

In the morning, there was no small commotion among the soldiers as to what had become of Peter. After Herod had a thorough search made for him and did not find him, he cross-examined the guards and ordered that they be executed. Then Herod went from Judea to Caesarea and stayed there. He had been quarreling with the people of Tyre and Sidon; they now joined together and sought an audience with him. After securing the support of Blastus, a trusted personal servant of the king, they asked for peace, because they depended on the king's country for their food supply. On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died. But the word of God continued to spread and flourish. When Barnabas and Saul had finished their mission, they returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John, also called Mark. (Act 12:18-13:1 NIV)

*"Merciful God, you resist the proud but give grace to the humble. Help us to trust you utterly, to rest our hope and confidence in you, and to serve you with pure hearts; through Jesus Christ our Lord."*¹

Dear friends of our Lord and saviour IX: "All glory be to God on high..." reminds us of what the triune God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit - has done to us in creation, salvation and sanctification. God – all in all. Therefore we are to love, fear and trust him above all else. Give thanks to him. Serve him with what we have. Sing, praise and thank him with all our lives. Giving the living God his due! Like Psalm 103 reminds us after Confession/Absolution too: "Don't forget all his benefits!" Like our prayers after eating breakfast, lunch and supper do too: "Thank the Lord for he is good and his mercy endures forever!" Yes, his mercies are new every morning. Therefore it is a good example that our Liberian friends like Albert Payvah and Patience Gbotoe set. If you ask them, how they are, then they will invariably answer: "Praise be to God! It's good, meet and salutary to answer like that. Yes, that is His due. We should not tire of giving God praise, thanks and glory all the days of our lives.

Here in Acts the evangelist St.Luke describes the growing church (Word of the Lord grows Martin Franzmann), but also the persecuted church – suffering and under stress – it's the militant church on the way, at war and in serious trepidation and affliction, not in heaven yet, but here on earth. The gathered congregation prays and call upon God for help as King Herod Agrippa I has beheaded St.James, the Lord's brother as is persecuting them with bloodhounds and merciless mercenaries

¹ Dobberstein Pg. 109
Wilhelm Weber, P.

and terrorists like that bloodthirsty Saul authorized by the authorities to smell out, catch, imprison and kill the followers of this new way shown by IX, the crucified and risen Lord of all. Those of the traditional faith, who had not yet been converted from the old and vain ways of their fathers, rejoiced and praised this tyrannical act of King Herod, who had St. James beheaded – just like there are millions even now praising Erdogan as he imprisons tens of thousands in Turkey and lets many of the opposition disappear. Oh, yes, tyrants will have their choir singing their praises too. You have to watch out, that you don't get caught up in the wrong choir! It's not the size of the choir or the enthusiasm or the volume of the singing and cheering that determines the truthful or righteous choir or church – but rather, the goal, content and foundation of their music & dance, liturgy and service. Just remember Elijah confronting the many, many Baal's priests and frenzied worshippers!

Oh and the tyrannical despots – these proud and haughty leaders like king Herod Agrippa I like this kind of praise. It makes them feel great, powerful and just so mighty. They bask in this glorious light and they look for more. So King Herod has St. Peter the apostle imprisoned too. You want power. I'll show you power. You want blood. I'll shed it. It seems all fun and games, dancing and cheering,² even though not just John the Baptist loses his head, but St. James and many, many more in the persecutions of then and now.

Yes, the congregation and Christian Church is in duress: Lord have mercy! That's what they cry as they try to flee, they cry like that in the catacombs, in the concentration camps and prisons. They cry with the old lamentations: How long still? Why have you forgotten me? That's why they call: *Kyrie eleison* + Lord have mercy + *Kyrie eleison* They call upon the Lord for help for they acknowledge him to be the source of all goodness, help and deliverance. They cry for themselves, they cry for their brothers and sisters in the persecution just as they cry for St. Peter, who is looked up by Herod and his soldiers. And if they don't find words for their lamentations and mourning, the Psalms of the Bible and Hymns of the Church help up their weakness and poverty.

