

For What Are You Willing to Fight?

How many of us have heard the expression, “That is not a hill I want to die on?” or “That isn’t a battle I am willing to fight?” Of course, we have all had to choose our battles. This came in handy for me in the classroom, especially with middle school students. If I picked on every little thing that they did, I would have gone out of my mind. There were a few things, though, that I simply couldn’t ignore.

I could not take it when students were just downright rude or disrespectful. There is a fine line between having fun and being disrespectful, but when that line was crossed, I made sure they knew about it. It took me a few years, but I had to learn the “if/then” way of dealing with behaviors. I had to say, “If this happens again, then this will be the consequence.” Oh, I had that down alright, but then I had to learn to be judicious with the pronounced consequences. I had to make sure it was something that I could actually follow through on. I found myself on more than one occasion using my mother’s infamous line, “I don’t know what I’ll do, but it won’t be good.” The other line was, “Do you want to see what follows the look on my face?” Luckily, the answer was invariably, “No.”

John the Baptist found himself the victim of his own words that he bravely uttered about Herod and Herodias. We can gather this information both from our Gospel lesson today and from Matthew’s gospel. Herodias had been married to Philip, Herod’s brother. *Herodias* is the feminine form of *Herod*, which functions somewhat as a title for members of the Herodian dynasty. Historians indicate that Herod Antipas and Herodias had an affair of sorts while her husband Philip was visiting Rome. Herodias then agreed to leave her husband in order to become Herod Antipas’s wife. Whether it was motivated by lust or was simply a power play, the new marriage was not honorable, and John the Baptist publicly denounced their adultery (Matthew

14:4). Herodias held a grudge against John and wanted him to be executed (Mark 6:19). Herod put John in prison for Herodias's sake (Matthew 14:3) but did not put him to death in part because he was afraid of the people, who believed John was a prophet (Matthew 14:5). Herod also seemed to believe that John was a righteous man and, though "greatly puzzled" by the things John said, "liked to listen to him" (Mark 6:20).

While Herod did not give a consequence he couldn't keep, he did make a promise to Salome that he didn't want to keep. I think it is important that we all be careful what we promise as well. Anyway, the Baptist could have saved his own head, literally, if he hadn't called out Herod and Herodias in public. It wasn't as if he simply said, "They shouldn't have done this." Scholars tend to believe that he called them out and, particularly, called out Herodias with some not-so-nice words.

John the Baptist stood up for what he believed was right. The divorce laws of the Jewish people and the divorce laws of Rome did allow for remarriage after a divorce had been announced. However, the divorce had very specific rules. It could not happen just because you wanted to marry someone else. John's issue was that it apparently went against Mosaic law. He held fast to this to the point of losing his head and his life. This has led me to wonder, though, for what would we be willing to fight or, in extreme cases, give up our own lives?

Some things are easy to fight for: your children, your spouse, or even your own life. How often do we read that someone lost their battle with cancer or some other disease? Most often, we are willing to fight for our own self-preservation or for that of a loved one. These most of us will battle to the death. There are other things, though, that we might still stick our neck out for because they are important to us. I have promised not to go into politics, but I will always fight for the ability to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, shelter the homeless, and help those who are

not in a position to help themselves. I will always stand up for the commandment that Jesus taught us in that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. We don't get to choose our neighbors. We are called to love everyone, including God, with our whole heart, soul, and mind as well as to love our neighbors. We want everyone to be able to live with dignity and to be who they are, as long as they don't hurt others. We say and/or have printed in our bulletins that "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey that you are welcome here."

In the next few months, we may be challenged in many different ways. If you are involved in a fight for your life or one of your loved ones is, please let us know so that we can offer you whatever support we can. If you are fighting for the spread of the Gospel and we can help, let us know! Together, we can enter into any fight that is for the true spread of the Gospel message and allows us all to love our neighbor as ourselves. You may not have to lose your head for it, but your heart and your relationship with God can certainly be strengthened. Aren't those things worth the fight?