

## **Passion of John the Baptist**

Langara Residence

29 August 2018

Dear Father Martin, and dear residents, staff and volunteers here at Langara:

### ***Introduction***

Before saying a few words on today's Gospel on this feast commemorating the death of St. John the Baptist, let me say how happy I am to be here with all of you to celebrate this Holy Mass. I am especially grateful to Father Martin, your chaplain, for regularly celebrating the Eucharist with you. I would also like to express my appreciation to all the staff here at Langara for the wonderful care they provide for you, residents, and for your families. Together with the dedicated volunteers they are a blessing to you – and to the wider community – at this time in your life. Providence Health Care carries out an invaluable ministry in the Lower Mainland. I thank the good Lord for ensuring that the healing and caring mission of Jesus is carried out with such expertise and tenderness in our midst.

Your prayers, now offered by the sufferings you endure, are stronger and more powerful than ever before. God is present with you. He is accompanying you here at Langara. He holds you close to him. In the Psalm we heard words that we all can make our own:

For you, O Lord, are my hope,  
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

Upon you I have leaned from my birth;

it was you who took me from my mother's womb (Ps 71:5-6).

Yes, truly, the good Lord who has been with you since your birth continues to be by your side to comfort you and to promise you life with him forever.

### ***Today's Gospel***

Today's Gospel recounts a chilling episode: the cruel beheading of John the Baptist, the one who prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus.

### ***John' Silence***

In the Gospel, where John is the principal figure, it is curious that the text records not a single word of his. He says nothing in his defense and nothing to condemn those who wanted him dead. He approached his death just as he had lived. He never pointed to himself but only to Jesus. He's the one who earlier had said: "Behold, look over there – not at me! – look to Jesus.

For us, we can see that the Baptist's death foreshadowed Jesus' own death on the Cross.

Today we honour the fact of his martyrdom. As you know, the English word "martyr" comes from the Greek word meaning "witness." Martyrs are those who, without counting the cost, even when it led to hideous torture and an excruciating death, remain faithful to the truth. John bore witness to the truth to the sanctity of marriage. And he was

punished for that. “He denounced transgressions of God’s commandments, even when it was the powerful who were responsible for them. Thus, when he accused Herod and Herodias of adultery, he paid with his life, sealing with martyrdom his service to Christ who is Truth in person.”<sup>1</sup>

For us, this kind of martyrdom does not await us. But there is a daily kind of martyrdom, which does not entail death, but is the patient suffering endured in union with Jesus. This is a true living out in practice of what the Lord said we must do: “take up your cross and follow me.”

### ***Conclusion***

Because you are following Jesus here at Langara by taking up your cross – whether you are a resident, staff member, volunteer or family – I can only express my gratitude to you and humbly ask that you offer this prayer of yours for the salvation of the world.

Jesus himself, in person, comes to help us on our journey now as we continue the Eucharist and prepare to receive him, body and soul, in Holy Communion.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict XVI, Angelus (24 June 2007).