And God answers their prayers. He did so then as he can do now too. Just as he did with St. Paul and Silas in Philippi, as he did with Daniel in Babylon and Schadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace under Nebuchadnezzar's reign. An Angel of God comes to deliver St. Peter from prison. Miraculously his chains fall off, the heavy prison doors open up and the guards don't wake up, but sleep undisturbed by the commotion. Although the congregations first has its doubts that

² Reminds us a bit of Goebbels asking the Germans: "Wollt ihr den totalen Krieg?" And literally millions shouted – yes!
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pJUOu63KLpA>

their prayers have been answered already – not just the next morning, but right in the middle of the night - and the maid Rhoda therefore has her work cut out trying to convince them that it is St.Peter at the door and not just a spook or fiction of the mind, the gathered Church finally does realize that God did not just do miracles and wonders in days long gone, but does so even now. St. Peter is free, he's been released. He's well and alive to preach the goodness and mercy of the Lord together with holy Christian Church.

The promise of our Lord IX to hear our prayer and to answer our call even in desperation holds true. The Christian congregation is not alone, but the living God is in their midst: Immanuel! He hears our prayer as he heard their prayer and just as he delivered St.Peter safe and sound out of the wretched clutches of the tyrannical king Herod, so too he keeps us safe and sure in his almighty and caring hands. So together with the suffering, militant and triumphant Church we praise God for his help and deliverance – then and now and tomorrow! It's not St.Peter's doing, not the congregation's determination, but wonderful help, salvation and liberation worked by the triune God himself. To him be all glory in heaven and earth.

In contrast to this happy story of liberation and salvation, we find King Herod in some trouble too, but he takes matters into his own hands. He's got challenges too. Diplomatic, economic, political quarrels, but he's gifted. Perhaps he's even bright, his cloths are anyway. He's somewhat of an orator. Whoever comes in his way, gets kicked aside, head chopped off like those soldiers, who had let St.Peter escape because they were fast asleep. Little did the king acknowledge that this was the working of God's angel – just like at the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The soldiers couldn't do much about this. They were just swept aside, stayed asleep, couldn't do anything about it.³

³ In Wikipedia we read on pride: "Exaggerated self-esteem is called "pride".[21] Classical Christian theology views pride as being the result of high self-esteem, and thus high self-esteem was viewed as the primary human problem, but beginning in the 20th century, "humanistic psychology" diagnosed the primary human problem as low self-esteem stemming from a lack of belief in one's "true worth." Carl Rogers observed that most people "regard themselves as worthless and unlovable." Thus, they lack self-esteem.[22] Dr. Terry D. Cooper (2003) conceptualizes excessive pride, along with low self-esteem, as an important paradigm in describing the human condition. He examines and compares the Augustinian-Niebuhrian conviction that pride is primary, the feminist concept of pride as being absent in the experience of women, the humanistic psychology position that pride does not adequately account for anyone's experience, and the humanistic psychology idea that if pride emerges, it is always a false front designed to protect an undervalued self.[23] He considers that the work of certain neo-Freudian psychoanalysts, namely Karen Horney, offers promise in dealing with what he calls a "deadlock between the overvalued and undervalued self" (Cooper, 112–3). He refers to their work in describing the connection between religious and psychological pride as well as sin to describe how a neurotic pride system underlies an appearance of self-contempt and low self-esteem: The "idealized self," the "tyranny of the should," the "pride system" and the nature of self-hate all point toward the intertwined relationship between neurotic pride and self-contempt. Understanding how a neurotic pride system underlies an appearance of self-contempt and low self-esteem. (Cooper, 112–3). Thus, hubris, which is exaggerated self-esteem, is sometimes actually a lie used to cover the lack of self-esteem the committer of pride feels deeply down."

He is very much like a typical ruler of those times. Think of the Pharaohs. But you get common people like that too. Think of Goliath or the Pharisee, who are prominent examples of sinful pride. So is King Herod Agrippa I – grandson of King Herod called the Great. Body language: Walk tall, chin in the air and hands in your hips. Of this proud ruler we hear: On the appointed day Herod, wearing his royal robes, sat on his throne and delivered a public address to the people. They shouted, "This is the voice of a god, not of a man." Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died... Therefore be on your guard: "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble." (1Pe 5:5 NIV)⁴

You have all reason to be glad, joyful and grateful: Baptism. No longer foreigner etc. but member of God's family. This is no reason to be proud or haughty, look down on others (racism, nationalism), fear others (xenophobia), but rather see them as brothers and sisters of the heavenly Father too. Therefore be grateful and praise the Lord, who has gifted us in such a special and meaningful way all the days of our life. Amen.

Hymn 947: "All glory be to God on high..."

Psalm 97

⁴ "When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom." (Pro 11:2 NIV) cf Psalm 37 and 73:4ff
Wilhelm Weber, P.