

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel
November 20, 2021
Church of St. Thomas More
November 21, 2021
34th Sunday of Year B John 18:33b-37

Today we celebrate the feast of Christ the King. In today's gospel we see Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor of Israel. Jesus tells Pilate that His kingdom "does not belong to this world," i.e., it doesn't have its origin in the rivalry, in the violence, in the brutality of an earthly kingdom. Its origin is in God, so it is based on the values of justice and peace that recognize the inestimable worth of every single human being. For Jesus, people are not expedient to the whims of an earthly ruler; they have an intrinsic value in themselves. Though the kingdom Jesus speaks of is not based on the twisted values of this world, its effects are to be felt, are to be made evident, in this world. Those effects are seen in opposing anything that threatens the dignity of a single human being. The kingdom of God is not something that exists like a warm glow within our hearts, or a distant, celestial realm where we hope to go when we die. The kingdom of God is present in our world to the degree that the justice and charity of God are present, are at work in the manner that people treat one another with respect and concern. So, the invisible reality of the kingdom of God will have quite real and demonstrable effects in restructuring the relationships between human beings--in putting people before profits, the weak before the strong, the meek before the mighty.

In Jesus on trial before Pontius Pilate, we see clearly how the two great institutions of that day--Roman law and Hebrew monotheism--conspired to silence the Truth to which Jesus had come to testify. Both of these institutions, among the noblest of antiquity, are corrupted in their attempt to muzzle the voice of Jesus--He who has come to speak God's Truth, to remind us of the proper way that people should treat each other. Roman jurisprudence was renowned for its spirit of fairness and Jewish monotheism renowned for its ethical purity. Yet, we see Jesus caught in the middle between the two, when these two forces--usually hostile towards each other--contravene their own basic tenets, as they perceive in the carpenter from Nazareth a threat to their vested interests. Pontius Pilate and the chief priests, in the very gesture with which they move away from the genuine achievements of their respective traditions, come together for the sake of expediency, as they join forces to silence Him who speaks the Truth. In response to the challenge Jesus presents, their own moral and ethical bankruptcy is revealed.

In the line that follows this evening's Gospel, Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?" This is not the inquiry of one who is genuinely searching for the truth, but the remark of a cynic who has long since abandoned the search. Pilate could not recognize in the One standing before him the very embodiment of Truth, because Pilate's whole life had been spent in avoiding that very question. The same question can be directed towards us, and especially in the context of today's Gospel. What is the truth of the kingdom that Jesus announced, and how is it brought to bear amidst all those issues that confront us as a nation, as a society? We live in an era when the very existence of truth is dismissed, when "alternative facts" and what "sounds true" can substitute for the search for truth. Often we prefer to live in the "echo chamber" of half-truths, distortions, even lies that enable us to live comfortably with our prejudices and biases. Let us pray that we can commit ourselves to the values of Christ's Kingdom, embodying the Truth that Jesus preached, and allowing that Truth to shine forth in all the choices of our lives.