

SJTI Opening Liturgy, 6 February 2009
Friday of the 4th week in ordinary time: Cycle B
Feast of Paul Miki and Companions, Martyrs

Homily

Our reading of Theology and Philosophy does not take place in a vacuum. It occurs within a context of self absorption, greed, and the destruction of our planet. In his book *Jesus Today* Albert Nolan outlines this very clearly. Some of the rhetoric we hear today is quite frightening. Especially around election time war-talk is how some people hope to attract members to their ranks. People are even prepared to kill for others. Over and above this, our Christian tradition holds before us examples of people who are not prepared to kill, but on the contrary, are prepared to die. Yesterday, we saw this in the example of St. Agatha. And today we see it in the examples of Paul Miki and his companions. These 6 Franciscans, 3 Jesuits and 17 lay people literally embraced the cross. They were crucified outside Nagasaki. How does one do something like this? How does one say like Ghandi, *I am prepared to die for what I believe, but I am not prepared to kill for it*? One thing is certain; we can do nothing of the sort if we do not allow the Word of God to take root in us. In fact that word cannot be ignored. This is what today's gospel passage is all about. This passage reminds us of the importance of God's word in our lives. We cannot put the Word of God into a box and simply live according to our own agendas. The word will come back to haunt us until such time we obey it.

This is what happened to King Herod. God's word disturbed him. The Baptist's words were clear: *Herod it is wrong for you to have your Brother Philip's wife*. Herod in fact had married his sister in law who was also his niece. Such lustful living had to be rebuked and John did this in short sharp terms. His message left no doubt as to what was necessary. The Word of God is never politically correct and can never be domesticated. It will trouble consciences as it did Herod's. Herodias was furious and wanted to have John killed – but Herod's fear is what spared the Baptist initially. And John was chained and imprisoned and finally killed – once more at the instigation of Herodias.

Herod would have thought that the voice that troubled his conscience had finally been laid to rest. But though the preacher was killed, the Word was not. It echoed in Herod's conscience long after the voice had been silenced. And now he hears Jesus; and what does he say: *It is John, whose head I cut off; he has risen from the dead*. And so it becomes clear – I can ignore the Word. I can put it in a box, on the bookshelf or even in the tomb – but it will haunt me and echo in my conscience and continue to disturb me until I embrace it and live it.

Saint Joseph's offers each of us a wonderful opportunity to live that Word. Our study is none other than an effort to uncover the truth. In our efforts to personalize our studies and to contextualize it we have a wonderful opportunity to probe the Word and to allow it to probe us. May it not leave us haunted like Herod, but free like the children of God we are meant to be.

Fr Sylvester David OMI