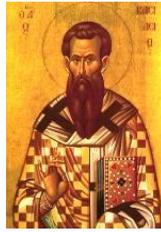


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## BEING PERFECT IN THE EYES OF GOD

THE GOSPELS DEPICT St John the Baptist as the “forerunner” or herald, announcing the immanent coming of God’s saving work in Jesus Christ. In the Gospel of Mark, for example, we hear John say: “*There comes One after me who is mightier than I, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to stoop down and loose. I indeed baptized you with water, but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit*” (Mk1: 7, 8).

John’s work as herald of our salvation was not limited to announcing the beginning of Christ’s ministry in Galilee. Our troparion for today’s commemoration mentions that John baptized the Lord Jesus. Then, it continues, “You have fought for the sake of truth and proclaimed to those in Hades that God, who appeared in the flesh, has taken away the sins of the world and bestowed His great mercy upon us.” John’s ministry continued after death, as he announced to the dead in Hades that Christ’s coming was close at hand.

**The Story of John’s Struggle:** We read the story of John’s final fight “for the sake of truth” in Mark’s Gospel. “*For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife; for he had married her. Because John had said to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife’*” (Mk 6:17, 18). John languished in prison because Herod had a superstitious fear of the prophet. He revered John as a holy man but could not bring himself to follow the Baptist’s teachings. “*Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. And when Herodias’ daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, ‘Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you.’ He also swore to her, ‘Whatever you ask me, I will give you – up to half my kingdom’*” (Mk 6:21-23).

What followed has frequently been retold in literature, music, painting and sculpture. Prompted by her mother, Salome asks for the head of John: “*I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter*” (v. 25). Because of the oath he had sworn in the presence of his guests, Herod agreed and had John beheaded, making possible the prophet’s ministry in Hades.

**Our Observance of John’s Death:** Because John, whom the Lord Himself had called the greatest man born of woman, was killed as a result of Herod’s birthday revels, the Byzantine Churches observe today as a strict fast: no parties, no luxury foods, no drink. We see where these things can lead.

A number of popular local customs have risen to mark the day among various Eastern Christians. People may: Avoid eating anything on round plates, since Salome asked for John’s head “*on a platter*” (Mk 6:25). Use bowls instead.

Avoid eating any round fruits or vegetables (they resemble a head);

Avoid eating anything that requires use of knives or anything that cuts;

Avoid eating or drinking anything red (they remind us of blood).

A contemporary way to observe this commemoration might be in fasting and praying for those who have died senselessly at the hands of others through terrorism, armed conflicts or senseless violence. Think of them as John’s “companions in suffering.”

**Did John Witness in Hades?** As the Gospels affirm, Jesus was still alive when John was executed. But the New Testament does not teach that John witnessed to Christ in Hades. How and when did this concept enter our tradition? Origen of Alexandria, the foremost commentator on the Scriptures in the third century, explained that John the Baptist had died before Christ, “so that he might descend to the lower regions and announce His coming. For everywhere the witness and forerunner of Jesus is John, being born before and dying shortly before the Son of God, so that not only to those of his generation but likewise to those who lived before Christ should liberation from the death be preached, and that he might everywhere prepare a people trained to receive the Lord” (Origen, *Homily on Luke* 4). (AugustLeaflets2020)

## SUNDAY 13<sup>TH</sup> AFTER PENTECOST

Saturday, August 29 & Sunday, August 30, 2020

### WEEKLY SERVICES

**Daily Liturgy:** Monday-Friday 8:30AM  
**Holy Liturgy:** Saturday 4:30PM, Sunday 11:00AM  
**Matins/Orthos:** Every Sunday 9:00AM  
**Holy Confession:** Every Monday 4-6PM  
**Vespers:** Every Saturday 3:00PM  
**Holy Rosary:** Every Sunday 10:30AM

### SPEEDY RECOVERY

Please continue to pray for our convalescing friends, including Archdeacon George Yany, Rt. Rev. Edward Kakaty, Fr. Mark Pasik, Maggy Atallah, Jean Benoit, Nancy Gazzal, Diane Kakaty, Sandra Kakaty, Daniel Klockowski, Julia Nassimos, Rose Pawlinga, Brian Sagrestano. Please notify Fr. Shofany in case of illness.

### WEEKLY OFFERINGS: THANK YOU!

Weekly Collection August 22/23: \$278.00 Beirut, Lebanon Collection: \$120.00

### SPIRITUAL ADVICE OF THE DAY

“... God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.” (Romans 8:28) For this “I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live.” (Psalm 116:1-2)

### † MEMORIAL MASSES †

#### THIS SATURDAY, AUGUST 29

† Eugene Hutchinson, By Doris Hutchinson & Family

† Deceased Members of the Cimbalo Family, By Robert Lalli

#### THIS SUNDAY, AUGUST 30

† Eugene Hutchinson, By Gloria Shaheen

† Nicholas Cordero, By Robert Lalli

#### NEXT SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

† Eugene Hutchinson, By Doris Hutchinson & Family

† Louis Chanatry, 47<sup>th</sup> Memorial Anniversary, By Doris Hutchinson & Family

† Norma Chanatry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Memorial Anniversary, By Doris Hutchinson & Family

#### NEXT SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

† Eugene Hutchinson, By Gloria Shaheen