Did you know . . .

The Passion of St. John the Baptist

August 29 is the memorial of the Passion of St. John the Baptist who died about 30 AD. It was known formerly as The Beheading of St. John the Baptist.

This great religious reformer was sent by God to prepare the people for the Messiah. He would say, "I am baptizing you with water, for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is mightier than I. I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." [Mt 3:11] John never allowed himself the false honor of receiving these people for his own glory. He knew his calling was one of preparation.

"The drunken oath of a king with a shallow sense of honor, a seductive dance and the hateful heart of a queen combined to bring about the martyrdom of John the Baptist. The greatest of prophets suffered the fate of so many Old Testament prophets before him: rejection and martyrdom. The 'voice crying in the desert' did not hesitate to accuse the guilty, did not hesitate to speak the truth." [Martyrdom of John the Baptist, Franciscan Media]. John boldly reprehended Herod for adultery and later, when the opportunity came, Herodias had John beheaded.

The account of the Baptist's passion is given in two of the four gospels…the original version in Mk 6:17-29 and an edited and shortened account in Mt 14:3-12. Biblical historians believe that the beheading of John took place at Machaerus, a fort in the desert on the east side of the Dead Sea, modern day Jordan.

This memorial began in the 4th century AD at the dedication of the Church of St. John at Sebaste in Samaria, Israel. According to tradition, John's skull had been buried there by his disciples. The commemoration gradually spread to the whole Church, first to the East in the 5th century and later to Rome by the 7th century.

Trusting in God's spirit, John found the courage to speak out for God's goodness and truth. May we, with the help of Christ, follow his example.

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