

Reading for the Memorial of St Alphonsus Liguori

1st August 2026

First reading

Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24

‘In truth the Lord sent me to you to speak these words.’

In those days: The priests and the prophets said to the officials and to all the people, ‘This man deserves the sentence of death, because he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your own ears.’ Then Jeremiah spoke to all the officials and all the people, saying, ‘The Lord sent me to prophesy against this house and this city all the words you have heard. Now, therefore, mend your ways and your deeds, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will relent of the disaster that he has pronounced against you. But as for me, behold, I am in your hands. Do with me as seems good and right to you. Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood upon yourselves and upon this city and its inhabitants, for in truth the Lord sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.’

Then the officials and all the people said to the priests and the prophets, ‘This man does not deserve the sentence of death, for he has spoken to us in the name of the Lord our God.’

The hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over to the people to be put to death.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 69(68):15-16. 30-31. 33-34. R cf. 14

At an acceptable time, answer me, O Lord.

Rescue me from the mire, lest I begin to sink.

From those who hate me, deliver me, and from the waters of the deep,
lest the waves overwhelm me.

Let not the deep engulf me, nor the pit close its mouth on me.

As for me in my poverty and pain, let your salvation, O God, raise me up.

Then I will praise God’s name with a song;

I will glorify him with thanksgiving.

The poor when they see it will be glad, and God-seeking hearts will revive;

for the Lord attends to the needy, and does not spurn his own in their chains.

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

Matthew 14:1-12

‘Herod sent and had John beheaded, and his disciples went and told Jesus.’

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard about the fame of Jesus, and he said to his servants, ‘This is John the Baptist. He has been raised from the dead; that is why these miraculous powers are at work in him.’ For Herod had seized John and bound him and put him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, because John had been saying to him, ‘It is not lawful for you to have her.’ And though he wanted to put him to death, he feared the people, because they held him to be a prophet. But when Herod’s birthday came, the daughter of Herodias danced before the company and pleased Herod, so that

he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.' And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given. He sent and had John beheaded in the prison, and his head was brought on a platter and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.

Short reflection on the reading for today

Two men and two women feature in today's gospel, John the Baptist and Herod, and Herodias and her daughter. Of the two men, Herod was a man of power, whereas John was powerless; Herod had the freedom of an autocrat to do whatever he liked, whereas John had no freedom, being locked up in prison. Yet, at another level, John the Baptist had an authority and freedom that the king did not have. John had a moral authority that Herod lacked, and he had the freedom to speak out of his convictions, whereas Herod lacked the freedom of his convictions; he had John beheaded against his better judgement. John had the authority of the person who was completely open to God's Spirit and that he had the spiritual freedom of the children of God. The gospels suggest that this is the only authority and the only freedom worth having, and very often it is to be found in people who might appear on the surface to have very little freedom or authority.

The most authoritative and the freest person of all was Jesus, because he was full of the Spirit, and he was at his most authoritative and his freest at the very moment when he appeared to have no authority or freedom, as he hung from the cross. The more our lives are in tune with the movements of God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit, the more we will share in the Lord's own authority and freedom, and the more we will begin to taste here and now that glorious freedom of the children of God that awaits us in the next life.