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Commentary on the Gospel: Christ the King (Year B)

Gospel for the Solemnity of Christ the King (Year B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Jn 18:33b-37*)

Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”

Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests

have handed you over to me; what have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.”

Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?”

Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”

Commentary

“Are you the King of the Jews?”

This is the question Pilate asks Jesus when they meet face to face.

To convince the governor to authorize Jesus' death, the Jewish leaders had changed the charge. While among themselves they had condemned Jesus for claiming to be the Son of God, before Pilate they accused him of saying he was the King of the Jews.

Perhaps more out of curiosity than true interest in knowing who Jesus is, Pilate asks him a question that we all need to ask ourselves: Who is Jesus? So important is this question that Jesus himself had once asked the Apostles: Who do you say that I am?

We each need to answer this question, since Jesus has come into the world to invite us to share in his kingdom by offering us his friendship. Jesus wants to win our friendship. He wants to reign in every human heart.

After Pilate's initial question, "Are you the King of the Jews?", Jesus asks: "Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?" He challenges Pilate personally: Who do you think I am? Jesus wants Pilate to confront this question that is essential in each person's life, since to welcome Jesus is to welcome God. For Jesus is the Incarnate Word and through his Humanity we come to know God.

Pilate tries to avoid answering this question: "Am I a Jew?" It isn't easy to accept Jesus and his Kingdom. It means opening our heart to Jesus' message and being willing to change our life. It means living in a new way, which is not always easy.

Jesus continues to give Pilate opportunities to accept him, by inviting him to take part in his Kingdom. He does so by his response to the question that Pilate asks next:

“What have you done?” Why have the Jewish leaders brought you into my presence to stand trial? Why do they want to kill you?

Jesus responds: “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.”

Pilate doesn't understand these words. He doesn't pause to reflect on what Jesus has just said but rather seems to want to rid himself of a troublesome problem. So he asks again the question that most interests him: Are you a King or not?

Jesus answers: “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.”

These words of Jesus before Pilate are what lead to his death. Jesus dies to bear witness to the truth.

What is the truth that Jesus announces? Above all, the Love that God has for us. To rescue us from the power of sin and death, God the Father sent his Son as Savior into the world, who “gave himself up to death, and, rising from the dead, he destroyed death and restored life” (Eucharistic Prayer IV).

Are you the King of the Jews? We too need to ask Jesus this question, and he will teach us that his kingdom is "a kingdom of truth and life, a kingdom of holiness and grace, a kingdom of justice, love and peace" (Preface for the Mass of Christ the King).

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