

**Sermon for Sunday next before Advent, 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021 'Called to be different?'**  
from Fr. Mike.

- Psalm 93.
- Daniel 7.9-10, 13-14
- **John 18. 33-37**

### **What kind of king is Jesus?**

Pilate wants to know. He needs to know because "king" is a political term, and Pilate is a political person. In this chapter, he keeps going back and forth between the Praetorium and the crowds outside. He moves from questioning Jesus inside City Hall to appeasing Jesus' accusers outside. Unfortunately, in John's Gospel those accusers are always called "the Jews" -- as though Jesus wasn't Jewish, as though all the Jews were to blame for killing Jesus.

Years after Jesus' death and resurrection, animosity toward Jewish people infected John's Gospel with language that accused all Jews of condemning Jesus. There were some Jews who opposed Jesus and some who followed him. There were some who collaborated with the Roman authorities - like Christian bishops appointed by the Nazi regime. Today we must repudiate every claim that Jews were responsible for Jesus' death. Pilate needed to know: "Are you the king of the Jews?" If so, you're guilty of treason because the emperor in Rome is the king of everyone everywhere, including the Jews.

### **To proclaim Jesus as King was a subversive act.**

One of my chaplain colleagues is an Anglican priest from South Africa. Not long ago he shared a story about what it was like to believe Jesus was King during the days of apartheid. "Our whole congregation was arrested," he said, "for refusing to obey the government." I thought I misheard him, but he went on to say that all 240 members of the congregation were arrested and put in jail -- from babies to a 90-year-old man.

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### **A clash of cultures**

The images clash. One is big and powerful, the other small and poor. Christ the King Sunday is a dissonant day. Some congregations have changed the name to Reign of Christ Sunday to avoid the male image of "king." But that doesn't make much difference if we forget that Jesus is "poor little Mary's boy." The ancient creeds got something right when they remembered Mary and Pontius Pilate almost in the same breath. Though "king" is male, the word is important because Jesus turned that word on its head. This king is in handcuffs, standing before Pontius Pilate who has the power to condemn him to death or set him free. This Sunday honours Jesus Christ as King, but soon the religious leaders will shout, "We have no king but the emperor!" (Ceasar). There is dissonance on this day and in this text.

### **"What is truth?"**

"What is truth?" Pilate asked, and the question is left hanging in the air. Was he being sarcastic or was he searching for answers nobody else had given him? The answer was not a philosophical proof or a creedal proposition. Truth was the person standing in silence before Pilate. We shouldn't be surprised because John's Gospel began with claims that shocked the philosophers. **"In the beginning was the Word,"** John began, **"and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."** The philosophers nodded their heads and pulled their chairs closer to listen.

They knew this Word. It was *logos* in Greek, as in "logic." This was the cosmic, eternal prime-mover, beyond time and space. This was logic they could understand and affirm, but they weren't prepared for the next part: **"And the Word became flesh and lived among us ... full of grace and truth"** (John 1: 14).

Therefore, if we truly believe this statement, each one of us (being followers of Jesus) is called to be quite different. To speak the truth, sometimes with a capital 'T', as revealed to us by our faith in Christ, our very different and unique kind of King who is ruler of our hearts, should we find the courage to accept him.

Starting from next week then, we will be spending this Advent in hopeful anticipation. Patiently working out what that kingship truly means for us today in practical terms, both as individual Christians, and as a loving servant-king community. Like most things that are worthwhile, this will require considerable effort and perhaps some degree of sacrifice. That said, please do not lose heart, because Jesus presents us with a clear and workable template of truth for this exciting journey.



Fr. Mike, Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021