

An Everlasting Dominion

Christ the King year B

John 18:33-38

What is happening in this gospel passage?

Jesus has been arrested, and the time has come for trial before Pilate.

The Jews want Jesus killed for blasphemy,
for claiming equality with God

when there is but one God, and none are his equal.

Pilate interrogates Jesus: “Are you the king of the Jews?”

Pilate is probably experiencing many things:

indifference, discomfort, impatience, perhaps some intrigue.

“What is all this?”

“Who is this Jesus so despised by his own people?”

Why the Jews hand Jesus over to Pilate is difficult to ascertain.

Their law gives them the right to stone blasphemers to death.

All we know is that Jesus is handed over to Pilate

to fulfill the prophecy regarding the kind of death Jesus would endure:

exalted like the serpent in the desert by Moses,
death on a cross.

Pilate interrogates Jesus: **“Are you the king of the Jews?”**

Jesus responds like a king, *like the king that he is*.

Jesus marvelously engages Pilate, awakening in him a desire for truth.

Such is the kingship of Christ,

a kingship in which he navigates and awakens the human heart.

His kingship is difficult for us to understand at first,

so different is it from all other kingships.

When we think kingship, or kingdom,

we think *power*, and understandably so.

We think of great rulers, with a multitude of subjects.

We think of force exercised from without,

necessary so to maintain order.

The kingship of Jesus is different from all other kingships.

Jesus reigns from within.

The kingships of this world are kingships of power.

The kingship Jesus is a kingship of love—*powerful* love, but love.

Any power in his reign
(and there *is* power, for he is *all-powerful*)
is at the service of love.

As king he navigates and awakens the human heart.
This explains Jesus' unusual responses to Pilate.
Jesus is asked what crime he has committed.
Not only does not admit to any crime (for there is none),
he does not even say of what crime he is *accused*.
He leads Pilate beyond the question, beyond the non-question,
and, in this, even exercises kingship over Pilate
—without the latter realizing it.

The sign of this is the wonderful question Pilate poses
in the verse following this passage,
expressing his engagement, his awakening:

“What is truth?”

What an wonderful question to be posed
when initially Pilate simply wished to expedite this matter.

Jesus' response is a pivotal revelation, of course.

**“My kingdom does not belong to this world.
If my kingdom did belong to this world,
my attendants would be fighting
to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.
But as it is, my kingdom is not here.”**

There is no need to fight to keep Jesus from this “fate”,
for, in this “fate”, he reigns as king—as bizarre as it may sound.
Jesus comes to communicate the love of God.
He can and will do so even in dying—like none can.
This is why he is victorious in all things.
This is why his crown is a crown of thorns.

Understand then, that when Jesus says “**my kingdom is not here**”,
he is not saying that his kingdom is *elsewhere*.

He is not saying,

“All of this does not really matter, because I am leaving.”

He is saying what he says to the disciples in Luke 17:20:

“The kingdom of God is within you.”

If Jesus comes to communicate the love of God,
then he comes to reign in our hearts.

Hear the words of Saint Gregory of Nyssa
(a bishop in what is now modern-day Turkey, who died in 394):
**“Blessedness does not lie in knowing something about God,
but rather in possessing God within oneself.”**

It is paramount for us to understand this, because our understanding directly
impacts how we approach Jesus and what we expect of Jesus.

Because we so readily understand kingship
according the human experience of it, according to the worldly model,
we probably do not even really view Jesus as a king.

Why do I say this?

Precisely because an earthly king exercises power
and brings about tangible transformation, “gets things done”.

How many of us beg Jesus to bring about tangible transformation,
to get something done in our lives, and it does not seem to happen?

How often are we left wondering if Jesus is really king?

Fine: he comes to love...blah, blah, blah.

But his love is strong and should change the bad and sad things in life,
should it not?

Why is my world not more perfect if Jesus is king?

Should his kingship not have immediate tangible effects, and fix things?

If he is king of my family,

then I should have no real problems in my home, correct?

The key question is, in fact, that of Jesus’ *purpose* as king.

His purpose: to love us and, in so doing, to draw us into the mystery of God.

And, although we would advise him otherwise,

he allows bad and sad things, for this greater good: our journey home.

As hard as it is to fathom at times,

let us trust that he does reign—even in our brokenness.

When we pray, “**Thy kingdom come**”,

we give him permission to reign in our hearts, in our *broken* hearts.

How awesome a king we have.

He *is* perfecting our world, yet his kingdom is not here, as we imagine.

Something amazing is happening *deep inside* us.

If only we trust, and yield in love.

We have every reason to hope, not to be discouraged.

His kingdom comes.

And “**His dominion is an everlasting dominion
that shall not be taken away.**” (first reading—Daniel 7:14)

