

LOOKING AT LIFE THROUGH THE LENS OF THE GOSPEL



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CHRIST THE KING

24th November 2024

John 18:33 Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

For the last gospel of the church’s year we return to John and this scene during the trial of Jesus before Pilate. Pilate represents the most powerful empire the world has ever known and lives out of a worldview that is utterly contrary to that espoused by Jesus. For Pilate, kings and kingship mean only one thing: a threat to the established order. For Jesus this is the language of the Bible where God is the shepherd king who looks out for the lost and bandages the wounded. For the worldly governor of Judea this is all a pipe dream; for Jesus it is a vision that will endure long after the Roman empire has crumbled into the dust. By his death and resurrection Jesus has witnessed to the truth about God and those who search for the truth still listen to his voice.

SEAN GOAN—Let the Reader Understand, Year B

As part of the process which will decide the execution of Jesus, the Gospel of John reports a surprising private dialogue between Pilate, representing the most powerful empire on earth, and Jesus a handcuffed prisoner who is depicted as a ‘witness to the truth’.

Indeed, Pilate apparently wants to know the truth that lies hidden in the strange character that he has before his throne. “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus will respond by expounding the truth of two fundamental assertions, very dear to the Evangelist John.

‘My kingdom is not of this world’. Jesus is not the kind of king that Pilate takes him to be. He has no intention of occupying the throne of Israel or contesting the imperial power of Tiberius. Jesus does not belong to the system in which the prefect of Rome operates, propped up by injustice and lies. He does not rely on the force of arms. The principles he stands for are completely different. Their reality emanates from the love of God for the world.

He does not come to rule like Tiberius, but to be ‘a witness to the truth’. The truth that Jesus brings is not a theoretical doctrine. It is a call that can transform the lives of people. Jesus said: ‘If you remain true to my word.. you will know the truth and the truth will make you free.’ Being faithful to the gospel of Jesus is a unique experience, for it leads to the knowledge of a liberating truth, which is able to make our lives more human.

Jesus Christ is the only truth that we Christians are entitled to live. In the church of Jesus do we not need to make a collective examination of conscience before the ‘witness to the truth’? Do we dare to discern with humility what is true and what is false in our following of Jesus? In what ways does the truth liberate us and how do lies enslave us? Do we not need to move toward higher levels of human and evangelical truth in our lives, our communities and our institutions?

JOSÉ A PAGOLA—Following in the Footsteps of Jesus, Year B

Throughout his life and ministry, Jesus has led by example showing that the reign of God on earth is built on love, service, justice, reconciliation and peace. It involves a restoration of place for those crushed by society and a turning of expectations on their heads: ‘the last shall be first’. One of the most radical things we can do is to surrender to this Dream of God but it does not come with out a cost. This is what Jesus did, and what we, his followers, are called to do.

Jesus says ‘I came into the world for this’. Reflect on your own life. What work have you been called to? What gives your life meaning and purpose? How are you living out the call to be a co-creator in God’s dream for the world?

TRÍONA DOHERTY & JANE MELLETT - The Deep End

INITIAL OBSERVATIONS

This is a wonderful passage from John 18, which goes to the heart of the Christology of that Gospel. It is read chiefly on Good Friday, but is also appropriate here. It must be said, however, that the presentation of the conversation with Pilate serves the theological programme of the Gospel rather than our need of historical facticity.

OLD TESTAMENT BACKGROUND

“Kingdom” is an important category for understanding the preaching of Jesus and the subsequent Christian tradition. There are two sources. There is the commonplace of all religions that God is a ruler or king. This is also found widely in the Hebrew Bible. Of the many possible illustrations, two may suffice:

For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our ruler, the Lord is our king; he will save us. (Is 33:22)

Say among the nations, “The Lord is king! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.” (Psa 96:10)

You may notice the connection of kingship with salvation and with justice. When, however, Jesus proclaims the kingdom of God (common in the Synoptics but rare in John—John 3:3, 5), he is not reflecting this religious cliché that God is in charge. Rather, the use of the expression is apocalyptic, deriving from works such as the book of Daniel. The hope in a future kingdom of God is a recognition of the felt absence of God. It is answering the question: where is God in all this mess? As a result, today’s first reading goes very well with the Gospel.

Thought for the day

It is possible to contrast the various philosophies and religions as systems of ideas and as ethical paradigms. What is distinctive of Christianity, however, is the centrality of the person of Jesus. In his own ministry, he proclaimed the Good News of the reign of God. The Good News for Paul is Jesus’ death and resurrection. Christianity is different: we have not only a message but a person to proclaim.

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POINTERS FOR PRAYER

1. The feast we have today, and the gospel, give us an opportunity to reflect on the different ways in which we, and others, exercise influence and leadership. The authority of Pilate came from position and power. The authority of Jesus came from his integrity and what he stood for. Recall leaders you have known whose influence was like that of Jesus (teachers, community leaders, family members).
2. The values of the kingdom of God cannot be imposed. It is never a matter of fighting battles, or forcing others into compliance. Perhaps through experience you have learned the limitations of the use of force, as a parent, a teacher, a group leader. What has been the good news, the learnings for you, in this?
3. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth and we are all created for a purpose. Who are today’s witnesses to truth in the world? Who are the people whose witness to truth has impressed you, either now or in the past? In what way have you been able to be a witness to truth? What was it like for you to be such a witness?

JOHN BYRNE OSA—Intercom

Textual Comments

MICHEL DE VERTEUIL—*Lectio Divina on the Sunday Gospels*

In today’s feast we celebrate Jesus under the title of King. These days, of course, we don’t have too many kings around but we do have “leaders” – so today we can call him a “perfect leader”. He is the kind of leader we all want to be, the kind of leader we want for ourselves and for others.

We know that Jesus exercised a special kind of leadership. His example must therefore invite us to a deep reflection on how we exercise leadership. Is our way of exercising it true or false? How do other people do it? What is the true form of leadership as it is understood in the world of today? This is clearly the importance of this feast for us and for the world in which we live.

To help us in this meditation on leadership, the church invites us, in this year B, to reflect on St John’s account of the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate. What we have here is only a short extract of a long and very wonderful scene. It is still long enough, however, for us to really enter into the extraordinary interplay between these two men.

It is a meeting between two people who know what kind of leadership they are about. We often find ourselves in this kind of situation today and so we can really meditate on it.

– Jesus is the ideal we are all looking to be like;

– Pilate represents the kind of leadership we are anxious to get away from.

We have played both parts at different times in our lives and we must be able to see how we can fit into each; we will then be able to measure how we are like them, and draw our conclusions.

We also remember those who stood up proud and self-confident in the presence of rulers who were considered powerful in the eyes of the world but in fact were not. We think of people like

– the great popes and saints of our church’s history

– the great women in the history of our church who have objected to the accepted ways of behaving and done wonderful things on their own;

Naturally Jesus himself is a powerful challenge to the church of our time – the universal church, and local church communities. He also reminds us of communities of people who in the face of very opposed values share a common faith, in themselves, and in the real values of the world they live in.