

10B 2021

What a difference it makes when we know that God is in control and that God determines our purpose.

Our entire outlook changes.

John the Baptist understood this, and Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, found his preaching intriguing.

Herod must have sensed something of the Spirit in John, but to please his new wife, Herodias, whom Herod Antipas had taken from his brother, Herod II, he had John arrested—he was more interested in the purposes of this world than those of God.

John, you see, had told Herod and his new wife that such a marriage was unacceptable, and Herodias in particular was furious.

When Herod Antipas is inspired by his step-daughter Salome's dancing to offer her anything, up to half his kingdom,

Salome consults with her mother, who, not content with John's arrest, tells her daughter to have Herod behead John the Baptist.

If Herod had valued God's purpose over the purposes of this world, he would have told Salome that John the Baptist's head was not his to give, but "out of regard for his oaths and for the guests," (not for God), "he did not want to refuse" Salome, who had allowed herself to be used as the tool of her mother, to become an accessory to murder.

Herod has the guard behead John and bring the head on a platter.

What atrocity we can justify when we place the purposes of this world above those of
God!

We become lost in a sea of our own desires, unmoored, as was Herodias, who first
desired Herod II and then his brother, Herod Antipas.

Herodias reminds me of a child in a classroom who is so busy trying to impress the other
children by acting out that she cannot focus on the lesson.

Other children, attracted to her presumed power over the teacher, start to do her bidding.
She does not understand that the teacher is offering her not what she desires, but what
she needs.

The student's short term gain therefore leads to longterm loss.

God is, after all, not an inexperienced teacher who loses control of the classroom.

It may, nevertheless, *feel* like God has lost control at times, as the world shifts back and
forth.

In the eighties and nineties, educators became convinced that school children suffered
from a summer slump.

By not going to school for two and half months, they lost what they had learned and
teachers had to spend time reviewing in the fall.

Pressured by a need to publish, educators kept doing studies that proved this.

As a result, California changed thousands of schools to the year round model, which had roughly the same amount of days, but broke up summer vacation and spread it throughout the year.

Researchers are now curiously unable to reproduce the results of that period.

In fact, it seems that having a long break, much like taking a retreat, is beneficial.

I personally remember finding that all the truly important life lessons I had learned during the school year did not take root until summer, when I could relax.

During the year, I mostly kept marching forward with whatever mindset I had had at the beginning of the year.

The next demand, the next task came too soon to adjust my being.

Once I had time to relax, however, all those experiences—the lessons from history, literature, arguments with friends, conversations with teachers—could take root.

I went back to the next grade a more mature person.

Others noticed this, too.

Tenth graders in particular commented on how much we had changed over the summer.

When I was in grad school, one of the professors in my program, a conscientious and engaging woman, had read about the summer slump and was concerned about her bright fourteen-year-old son.

The professor wanted to hire me to “keep her son busy over summer so he did not just waste his time riding his bike around.”

She added that she wanted him instead to turn out like me.

While that was flattering, and I needed the money, and I had rapport with her son, I could not do it.

I explained to her that, when I was her son’s age, riding my bike is exactly how I spent my summers and I thought it was important that he also have time to explore on his own, to play, to recreate.

She was disappointed, unconvinced, but accepted my refusal.

I think she signed him up for a class.

She had become convinced that he would fail in this world if he did not continue to learn throughout the year and did not recognize that this contradicted the needs of his spirit, which were rest, recovery, recreation, to let himself be created anew.

This narrative of constant growth towards becoming employable was part of a larger progress narrative.

We were taught that we were all working together to make a better world.

We believed that we were part of a shared and meaningful earthly project, one that blurred the secular and sacred and would make the world better, more loving.

The progress narrative was baptized by the church, and, though it took a great hit after World War I when destruction instead of progress was the result of technology, it returned after World War II.

People thought that heaven could be achieved on this planet.

We were wrong.

In believing this, we had more in common with Herod and Herodias than we thought.

We mistook the classroom for our home and were going to make it be what *we* thought it should be.

In reality, we may sometimes draw close to the kingdom of heaven, but it is never fulfilled here.

The dream of constant progress, whether you have realized it or not, has been dashed, and the world and our nation are in limbo.

Try as we might, that sense of having a shared vision is slipping from our fingers.

The old ways of stirring it in our hearts are not as effective, and we now are either denying or mourning the loss.

God has not withdrawn, but the curtain has been pulled back.

We now may more readily glimpse the fact that some things get better, others worse, and we learn along the way.

We pollute the world, but we grant more rights to certain people in certain places while other places deny rights to more people and even engage in genocide.

We are at a point of disorder, awaiting the next order, and people are growing uncomfortable, grouchy, unsettled.

What comes next is unclear.

I suspect we elected an old president out of nostalgia and, to some extent, denial.

This is not to say that nothing worthwhile can be achieved during this period.

I will leave that for history to judge.

The truth is, though, we cannot go back.

We must find a new unifying dream, not constant progress, but perhaps living in harmony with the creation against which we sin so often—no longer seeking to be in control of, but to be a part of God's creation.

For the time being, however, we have no unifying dream and, as a result, we have lost our sense of responsibility to others.

Just a couple of weeks ago, I deleted my NextDoor account, which I call FaceBook for neighborhoods, because some began threatening to murder their neighbors.

It was the threat of a coward, but I do not want to be exposed to that.

If, like Herodias, we set about murdering everyone who disagrees with us about anything, we will be the only person left.

In losing our admittedly fallacious yet unifying goal of constant progress, we have lost our sense that to be an American in and of itself is to share something.

People are withdrawing into their corners, unable to be united even by the same red, white, and blue colors on the flag, and the amount of hatred I perceive around me is astounding.

I had not known it was there, though it was, all along, simmering underneath the progress narrative.

The way forward is to wait on God to reveal what is next while we mourn the loss of that delusion.

In this period of grief, if we allow people to whip us up and turn us against our brothers and sisters the way Herodias manipulated Solome and Herod, those people then control us.

We have lost our freedom, and we have strayed from the Christian path.

If we come to communion, yet are unable to see others as our Christian brothers and sisters, but only as Democrats, Republicans, gay or straight, black or white, we have strayed from the Christian path and make a mockery of the Eucharist, which beautifully celebrates our being one body in Christ.

Do not let anyone make you their Salome.

What a difference it makes when we know that God is in control and that God has set the purpose.