



# The Holy See

---

**POPE FRANCIS**MORNING MEDITATION IN THE CHAPEL OF THE  
*DOMUS SANCTAE MARTHAЕ*

*The great gift of martyrdom*

*Friday, 8 February 2019*

---

**[Multimedia]**

(by [www.osservatoreromano.va](http://www.osservatoreromano.va))

Commenting on the day's Gospel reading which described the martyrdom of John the Baptist, Pope Francis called on the faithful gathered for Mass on Friday, 8 February, to learn how to give one's life for others as John the Baptist did, in contrast to Herod whom Satan enveloped in corruption, hatred and vanity.

John the Baptist, the Pope said, knew he had to "annihilate" himself, to steadily "diminish", whereas Jesus was to grow. John's light, Francis observed, "slowly burned out, up to the darkness of that cell, alone in prison, where he was beheaded". Indeed, "the life of martyrs is not easy to recount: martyrdom is a service; it is a mystery; it is a very special and great gift of life". Pope Francis said.

The Holy Father then highlighted three attitudes found in the Gospel. The first of these attitudes is corruption, as demonstrated by the king, who believed John the Baptist was a prophet. Initially, the king protected and listened to John. However his perplexity upon hearing John accuse him of adultery led him to attempt to strike a "diplomatic balance" between his own dubious behaviour and the holiness of the prophet before him.

The second attitude is that of Herodias, the wife of the king's brother. "The Gospel says that she 'hated' John" because he spoke with clarity. And, the Holy Father continued, "we know that hatred is capable of anything". Indeed, "hatred is the breath of Satan", who does not know how to love". Herodias "had the satanic spirit of hatred".

The third attitude, vanity, is exhibited by the young dancer, Herodias' daughter, whose dancing so pleased King Herod that he promised her anything she desired.

Satan is behind all these attitudes, sowing "hatred in the woman, vanity in the young woman and corruption in the king", the Pope concluded. And within this context, John the Baptist died alone in a cell "because of the whim of a vain dancer, the hatred of an evil woman and the corruption of an indecisive king".

John, the greatest "man born of a woman", Pope Francis said, thus allowed himself to diminish so as to leave his place to the Messiah. "Life has value only when we give it; when we give it in love, in truth; when we give it to others, in everyday life, in the family".