

*Soldiers asked John, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'* St Luke 3:14.

St John the Baptist is an uncompromising figure. No one is spared from being told the truth about themselves, from the crowds that came out to hear him and be baptised, to officials like the soldiers here, and even King Herod in his palace is the focus of his attention. He 'speaks the truth to power' as we might say because his point is that you cannot pretend to be God's 'chosen' if your behaviour is out of step with his purposes. God's justice is worked out in the behaviour of his followers.

The Venerable Fulton Sheen was once asked how to become a *popular* preacher. He replied that to be popular you simply needed to avoid preaching against the sins people really commit, but the call is to become an *authentic* preacher and that means challenging everyone. That is preaching in the spirit of St John the Baptist. It begins with addressing ourselves but it is not afraid to turn its attention against whatever is sham, unjust and unrighteous. What do you think he would want us to turn our voices to condemn today?