

St. Alphonsus Mary de' Liguori - Bishop, Doctor

Readings at mass - Jeremiah 26:11-16,24, Psalm 68(69):15-16,30-31,33-34, Matthew 14:1-12

The Holy Spirit reminds us that the Lord is impressed by someone who truly turns to God, that is “the humble and contrite in spirit who trembles at my word” (Is 66:2). Let us look at this ‘contrition’ or repentance just briefly. So first, ‘amend your behaviour and actions’ and then ‘listen to the voice of the Lord your God’. If and only if we amend our behaviours to that like a child of God, then we will clearly hear the word of God. There is no point in pretence; we must come before him exactly how we are, acknowledging our faults and failures. Remember, Jesus said the exact same thing, “repent and believe in the good news”.

So, the word of God was addressed to Herod and the people there, but it produced no fruit of repentance or conversion. Remember the incident when Jesus was brought before Herod, who was very glad apparently to have seen Him; sadly, Herod only sought a sign or miracle from Him. He did not receive a single word of God from Jesus. St. Alphonsus said in one of his sermons – “Since God knew that man is enticed by favours, he wished to bind him to his love by means of his gifts”. The gifts must not be the end, and often the case is that once we receive what we asked for, we no longer pray.

St. John the Baptist, whom the church venerates greatly by celebrating His beheading as a feast day. As it says in the book of Sirach, the memory of the saints is like “blended incense prepared by the skill of the perfumer” (Sir 49:1). So even though the Herod family had that precious head, the relic, they had produced no fruit and in contrast, St. John’s disciples after burying his body immediately goes to Jesus. God the Father who can never be outdone in graciousness, gives and gives and further gives His only Son to us. We must indeed desire for the greatest of the gifts itself, that is God himself.