

Reflection for Christ the King: John 18: 33-37

This Sunday we celebrate Christ the King. This reading leaves us with as many questions as answers. We must ask what do we mean when we talk about Christ the King and the Kingdom of God, where is the Kingdom of God, when will we see the Kingdom of God, how do we define the Kingdom of God? Perhaps along with Pilate we may ask what is truth?

John sets the scene for what could be part of a psychological drama, which is a psychological drama. The arrest has taken place, a noisy event, with shouting, sticks and staves. The appearance before the Sanhedrin with more shouting and accusations. Now Jesus is alone with Pilate, just the two of them. What is Pilate doing, is he trying to see if Jesus will produce enough evidence to convict himself or could Pilate be looking for a convenient way out of the situation? Pilate asks, 'Are you the King of the Jews?' Jesus responds with another question, "Is this your own question or someone else's?" Pilate replies, 'I am not a Jew. It is your own that have handed you over!'

Jesus starts to explain the reality of His Kingdom. A Kingdom not of this world, not as the world understands kingdoms and kingship. Pilate says, 'So then perhaps you are a King then!' "I am a King. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." And the bit that the lectionary misses out: Pilate asks, 'What is truth?'

There are no simple answers either to our questions or even Pilate's. We are given an image of contrasting powers, Pilate stands for earthly power, the might of the Roman empire. Pilate questions Jesus, but he is not listening to Jesus, he fails to understand the nuances, the subtleties, of Jesus' answers. Pilate only understands one sort of power. The real danger is that for us we too relate to that sort of power, the need for control, the need to be right and to ensure that everyone else conforms, at least to some degree. This throws Jesus into sharp relief, "my kingdom is not of this world or else my supporters would be fighting now", that is not God's way. It has been said a definition of the Kingdom of God is simply God doing things His way. We have already discovered that our way is not God's way. This strange human obsession with power is an aberration, for we have no power of our own, no power to create, to redeem or sanctify. Jesus' challenge to Pilate's kind of power is too slow and subtle for many of us. We want action, we want God to step in and sort things out, but God does not work like that and that for us is a hard lesson to receive and to share. Jesus is for truth, so any other way must be falsehood and so must fail.

We celebrate Christ the King – a different kind of King, Alleluia!

*King of all past empires,
Lord of all present rulers,
Master of all that is to come,
Lord of kingdoms great and tiny,
Teach us to hold lightly on to the reins of our supposed power,
Remembering that all aspects of our life and loves, *
*our work and worship,
our time and treasure are under your rule,
And that in all things,
You are king,*

Amen