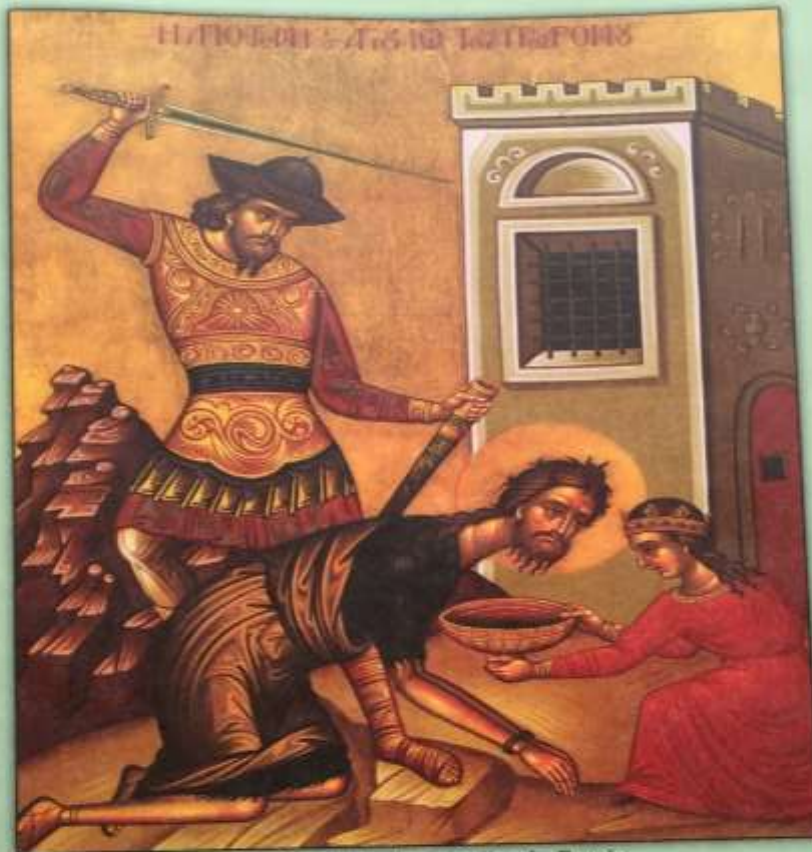


FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST  
BEHEADING OF THE HOLY AND GLORIOUS PROPHET,  
FORERUNNER AND BAPTIST JOHN



*Icon of the Beheading of John the Baptist*

***The Prophet and Forerunner***

Now although the principle stands that "We all offend in many ways" (James 3:2), which of us dare to say that blessed John sinned in act or word or dress or food, when the gospel history praises the harshness of his clothing and the frugality of his meals; when everything he said either rendered testimony to the truth or refuted those who spoke against him; when even those who did not like him held in veneration his works of justice? What place could there have been in his inmost heart for sin, when the coming of the Holy Spirit consecrated him even before his birth, when not even in comparison with the ordinary way of human life could he be turned aside from the path of virtue, who from his boyhood on led an entirely solitary life?

And yet a man of this sort, one who

was so preeminent, reached the end of his earthly life by shedding his blood after a long period of affliction in chains. He who brought the good news of the freedom of heaven was thrust into chains by wicked people; he who "came to bear testimony to the light" (John 1:8), and who merited to be called "a burning and shining lamp" by the very light which is Christ (John 5:35), was shut up in the darkness of prison; he who was greater than all those born of women (Matt. 11:11; Luke 7:28) was punished by being beheaded at the request of the basest of women; and he to whom it was granted to baptize the world's Redeemer, to hear the Father's voice above him, and to see the grace of the Holy Spirit descending upon him, was baptized in his own blood.

Venerable Bede, *Homily II.23*