

Reading for the Memorial of St Paul Miki and Companions

6th February 2026

First reading

Sirach 47:2-11

‘David praised the Lord God with all his heart and loved God.’

As the fat is selected from the peace offering, so David was selected from the sons of Israel. He played with lions as with young goats and with bears as with lambs of the flock. In his youth did he not kill a giant, and take away reproach from the people, when he lifted his hand with a stone in the sling and struck down the boasting of Goliath? For he appealed to the Lord, the Most High, and he gave him strength in his right hand to slay a man mighty in war, to exalt the power of his people. So they glorified him for his ten thousands and praised him for the blessings of the Lord, when the glorious diadem was brought to him. For he wiped out his enemies on every side and annihilated his adversaries the Philistines; he crushed their power even to this day. In all that he did he gave thanks to the Holy One, the Most High, with ascriptions of glory; he sang praise with all his heart, and he loved his Maker. He placed singers before the altar to make sweet melody with their voices. He gave beauty to the feasts and arranged their times throughout the year, while they praised God’s holy name, and the sanctuary resounded from early morning. The Lord took away his sins and exalted his power for ever; he gave him the covenant of kings and a throne of glory in Israel.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 18(17):31. 47. 50. 51. R cf. 47b

Blest be the God of my salvation!

As for God, his way is blameless;
the word of the Lord is pure.

He indeed is the shield
of all who trust in him.

The Lord lives, and blest be my Rock!

May the God of my salvation be exalted.

So I will praise you, Lord, among the nations;
to your name will I sing a psalm.

The Lord gives great victories to his king,
and shows merciful love for his anointed,
for David and his seed for ever.

Gospel Acclamation

Cf. Luke 8:15

Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are those who hold fast to the word of God
in an honest and good heart,
and bear fruit with patience.
Alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 6:14-29

‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.’

At that time: King Herod heard of Jesus, for his name had become known. Some said, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead. That is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.’ But others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And others said, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old.’ But when Herod heard of

it, he said, 'John, whom I beheaded, has been raised.' For it was Herod who had sent and seized John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because he had married her. For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.' And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly.

But an opportunity came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his nobles and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee. For when Herodias's daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests. And the king said to the girl, 'Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you.' And he vowed to her, 'Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.' And she went out and said to her mother, 'For what should I ask?' And she said, 'The head of John the Baptist.' And she came in immediately with haste to the king and asked, saying, 'I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.' And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Short reflection on the reading for today

This execution has inspired artists and playwrights throughout the centuries. The sumptuous banquet in Herod's palace for his birthday became a banquet of death. Mark follows this scene with the feeding by Jesus of the multitude in the wilderness. It is as if the evangelist wants us to contrast Herod's banquet of death with Jesus' banquet of life. John the Baptist was a good and holy man, who courageously spoke God's truth, for which he was made to suffer.

Jesus was crucified for the same reason, for speaking God's truth without fear.

Our own lives will call for sacrifice at times, the kind of courage shown by John and Jesus. One of the seven named gifts of the Holy Spirit is courage. Today, more than ever, we need the courage of the Holy Spirit to witness to live by the values of Jesus. A courageous faith is not arrogant, but it is firm and enduring. We pray for the kind of faithfulness that shaped John's life and death.