

Oh God! Why are you letting this happen to me?

A reflection on the Gospel reading for the martyrdom of Saint John the Baptist

Prepare: Read Mark 6:17-29

In Mark 6:17-29, God fails to protect John the Baptist. Was it because John didn't pray for protection? He probably did! So why was he killed if not because God abandoned him? Perhaps he had strayed from God's will? No. Herod killed him while he was doing the Lord's work.

Based on this, we might surmise that working for God is not safe. It sure seems so whenever we take an unpopular stand on the truth.

I can envision myself marching up to Almighty God, hands on my hips, saying, "Well? How about it? Why didn't you protect me from —? Where were you? How can you promise protection and then let me down? What do You have to say for Yourself, huh?"

However, as in every struggle, every persecution, every emotional or spiritual earthquake, we have to humbly assume that there's something about the Bigger Picture that we can't yet see, something we can't yet understand. Eventually, in this life or the next, God will reveal it and we will go, "Ahhhhhhhhh." And John the Baptist in heaven will nod his head and say, "It was all worth it." And we will agree.

In the meantime, instead of asking "Where were You, God? Why are You letting this happen to me?" we should ask, "Which is more important: protection from physical harm or doing what God wants me to do for the sake of the salvation of others?" (Note: I am *not* suggesting that we

allow an abusive person to continue suppressing us. Such abuse must be stopped or fled; we're helping no one if we allow it to continue.)

Another way to word this question is: "Which is more important: my physical comfort or the world's spiritual discomfort?"



Let's be honest. We prefer to stay comfortable. We avoid situations that might result in persecution. We tend to be people-pleasers instead of God-pleasers, so that others will like us and approve of us.

All Christians are called to some kind of martyrdom. If we're not being persecuted for the faith, our faith isn't disturbing anyone around us, which means that our faith isn't visible. A visible faith always disturbs those who don't want to follow Christ or accept the Christian challenge of holy living.

Serious Christians give Christ their daily life to work for Christ's kingdom on earth. Could we not also devote our death to his kingdom?

Oh God, grant me a death that will help others discover the fullness of Your love. When my time on earth is near its end, fill me with Your grace so that I can ignore my desire to be comfortable, for the sake of making a difference in the lives of those I leave behind. Use my dying breath for Your glory and for the purposes of Your kingdom. Amen!

If you sincerely pray for this, you'll discover that your life becomes much more meaningful, and your death — even if it's by martyrdom — is no longer fearsome.