

Kingship of Our Lord Jesus Christ -2 (10/25/2020)

Jesus meets with Pilate for a strange interrogation. It is a question that can lead to problems for the one who answers. An individual claiming to be a King becomes a potential rival to Caesar - and could end up in hot water. This is a fact that the crowd reminds Pilate when they say *If you release him you are no friend of Caesar. Everyone who makes himself a king opposes Caesar.* Many times Jesus is posed questions that are meant to be a stumbling block, and he slips out of the trap - here it is time for the trap to spring, so his answers are not to escape the inevitable death, but to educate about himself and the Kingdom of God.

By asking the question of whether or not Jesus is a king, Pilate betrays the narrowness of his view of what a king and kingdom are. Just like people were locked into certain political understandings of the Messiah, just as the interpreted “salvation” and being saved by God to be earthly realities - so too Pilate has no other context by which to understand a kingdom but by the framework he already knows. Imagine looking to Jesus and seeing no more than a human being who is a teacher preaching a way of life, or military or political figure. Yet that was the case with many in his time - and unfortunately with many in our own time too. In our continuing quest to displace God from relevance by making ourselves the center of importance in the universe - many Christians have returned to an understanding of salvation that is earth bound and does not reflect the true nature of the kingdom of God.

I was attending a class taught by a minister of another Christian faith and he remarked: “Can’t we really say that salvation is about us lifting each other out of our conditions of injustice. Why is there a need to speak about a heaven, can’t we create a heaven here on earth.” With such a viewpoint (that by the way is more common than you may realize) - we return to a view of salvation as an earthly reality of conquering injustice, something that we can achieve on our own - with Jesus reduced to being a really important moral teacher. I struggle to think how anyone who holds such a position can be considered a Christian. The very nature of our Salvation is precisely beyond this world, it necessarily involves the supernatural intervention of God enacting a plan to save us (not from human injustice and earthly death) but from a just condemnation to eternal death. Salvation without the savior Jesus Christ is not salvation, it is human means of creating an earthly kingdom of peace and stopping there.

This divide between the Earthly and the Heavenly understanding of Kingdom is exactly at the heart of the discussion between Jesus and Pilate. Pilate asks Jesus *Are you the King of the Jews?* He is, of course thinking of an earthly king - he wonders perhaps if he is a claimant for the thrown of Herod - he perhaps wonders if there is a political dispute in the Jewish ruling class that he has to sort out. But Pilate also senses some injustice here. Why would these people place Jesus in such a precarious position, why would they stick his neck out in front of the Roman authorities. Pilate asks *What have you done?* Jesus does not remain with him in pondering the complexities of earthly politics and the reactions of jealous usurpers of power. He does not answer his question but says instead *My kingdom does not belong to this world.* Jesus asserts that his kingdom is one that is of a type that Pilate has not yet encountered. He offers as proof the fact that if he was a king, of the earthly variety, his subjects would be fighting for him and war would commence. He repeats *My kingdom is not here.* He further states that the reason he came was to testify to the truth, all those who belong to the truth - all those who are destined for a kingdom that is beyond this world- will hear his voice.

We as Catholic Christians seek always to hear his voice. We recognize that Jesus is a king of a sort that we cannot fit into our narrow conceptions of royalty and politics. He is a big who possesses the ultimate truth. He is a king whose power is shown in obedience and suffering not in destruction of enemies. He is a king that by his love and self sacrifice achieves a victory over the enemy that cannot be wrought by any weapons. He is a king whose kingdom is not bound by time, is not bound by place and regions, is not superseded by any kingdom of earth, because it is not of earth. This king speaks through the prophet Isaiah: *Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool.* How presumptuous to think that we can achieve for ourself a saving action apart from Jesus, and of our own powers.

Let us today give praise to that King in our worship today. Let us turn to him in this solemn act of worship as the self sacrificing King Jesus Christ lays down his life for us upon this alter and by that act, achieves a victory over an eternity of death. A king whose power knows no bounds and whose generosity knows no limits, as he offers a share in his eternal life to we small creatures who populate his footstool. By this he shown himself a king of great power, a king of great expanse, and a king of unbounded compassion who brings us true and complete salvation.