

Reflection Tuesday Week 21 Beheading of John the Baptist 2023

Saint John the Baptist has two feasts. One, in August, celebrating his death, and one, in June, celebrating his birth. A prophet from before his birth, leaping in the womb to announce the coming of the incarnate God, John the Baptist's task was to proclaim the fulfilment of all prophecies – and thus his own obsolescence. And *he did*. With unequalled courage, he spread the news that he, the greatest of all men, was the least in the kingdom of heaven. His disciples, and the devil, would have preferred him to fight, to build his sect, to defeat this upstart, Jesus, whom he himself had baptized, to seize his place in history. But he did not – and so, rightly, he *has* his place, and he has glory in heaven.

St Bede writes:

There is no doubt that blessed John suffered imprisonment and chains as a witness to our Redeemer, whose forerunner he was, and gave his life for him. His persecutor had demanded not that he should deny Christ, but only that he should keep silent about the truth. Nevertheless, he died for Christ. Through his birth, preaching and baptizing, he bore witness to the coming birth, preaching and baptism of Christ, and by his own suffering he showed that Christ also would suffer. Such was the quality and strength of the man who accepted the end of this present life by shedding his blood after the long imprisonment. He preached the freedom of heavenly peace, yet was thrown into irons by ungodly men; he was locked away in the darkness of prison, though he came bearing witness to the Light of life and deserved to be called a bright and shining lamp by that Light itself, which is Christ. John was baptized in his own blood, though he had been privileged to baptize the Redeemer of the world.

A prosecuting attorney called his first witness, a grandmotherly, elderly woman to the stand.

He approached her and asked, 'Mrs. Jones, do you know me?' She responded, 'Why, yes, I do know you, Mr. Williams. I've known you since you were a boy, and frankly, you've been a big disappointment. You lie, your unfaithful, and you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. You think you're a big shot when you haven't the brains to realise you'll never amount to anything more than a two-bit paper pusher. Yes, I know you.'

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do, he pointed across the room and asked, 'Mrs. Jones, do you know the defence attorney?'

She again replied, 'Why yes, I do. I've known Mr. Bradley since he was a youngster, too. He's lazy, bigoted, and he has a drinking problem. He can't build a normal relationship with anyone, and his law practice is one of the worst in the entire state. Not to mention that he's also *unfaithful.*

The defence attorney nearly died.

The judge asked both counsellors to approach the bench and, in a very quiet voice, said, 'If either of you idiots asks her if she knows me, I'll send you both to the electric chair.'