

Commentary for Chapter 32

One sin leads to another. When Herod persuaded his brother Philip's wife to leave her lawful husband for him, both he and Herodias committed a grievous sin. This sin led them on to commit other sins. Herod threw John into prison, though he "knew him to be a just and holy man". He thus sinned against justice. Herodias hated the holy Baptist, persuaded her daughter to sin, and thus caused the Saint's death.

Oaths. An oath is to call God to witness the truth of what we say or promise. Herod sinned by taking an oath thoughtlessly and without necessity. Now, ought he to have kept his oath when the sinful request for John's head was made to him? No! for an oath to do something sinful is, in itself, invalid. A man sins if he takes such an oath, and he sins again if he keeps it. Herod committed a double sin, first he made a sinful oath, then by keeping it he committed murder.

Human respect made Herod grant the girl's cruel request. He was ashamed in the presence of his guests to break a promise which was obviously sinful. He did not fear to offend God by committing a very grievous sin, but he shrank from the false judgment of men, and thus gave the cruel and murderous order.

Sharing in the guilt of others. Even the guests were not innocent of John's death. They ought to have corrected Herod, and not have passed by his sin in silence. By not trying to stop him from doing the evil they shared in the guilt.

Virtue alone is beautiful. We all detest the daughter of Herodias. She was beautiful, she wore fine clothes, she danced very cleverly, but she had a heart full of vice and sin instead of virtue and grace. St. Catharine of Sienna saw a soul in the state of grace and said it was too beautiful to describe. That is where true beauty lies and that is what we will see in all of the blessed in heaven.

Intemperance (or gluttony) is a capital sin. A capital sin is not necessarily one of the worse sins, but one which easily leads to other sins. Herod would not have been carried away by the sight of the girl's dancing to make a rash and frivolous oath, unless he had over eaten and drunk too much wine.

St. John died a martyr to his calling. Having been called by God to be a preacher of penance, he represented Herod's sin to him, and reminded him of the law of God. On this account he died a violent death at the age of thirty-two. To him applies the eighth beatitude: "Blessed are they who suffer persecution, for justice' sake." His soul passed directly into Limbo, where he, like St. Joseph, awaited the arrival of the Messiah, and the speedy accomplishment of the work of Redemption. When our Lord ascended into heaven, he was taken up with Him into everlasting happiness. The Church honors him as a great Saint, and on the 24th of June celebrates his nativity, because he was born without original sin.

The end of Herod. Later on, Herod was deposed by the Roman emperor and banished to Lyons. Both he and his wife died in misery. The daughter of Herodias perished during a party on the frozen ice. The ice broke, she fell into the water, and her head was severed from her body by a piece of broken ice.