife, but the wife of another half-brother, also called Herod. Herodias wanted John the Baptist dead and she seized the opportunity.

Or Herodias' step-daughter, called, according to Josephus, Salome, She was guilty, because, if she hadn't done what her mother said, John wouldn't have been executed. And she made it worse by demanding John's head on a platter.

Or what about Herod? He was guilty, as he was so carried away by Salome's dancing that he made a rash promise, and then felt that he couldn't resist without losing face. So, although he knew that John was a holy man, he went along with it.

Then he is smitten by conscience, thinking that John might have been raised from the dead, or that it might be Elijah, who was expected just before the coming of the Messiah. Herod went along with the plan, knowing that it was wrong. What a mess!

In the first reading, Amos sees Israel as a wall, which is so out of true that it must fall. Israel had disobeyed God by treating people badly and by worshipping idols. He sees God as having run out of patience.

But those in authority wouldn't listen. The land wouldn't be able to face his words and Amos must be banished. Amos' reaction is that he isn't even a prophet, but has been called from his job to prophesy.

By contrast, in Psalm 85, a priest or prophet asks to listen to God's answer to the nation's prayer, confident that he will assure the people of peace and of his presence and authority.

'I will listen to what the Lord God will say, for he shall speak peace to his people and to the faithful, that they turn not again to folly.'

God's answer was that salvation is a happy meeting, like that between friends, who have been separated, a meeting between God's love and the people's loyalty: 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.'

The congregation replies that their welfare is God's gift, that he will come in justice and the land will prosper.

We may not intend to do wrong, but by trying to save face and failing to listen, we may make things worse. Honesty is the best policy, as we say, which frees us to admit when we have got things wrong, so that we can be renewed and earn the respect of other people.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.