

GOSPEL

JOHN 18:33-37

'Are you the king of the Jews?' Pilate asked. Jesus replied, 'Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others spoken to you about me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? It is your own people and the chief priests who have handed you over to me: what have you done?' Jesus replied, 'Mine is not a kingdom of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, my men would have fought to prevent my being surrendered to the Jews. But my kingdom is not of this kind.' 'So you are a king then?' said Pilate. 'It is you who say it' answered Jesus. 'Yes, I am a king. I was born for this, I came into the world for this: to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice.'

A Reflection by Pope Francis

The Solemnity of Christ, King of the Universe, which we celebrate today, is set at the conclusion of the liturgical year and recalls that the life of creation does not advance at random, but proceeds toward a final destination: the definitive manifestation of Christ, Lord of history and of all creation. The conclusion of history will be his eternal kingdom. Today's Gospel passage speaks to us about this kingdom, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of Jesus, recounting the humiliating situation that Jesus is in after being arrested in Gethsemane: bound, insulted, accused and led before the authorities of Jerusalem. And then, he is presented to the Roman prosecutor, as one who seeks to undermine political power, to become the king of the Jews. So Pilate conducts his inquest and, in a dramatic interrogation, twice asks Jesus *if He is a king*.

And Jesus initially responds that his kingship "is not of this world". Then he states: "You say that *I am a king*". It is evident from his entire life that Jesus does not have political ambitions. Let us recall that after the multiplication of the loaves, the people, excited by the miracle, would have sought to proclaim him king, to overturn the Roman power and reestablish the kingdom of Israel. But for Jesus the kingdom is something

else, and it is certainly not achieved by revolt, violence and the force of arms. This is why he withdrew alone to pray on the mount (cf. Jn 6:5-15). Now, in responding, He makes Pilate take note that His disciples did not fight to defend Him. He says: "if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews".

Jesus wants to make it understood that above and beyond political power there is another even greater one, which is not obtained by human means. He has come to earth to exercise this power, which is love, by *bearing witness to the truth*, the divine truth which ultimately is the essential message of the Gospel: "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8); and he wishes to establish in the world his kingdom of love, justice and peace. And this is the kingdom of which Jesus is king, and which extends until the end of times. History teaches us that kingdoms founded on the force of arms and on the abuse of power are fragile and sooner or later collapse. But the Kingdom of God is founded on his love and is rooted in hearts — the Kingdom of God is rooted in hearts —, conferring peace, freedom and fullness of life upon those who embrace it. We all want peace; we all want freedom and we want fulfilment. And how do you do this? Allow the love of God, the Kingdom of God, the love of Jesus, to take root in your heart and you will have peace, you will have freedom and you will have fulfilment.

Today Jesus asks us to *allow him to become our king*. A king who, with his word, his example and his life immolated on the cross saved us from death, and — this king — indicates the path to those who are lost, gives new light to our existence marred by doubt, by fear and by everyday trials. But we must not forget that Jesus' kingdom *is not of this world*. He will give new meaning to our life — at times even put to difficult tests through our mistakes and our sins — merely on the condition that we not follow the logics of the world and of its 'kings'.

May the Virgin Mary help us to welcome Jesus as the king of our life

and to spread his kingdom, by bearing witness to the truth which is love.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- The Kingdom of God is an often used phrase - what do you understand to be the kingdom of God?
- Our story is caught up in God's story - Jesus knew what he was born for, what have you discovered about your why, your purpose?
- Jesus speaks authoritatively here, even in the events of his condemnation, of truth and listening to his voice. how do you connect with the truth - that is Jesus?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.