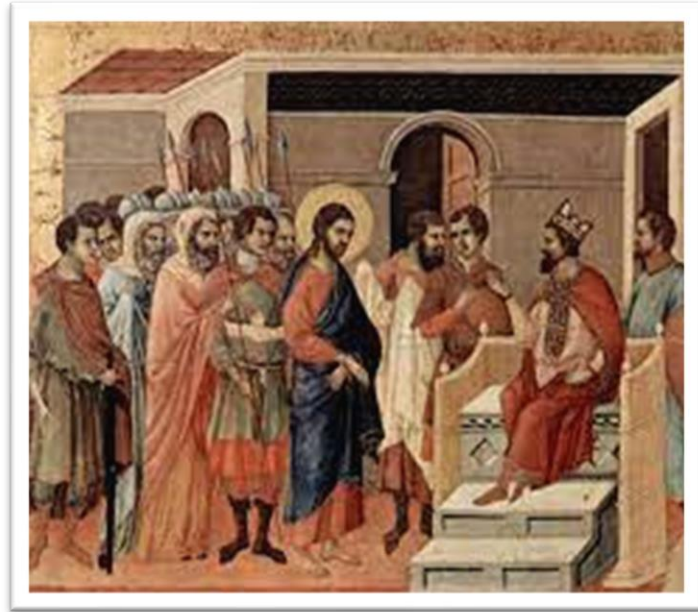


Jesus before Herod

The palace of the Tetrarch Herod was built on the north side of the forum, in the new town; not very far from that of Pilate. An escort of Roman soldiers, mostly from that part of the country which is situated between Switzerland and Italy, had joined the procession. The enemies of Jesus were perfectly furious at the trouble they were compelled to take in going backwards and forwards, and therefore vented their rage upon him. Pilate's messenger had preceded the procession, consequently Herod was expecting them. He was



seated on a pile of cushions, heaped together so as to form a species of throne, in a spacious hall, and surrounded by courtiers and warriors. The Chief Priests entered and placed themselves by his side, leaving Jesus at the entrance. Herod was much elated and pleased at Pilate's having thus publicly acknowledged his right of judging the Galileans, and likewise rejoiced at seeing that Jesus who had never deigned to appear before him reduced to such a state of humiliation and degradation. His curiosity had been greatly excited by the high terms in which John the Baptist had announced the coming of Jesus, and he had likewise heard much about him from the Herodians, and through the many spies whom he had sent into different parts: he was therefore delighted at this opportunity of interrogating him in the presence of the courtiers and of the Jewish priests, hoping to make a grand display of his own knowledge and talents. Pilate having sent him word, 'that he could find no cause in the man,' he concluded that these words were intended as a hint that he (Pilate) wished the accusers to be treated with contempt and mistrust. He, therefore, addressed them in the most haughty distant manner possible, and thereby increased their rage and anger indescribably.

They all began at once to vociferate their accusations, to which Herod hardly listened, being intent solely on gratifying his curiosity by a close examination of Jesus, whom he had so often wished to see. But when he beheld him stripped of all clothing save the remnant of a mantel, scarcely able to stand, and his countenance totally disfigured from the blows he

had received, and from the mud and missiles which the rabble had flung at his head, the luxurious and effeminate prince turned away in disgust, uttered the name of God, and said to the priests in a tone of mingled pity and contempt, 'Take him hence, and bring him not back into my presence in such a deplorable state.' The guards took Jesus into the outer court, and procured some water in a basin, with which they cleansed his soiled garments and disfigured countenance; but they could not restrain their brutality even while doing this, and paid no regard to the wounds with which he was covered. Herod meantime accosted the priests in much the same strain as Pilate had done. 'Your behaviour vastly resembles that of butchers,' he said, 'and you commence your immolations pretty early in the morning.' The Chief Priests produced their accusations at once. Herod, when Jesus was again brought into his presence, pretended to feel some compassion, and offered him a glass of wine to recruit his strength; but Jesus turned his head away and refused this alleviation.

Herod then began to expatiate with great volubility on all he had heard concerning our Lord. He asked a thousand questions, and exhorted him to work a miracle in his presence; but Jesus answered not a word, and stood before him with his eyes cast down, which conduct both irritated and disconcerted Herod, although he endeavoured to conceal his anger, and continued his interrogations. He at first expressed surprise, and made use of persuasive words. 'Is it possible, Jesus of Nazareth,' he exclaimed, 'that it is thou thyself that appearest before me as a criminal? I have heard thy actions so much spoken of.

Thou art not perhaps aware that thou didst offend me grievously by setting free the prisoners whom I had confined at Thirza, but possibly thy intentions were good. The Roman governor has now sent thee to me to be judged; what answer canst thou give to all these accusations? Thou art silent? I have heard much concerning thy wisdom, and the religion thou teachest, let me hear thee answer and confound thy enemies. Art thou the king of the Jews? Art thou the Son of God? Who art thou? Thou art said to have performed wonderful miracles; work one now in my presence. I have the power to release thee. Is it true that thou hast restored sight to the blind, raised up Lazarus from the dead, and fed two or three thousand persons with a few loaves? Why dost thou not answer? I recommend thee to work a miracle quickly before me; perhaps thou mayest rejoice afterwards at having complied with my wishes.' Jesus still kept silence, and Herod continued to question him with even more volubility. 'Who art thou?' said he. 'From whence hast thou thy power? How is it that thou dost no longer possess it? Art thou he whose birth was foretold in such a wonderful

