

August 2, 2008
Saturday of the Seventeenth Week in Ordinary Time

Readings of the day may be found on the following link:

<http://www.nccbuscc.org/nab>

Jeremiah 26:11-16, 24

Psalms 69:15-16, 30-31, 33-34

Matthew 14:1-12

Although he wanted to kill him, he feared the people, for they regarded him as a prophet. But at a birthday celebration for Herod, the daughter of Herodias performed a dance before the guests and delighted Herod so much that he swore to give her whatever she might ask for.

I find it interesting that, at every turn, Herod chose what would help him look good in the eyes of the people rather than what was morally right. I wonder if he really knew what was right. I heard a professor of theology say that the more we choose the road of self-service and self-gratification, the less freedom we have to make a better choice. The beliefs, patterns and behaviors become so ingrained that it is extremely difficult to act in ways that are healthy and holy. In the world of psychology, this is called a personality disorder. I say it is difficult to make the change rather than impossible to make the change because I believe that nothing and no one is beyond redemption, even if it seems like it. I can't presume to know the extent of Herod's psychological or spiritual state, but, in every story I can recall at this moment, he chooses what is good for himself at the expense of another. In this gospel, temptation was too great. Is that true for us as well? When the situation calls for us to make a decision to act purely out of love, are we free enough to make that choice, or are we so practiced at serving our needs and wants that the loving choice is almost beyond reach, as it appears to be for Herod?

If we want other people to give us something that only God can give, we become a demon. We say, "Love me!" and before you know it we become violent and demanding and manipulative. It's so important that we keep forgiving one another - not once in a while, but every moment of life.

Henri Nouwen