

Commentary on the Feast of Christ the King



Today we conclude the Liturgical Year with our celebration of the feast of Christ the King. On this final Sunday of the year we meditate on Our Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge that all creatures in heaven and on earth are ultimately subject to him as the Universal King. For our Gospel text we have the interesting exchange between Jesus and Pontius Pilate about his Kingship; this interaction occurs on the steps in front of Pilate's palace on the night of his arrest. Of course, Pontius Pilate is very concerned to hear about Jesus' claims to kingship since he was the representative of Caesar and it was his duty to uphold the authority and might of Caesar in Palestine. And it was his particular role to root out anyone who claimed to rival Caesar.

It immediately becomes clear that they are talking on completely different levels; Pilate seeming to be concerned only with earthly authority while Christ is speaking about his universal spiritual authority. One focussing on the human, the other on the divine. Surprisingly perhaps, Pontius Pilate does not regard Jesus as any kind of real threat to Caesar. Maybe this was because Jesus does not arrive with soldiers and weapons but simply as himself together with his known abilities as a healer and miracle worker. Pilate seems to regard the arrest of Jesus as merely the outcome of a religious squabble among the Jews and therefore as something beneath his attention. But he does not want the blood of Jesus on his hands and offers to release him. This shows that Pilate does not understand the Jewish authorities nor the nature of the threat that Jesus presents to them. We are here dealing with St John's account of these events but in St Matthew's Gospel we read how Pilate had been given a warning by his wife to have nothing to do with harming Jesus because she had a disturbing dream about him.

In the text before us Jesus speaks about truth. He says that he came into the world to bear witness to

the truth and that all who are on the side of truth listen to his voice. Unfortunately we miss the next line which has Pilate's reply, "What is truth?? Clearly Pontius Pilate does not have much time for truth. He is a politician and as such he is used to the venality of man and the tricks and half-truths used by the various factions of the political elite. What he is interested in is authority and governance. He is a ruler and wants nothing to disturb the established order and his position as the effective governor of Palestine. Christ on the other hand is focussed on the really important things in life, namely the virtues. Material possessions and the exercise of power do not interest him; in fact he knows very well that these things go completely against that which is truly fulfilling in life. His message to us is that it is only truth, justice, unity, fidelity and similar virtues which bring true happiness and fulfilment in life. He wants us to understand that we are living in a passing world and that our eyes ought to be set on the Kingdom where these values come into their own. Pursuing the acquisition of wealth and power can never be truly satisfying.

Things like celebrity and purely human fame are in the long run completely worthless. Ultimately the things that the world admires are empty and unfulfilling. What lasts are the eternal values and in the end all these come down to one thing: love. It is the person that loves others with their whole heart who finds the most fulfilment in life. It is those who love God with all their hearts who find real peace in this world and the next. Pilate says, "What is truth?? For him this is a dismissal of something that he regards as quite unimportant and ultimately worthless. As a politician and as a man of the world living in Roman times he has obviously seen men give their lives for their principles but apparently he felt that in the end they were giving their lives in vain. To Pilate principles were clearly something expendable. He does not value love of country or family or party very greatly. Pilate lives his life entirely in the present moment and the things that he values are only those things which will bring him advantage or personal gain. He is not a bad man but his values are distorted and he has no eye for eternity. He thinks in the short term. Pilate's question though is of vital importance for anyone who believes that God is in charge and for anyone who believes in an afterlife. It is of vital importance because God clearly regards truth as something absolutely critical.

Truth like many other concepts that fall into the religious field is perhaps best defined by looking at its opposite, in this case falsehood. That which is false cannot be trusted, it is tricky and unreliable. And ultimately falsehood is not something on which anyone can base their lives. Truth, however, is what corresponds with the facts and is a faithful reflection of reality. Truth is therefore utterly reliable and dependable and what is more it corresponds to the nature of God himself. This is the key. If we are to describe God then we use words like true, good, trustworthy, faithful, one, eternal and so on.

Consequently if we want to become like God then we need to adopt these values and make them an essential part of our lives. We need to become persons who are truthful, good, faithful, just and all those other attributes which we ascribe to God. If we adopt these as our priorities in life we will be filled with integrity and be considered as persons worth looking up to and following. We will be living then a life that is truly worthwhile and fulfilling, a life that is greatly satisfying; a life, in other words,

that is in complete conformity with the will of God. It will be by living such a life that will get us to heaven, for to live any other kind of life will mean that our horizons are based only on the things of this world and not the things of the next world.

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