manner? Kings from the East came to my father to see a newly-born king of the Jews: is it true that thou wast that child? Didst thou escape when so many children were massacred, and how was thy escape managed? Why hast thou been for so many years unknown? Answer my questions! Art thou a king? Thy appearance certainly is not regal. I have been told that thou wast conducted to the Temple in triumph a short time ago. What was the meaning of such an exhibition?—speak out at once!—Answer me!’ Herod continued to question Jesus in this rapid manner; but our Lord did not vouchsafe a reply. I was shown (as indeed I already knew) that Jesus was thus silent because Herod was in a state of excommunication, both on account of his adulterous marriage with Herodias, and of his having given orders for the execution of St. John the Baptist. Annas and Caiphas, seeing how indignant Herod was at the silence of Jesus, immediately endeavoured to take advantage of his feelings of wrath, and recommenced their accusations, saying that he had called Herod himself a fox; that his great aim for many years had been the overthrow of Herod’s family; that he was endeavouring to establish a new religion, and had celebrated the Pasch on the previous day. Although Herod was extremely enraged at the conduct of Jesus, he did not lose sight of the political ends which he wished to forward.

He was determined not to condemn our Lord, both because he experienced a secret and indefinable sensation of terror in his presence, and because he still felt remorse at the thought of having put John the Baptist to death, besides which he detested the High Priests for not having allowed him to take part in the sacrifices on account of his adulterous connection with Herodias. But his principal reason for determining not to condemn Jesus was, that he wished to make some return to Pilate for his courtesy, and he thought the best return would be the compliment of showing deference to his decision and agreeing with him in opinion. But he spoke in the most contemptuous manner to Jesus, and turning to the guards and servants who surrounded him, and who were about two hundred in number, said: ‘Take away this fool, and pay him that homage which is his due; he is mad, rather than guilty of any crime.’ Our Lord was immediately taken into a large court, where every possible insult and indignity was heaped upon him. This court was between the two wings of the palace, and Herod stood a spectator on a platform for some time. Annas and Caiphas were by his side, endeavouring to persuade him to condemn our Saviour. But their efforts were fruitless, and Herod answered in a tone loud enough to be heard by the Roman soldiers: ‘No, I should act quite wrongly if I condemned him.’ His

meaning was, that it would be wrong to condemn as guilty one whom Pilate had pronounced innocent, although he had been so courteous as to defer the final judgment to him.

When the High Priests and the other enemies of Jesus perceived that Herod was determined not to give in to their wishes, they dispatched emissaries to that division of the city called Acre, which was chiefly inhabited by Pharisees, to let them know that they must assemble in the neighbourhood of Pilate's palace, gather together the rabble, and bribe them to make a tumult, and demand the condemnation of our Lord. They likewise sent forth secret agents to alarm the people by threats of the divine vengeance if they did not insist on the execution of Jesus, whom they termed a sacrilegious blasphemer. These agents were ordered likewise to alarm them by intimating that if Jesus were not put to death, he would go over to the Romans, assist in the extermination of the Jewish nation, for that it was to this he referred when he spoke of his future kingdom. They endeavoured to spread a report in other parts of the city, that Herod had condemned him, but still that it was necessary for the people likewise to express their wishes, as his partisans were to be feared; for that if he were released he would join the Romans, make a disturbance on the festival day, and take the most inhuman revenge. Some among them circulated contradictory and alarming reports, in order to excite the people and cause an insurrection; while others distributed money among the soldiers to bribe them to ill-treat Jesus, so as to cause his death, which they were most anxious should be brought about as quickly as possible, lest Pilate should acquit him.

Whilst the Pharisees were busying themselves in this manner, our Blessed Saviour was suffering the greatest outrages from the brutal soldiers to whom Herod had delivered him, that they might deride him as a fool. They dragged him into the court, and one of their number having procured a large white sack which had once been filled with cotton, they made a hole in its centre with a sword, and then tossed it over the head of Jesus, accompanying each action with bursts of the most contemptuous laughter. Another soldier brought the remnant of an old scarlet cloak, and passed it round his neck, while the rest bent their knee before him—shoved him—abused him—spat upon him—struck him on the cheek, because he had refused to answer their king, mocked him by pretending to pay homage—threw mud upon him—seized him by the waist, pretending to make him dance; then, having thrown him down, dragged him through a gutter which ran on the side of the court, thus causing his sacred head to strike against the columns and sides of the wall, and when at last they raised him up, it was only in order to

recommence their insults. The soldiers and servants of Herod who were assembled in this court amounted to upwards of two hundred, and all thought to pay court to their monarch by torturing Jesus in some unheard-of way. Many were bribed by the enemies of our Lord to strike him on the head with their sticks, and they took advantage of the confusion and tumult to do so. Jesus looked upon them with compassion; excess of pain drew from him occasional moans and groans, but his enemies rejoiced in his sufferings, and mocked his moans, and not one among the whole assembly showed the slightest degree of compassion. I saw blood streaming from his head, and three times did the blows prostrate him, but angels were weeping at his side, and they anointed his head with heavenly balsam. It was revealed to me that had it not been for this miraculous assistance he must have died from those wounds.

The Philistines at Gaza, who gave vent to their wrath by tormenting poor blind Samson; were far less barbarous than these cruel executioners of our Lord. The priests were, however, impatient to return to the Temple; therefore, having made certain that their orders regarding Jesus would be obeyed, they returned to Herod, and endeavoured to persuade him to condemn our Lord. But he, being determined to do all in his power to please Pilate, refused to accede to their wishes, and sent Jesus back again clothed in the fool's garment.