

Homily based on the readings from September 25, 2025 (Haggai 1.1-8; Luke 9.7-9)

This past weekend, I spent the better part of two days driving to and from my cousin's wedding in North Carolina. Trying to pass the time, I decided to listen (twice) to the entirety of Handel's *Messiah*. In case you are unfamiliar with this work, it is a monumental oratorio – a musical composition for orchestra and voices – that essentially recounts the entire story of God's salvation of humanity. The lyrics are taken from numerous books of the Bible, especially Isaiah, the Psalms, and First Corinthians. (Even if you are not partial to this sort of music, I am sure you would recognize at least a few sections – particularly the famous *Hallelujah* chorus.)

For some reason, there was one movement – a bass aria – that especially caught my attention this time. The text is a version of the Second Psalm:

Why do the nations so furiously rage together:

Why do the people imagine a vain thing?

The kings of the earth rise up, and the rulers take counsel together:

Against the Lord, and against his anointed.

Regardless of whether the *music* moves you in any way, this *question* is *vitally* important. Why do the nations, why does the *world*, hate Jesus so profoundly – not just Christ, but his *disciples* and even the faintest *echoes* of his message? This attitude has been prevalent throughout the history of the Church – from the Crucifixion, to the brutal slayings of the martyrs, to the aggressive repudiation of Christian values in the modern world. What is the reason for this fierce animosity – both toward Christ and toward Christianity? If people do not like what we have to say, why not simply ignore us?

The fact is that every human being – no matter how powerful or how influential – is equipped with a conscience. Deep in our hearts, we all know what is right and what is wrong – even if we lack the honesty to

admit it to ourselves. The last thing we want is a reminder, staring us in the face, of our own failures and misdeeds. In today's Gospel, that is exactly what is happening to Herod. Jesus, by his very existence, serves as a living reproach for the murder of John the Baptist. Even though Herod had never met Jesus in person, his conscience – and the corresponding fear of punishment – were *relentlessly* gnawing at him.

Not everybody with a guilty conscience will react violently, but many will lash out in some form – largely as a way of masking their own distress. That is the only way to explain their level of hostility, directed against anyone who threatens their *illusion* of self-satisfaction. If we are on the receiving end of that anger, we need to understand what it is we are encountering. In truth, people are not furiously raging against *us*, but against *themselves*.

Our response to such anger can *never* be more anger. The only way to combat hatred is with love, even when – especially when – that hatred causes injury to ourselves or to our loved ones. That is a difficult lesson

for anyone to learn, but it is essential – as Christians – that we model every aspect of our lives on the *King of kings and Lord of lords: the Lamb that was slain, who hath redeemed us to God by his blood.*