

Reading for the Memorial of the Beheading of St John the Baptist

29th August 2026

First reading

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

‘God chose what is weak in the world.’

Consider your calling, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption; so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 33(32):12-13. 18-19. 20-21. R12b

Blessed the people the Lord has chosen as his heritage.

Blessed the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen as his heritage.

From the heavens the Lord looks forth; he sees the whole human race.

Yes, the Lord’s eyes are on those who fear him, who hope in his merciful love, to rescue their soul from death, to keep them alive in famine.

Our soul is waiting for the Lord. He is our help and our shield.

In him do our hearts find joy. We trust in his holy name.

Gospel Acclamation

Matthew 5:10

Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 6:17-29

‘I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’

At that time: Herod 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

Many churches have a painting or mosaic of the moment when John the Baptist baptised Jesus. Not so very long after that encounter, both of them would be put to death by the tyranny of imperial Rome. Jesus was crucified at the orders of Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea, and John the Baptist was beheaded on the orders of Herod Antipas who ruled Galilee on behalf of Rome. Jesus more than likely saw his own destiny revealed in what happened to John. John was executed because he had challenged Herod for acting against the Jewish Law by marrying his brother Philip's wife. John was a courageous witness to God's will for our lives. In the story we have just heard, he stands out as a beacon of light against the darkness of the other characters, that unholy trinity of Herod, Herodias his wife, and her daughter. Between them they managed to eliminate what the gospel refers to as a "good and holy man," just as Jesus, the ultimate "good and holy man," would be eliminated by another coalition of darkness. It seems to be in the nature of light that it often finds itself shining in darkness. The light of the Lord's presence shines in our own darkness, in the dark and difficult experiences of life. Jesus spoke of John as a "burning and shining lamp." John the Baptist is a great inspiration to us to allow the light of our faith to shine, the light of the gospel, even when it is not popular or convenient to do so. Our calling is to allow the light we have received in baptism to shine brightly, in season and out of season. In his first encyclical, "Light of Faith," Pope Francis declared, "there is an urgent need to see once again that faith is a light, for once the flame of faith dies out, all other lights begin to dim. A light this powerful cannot come from ourselves but from a more primordial source: in a word, it must come from God."