

November 24, 2024

The Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

John 18:33b-37

Pilate said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?"

Jesus answered, "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."

So Pilate said to him, "Then you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

Background:

This is the last Sunday of the liturgical year. Next Sunday is the first Sunday of Advent. Though this has been the year devoted to reading Mark's Gospel, the text is from John's Gospel.

This Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe may feel awkward. The title "king" can suggest a medieval system of royal entitlement at the expense of unfortunate serfs and servants. Even today in our world, royal families live a lifestyle their fellow countrymen cannot afford, and those who have royal status live a life that ordinary persons could not access. There are places of the world where the elite can live a lifestyle without regard for the common or disadvantaged of society. Our experience and attitudes toward the titles and status can affect how we hear the scripture texts, and how we celebrate this Solemnity.

In all the Gospels, Jesus has harsh criticism for religious leaders who assume attitudes of superiority. Jesus also rebukes those who see him as the messiah, those who would want to reestablish the greatness of the Hebrew Nation as it was in the days of their great King David. The religious authorities see Jesus as someone who is presenting himself as the "anointed of God." Therefore, they believe him to be blaspheming. They also believe that such claims would be a threat to Roman authority and upset the fragile peace that allowed them to function as the religious authority while being subjects of the Romans.

In this Gospel Pilate is addressing Jesus privately, away from the crowds and the religious leaders who have turned Jesus over to him and the Roman authority he represents. Pilate acts as one who must determine if Jesus is an authentic threat to the Roman authority that he represents. He may also be trying to understand Jesus, who does not fit the power structures with which he is familiar. In his questioning, Pilate asks Jesus directly if he is a king. He seems to be asking Jesus if he himself believes he is the Messiah. One of the ways people expressed their hope and belief in God was through the image of a future kingdom that would restore God's order and peace to all of creation. Linked to this image of God's reign is a ruler, one who would govern with the mind and heart of God. That person was understood as the true and only king.

On one level the Gospel text is a dialogue between two people who are attempting to speak to one another, but have different ideas of what it is to be a king. Pilate, the governor, is trying to determine if Jesus considers himself to be the King of the Jews. If so, is he a member of the religious fringe, or does he have true political aspirations? Should Jesus and his disciples be taken as a threat to the Roman rule? For his part, Jesus never claims that he is a king, but he does represent a kingdom, the reign of God. God's realm turns the order upside down. It is built on a ruler who is a servant--who does not order but invites, does not demand to be served but washes the feet of others, does not demand that others give their life in service but instead gives his life in service for others. In the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate they are trying to speak to each other, but each is speaking from their unique perspective.

Even though Jesus dies disgraced and suffering, the inscription placed over his head on the cross indicates that Jesus is the “King of the Jews.” In John’s Gospel it is often Jesus’ enemies who state the profound truth, even if they are unaware of the significance of what they have declared. In the central section of John’s passion account, Jesus is presented as the king. “Then Pilate took Jesus and had him scourged. And the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns and placed it on his head, and clothed him in a purple cloak, and they came to him and said, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’” (John 19:1)

At the end of each liturgical year the Church closes the year with The Solemnity of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. In the Gospel Pilate is trying to sort out who this “King of the Jews” is that stands before him. Even before Pilate when his life is in jeopardy, Jesus is true to the role of being servant of the Father. Pilate’s struggle to understand Jesus invites the Church to reflect on our understanding of Jesus as King of the universe and how we as disciples are called to serve that King.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you think of royalty, what images and feelings are invoked in you?
2. When you think of title, Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe, what images come to mind?
3. Recall some of the Gospel passages that have been read this past year. Which have been your favorites? How is Jesus Christ the King in those passages too?
4. What do you recall of the royal line of David in salvation’s history? What meaning or significance did he have for the Hebrew people?
5. Pretend that you are part of the Gospel scene as it unfolds, maybe an attendant of Pilate who can overhear the conversation. Begin by thinking, what kind of day is it? What sounds are in the air? Are people milling around in the background? Do you hear or see any of Jesus’ followers or any of the Pharisees in the distance? How are you feeling about being there? What are some of the thoughts going through you as you hear Pilate and Jesus?

Pilate asks Jesus’ point blank if he is the King of the Jews.

Are you surprised, what goes through you? What happens among those who can hear the questions? Can you hear their comments?

Jesus replies: **"Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?"**

What happens within you as you hear this response? What are you thinking? How does Pilate respond with his body, the expression on his face? How do the onlookers respond? Can you hear any of their comments?

"I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me,"

Pilate says. What do you hear in his words, his gesture, his face, and the way he says this?

"What have you done?"

What is Pilate’s mood? What is he really trying to tell Jesus? How do you hear this statement? If you were able, what you like to say to Pilate at this moment?

"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."

How does Pilate seem to hear this statement? What kind of reaction does that bring to those who are listening, and to you?

"Then you are a king?"

What is Pilate’s mood, and his intention, as he asks this question? What is going on in you as you listen to their conversation at this point? Can you hear any of the comments from the onlookers?

Jesus responds to Pilate, **"You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."** With what intention is Jesus responding to Pilate? Is there hope in his voice that Pilate will understand? How does Pilate hear Jesus’ response? What is his reaction? What are some the comments of those in the crowd? How do they respond? How do you hear what Jesus has just said? What are you feeling?

6. Can you take some time now to talk with God or Jesus about what kind of King Jesus is for you, the kind of follower you would like to be, or what this feast means for you in your relationship to God?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. The homepage is <https://fsc-calledtobe.org/>. The third link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for Nov. 24, 2024, Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

As the visions during the night continued, I saw one like a Son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven; when he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, the one like a Son of man received dominion, glory, and kingship; all peoples, nations, and languages serve him. His is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed.

The Lord is king, in majesty and splendor is the Lord robed; and girt about with strength. And he has made the world firm, not to be moved. Your throne stands firm from of old; from everlasting you are, O Lord. Your decrees are worthy of trust indeed; holiness befits your house, O Lord, for length of days.

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead and ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, who has made us into a kingdom, priests for his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen. Behold, he is coming amid the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him. All the peoples of the earth will lament him. Yes. Amen. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "the one who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty."

Pilate said to Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus answered, "Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?" Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?" Jesus answered, "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."

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Excerpts from Daniel 7:13-14; Psalm 93:1-2, 5; Revelation 1:5-8; and John 18:33-37

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for November 24th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. On this feast of Christ the King, the Gospel is from John, where Pilate asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus replies, "My kingdom does not belong to this world." When Pilate asks, "Then you are a king?" Jesus replies, "You say I am a king. For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

The other readings have additional references to the eternal kingship of Jesus, the heavenly king coming on the clouds. In the first reading from Daniel, the prophet describes a vision, "I saw one like a Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven. When he was presented before the Ancient One, he received dominion, glory, and kingship. His everlasting dominion shall not be taken away." Psalm 93 proclaims, "The Lord is king, robed in splendor. Your throne stands firm from of old, and your decrees for length of days." In the second reading, from Revelation, we hear, "Jesus Christ is ruler of the kings of the earth. He has made us into a kingdom. He is coming amid the clouds."

The feast of Christ the King is the final Sunday of our liturgical year. In the closing words of the Christ the King Gospel, after Pilate asks, "Then you are a King?" Jesus says, "I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Let us remember to listen, on this feast and as we close this liturgical year, to listen also to some other words he spoke in Matthew chapter 6, where he taught us, "This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, *your kingdom come*, your will be done, on earth as in heaven."

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!