

In 1925, Pope Pius XI established the Feast of Christ the King as a corrective to the rampant nationalism and secularism that followed WWI. Tensions all over the globe were escalating the risk of another World War. He invited Catholics and Christians to reflect on the image of Christ the King so as to gain perspective on how Christ's teachings need to permeate our thinking and actions in the world. Sadly, his effort was not enough to prevent World War II.

Pope Pius' concern has reemerged in our own day. Can Christians today integrate our faith so as to live in peace with our neighbor? We are invited today to enter into Jesus' dialogue with Pilate.

When being deposed, one of the first things that you are told is that the lawyers will ask the questions and you will answer them. You are not allowed to question the lawyers. Jesus is clearly not interested in following this protocol. He immediately answers a question with a question: Do you say Jesus is king on your own or have others told you about him?

Have we decided to follow Jesus as our Master, or are we Christians because, well to put it bluntly, we were born Catholic? Jesus is probing Pilate and us. What is our level of commitment? Is there a possibility that we are really willing to follow him?

We get the sense from Pilate that he is tempted. He has seen enough of politics, war and division. But, he is in a tight spot. He is being asked to make a political decision.

The Gospel of John is absolutely clear. Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent. He even tries to release Jesus. In the end, he condemns Jesus for political reasons. How many millions of innocent people have died because of politics?

Jesus continues instructing Pilate: “My kingdom does not belong to this world.” On the one hand Jesus is saying: “I am no threat to you, I do not seek political power.” On the other hand, Jesus invites Pilate and us to ask: “Where then is your kingdom?”

Jesus taught a lot about the Kingdom of God. He would say: “The Kingdom of God is like” this or that. He also said that it is “among us and within us.” The Kingdom of God can be established as our inner center. This requires that our ego surrender to the supremacy of God’s Kingdom, and at the same time, the Kingdom of God is the very fulfillment of the ego as it is established in its proper role in our life, a position of strength and importance as the representative of our total self. “Anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.”

The Kingdom of God also manifests in our outer living as a life marked by commitment, not by self-seeking. But this is only possible if the Kingdom of God has been established inwardly and the ego has sacrificed its self-centeredness to the kingdom.

This must not be confused with weakness. This is not a call to extinguish, nullify, or devalue our egos. The ego's role is extremely important. There can be no Kingdom of God within, without a strong ego. Only a strong ego can make the act of self-sacrifice necessary for the Kingdom of God to be established in us. We cannot sacrifice what we do not have. Only a strong person can dispense with self-pride.

Letting the Kingdom of God be established as our center does not come readily to us. Our natural inclination is to seek power for ourselves and to try and exploit life for our own purposes.

Even the idea of giving our life over to the Kingdom of God can produce great anxiety because it looks like it will extinguish our ego. In truth, the old ego does die so that a new ego may be born. This is the heart of conversion. This is the way of the soul.

Finally, Jesus invites Pilate to embrace the Kingdom of the Truth. This is who Jesus is. He is the witness to the Truth. The Spirit of God is the Spirit of the Truth. This is the way. Living led by the Spirit of the Truth.

It is interesting that in Dante's Inferno, the icy heart of Hell is reserved for those who undermine the human community of truth: liars, the fraudulent, the flatterers, the forger and worst of all the traitors of the truth. The Feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, was created to counter the untruths of nationalism and secularism in 1925. What untruths are we being asked to counter today? We can only succeed if Christ's Kingdom of the Truth is established within us.