

*Are You the King of the Jews?**We read as follows in Jesus' name:*

And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led Him away and delivered Him over to Pilate. And Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him, "You have said so." And the chief priests accused Him of many things.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Dearly Beloved,

This week we are at the beginning of Jesus' trial before Pilate.

The chief priests and Jewish council have just delivered Jesus over to Pontius Pilate for execution.

(They were hoping that Pilate would simply honor their condemnation and Rome could do the dirty work of executing their victim.)

But Pilate had more of a sense of justice than that, and so demanded that they bring formal charges.

What they condemned Jesus for in their own unjust court was blasphemy, because He claimed (correctly) to be the Christ and the Son of God.

But this wouldn't hold water in Rome's civil courts, and they knew it.

Their tactic was then to make Jesus out to be the very thing that they were looking for in a christ, that he would be a political, civil king (like David), and that he would liberate Israel from foreign rule. And not only liberate them, but actually dominate the whole world, including Rome.

Such was the Jewish dream of a christ.

But here, they find that it is advantageous to put these words into Jesus' mouth, as if He were claiming these things to be true of Himself.

And so starts Pilate's interrogation of Jesus with the straight forward question:

"Are You the King of the Jews?"

Jesus' response will tell him where the investigation will go next.

If He says "yes" or "no" then Pilate will need to consider how to verify his answer.

But Jesus doesn't give such an answer.

Instead He says simply: **"You have said so."**

St. John tells us more of the conversation, He reports that Jesus also asked Pilate a question:

"Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?" John 18:34

Neither of these are not straight forward responses, are they?

But it was not just a matter of saying, "Yes, I am the king of the Jews." Or "No, I am not."

He is a king, and He is the king of the Jews, but not only the Jews.

He is the king of all the people of the world.

During this trial, Jesus will tell Pilate that His **"kingdom is not of this world."**

And earlier that week, on Palm Sunday, He allowed the people to hail Him as

"the King coming to them gentle and riding on a donkey, a colt, the foal of a donkey."

They even threw down palm branches and cried out, **"Hosanna to the Son of David,"**

a very regal title – which He did not reject.

So to say, “No, I am not a king,” would be to renounce His kingdom,
to renounce you as His subjects, and to renounce His inheritance as the Son of God.
It would be a lie, making Him just as worthy of execution, death and hell as you and I.

But at the same time, He was not the king that He was being accused of being.
In fact, He had refused that kind of crown earlier like we heard on Sunday after the feeding of the 5K.
After seeing the miracle, they wanted to come and make Him their king,
so He retreated up the mountain by Himself alone.
No, He was not the kind of king that would lead His citizens in sedition or treason or rebellion
against the divinely ordained civil governments.

And so Jesus puts the question to Pilate,
“**Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about Me?**”
Jesus is leading Pilate to consider the source of these trumped up charges.
Are the Jewish leaders really the ones who are concerned about Rome’s rule remaining in tact?
If Jesus were acting rebelliously and setting Himself up as a rival king to Rome,
wouldn’t Pilate have heard about Him already, especially after Palm Sunday’s triumphal entry?

But still, Jesus knew what was at stake: His kingdom. You are.
He bore witness to the truth for Pilate, which Pilate did see, declaring Jesus innocent 3 times,
but He wouldn’t defend Himself to avoid the sacrifice that He is to make.
And so He acknowledges, “**You have said so.**”

This is the charge that Pilate ultimately recognized as the offense deserving capital punishment.

Bishop Thomas Kingo wrote a hymn stanza recalling the situation:

*14 On His cross has Pilate written
Splendid title: "King of Jews!"
Envy angry hearts has bitten
All who heritage misuse.
They insist on vengeance grim
Tearing Jesus limb from limb
Though they make Him bloody, gory,
Yet He is the King of Glory.*

Pilate, when He wrote the charge: “**Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews**” meant to mock the Jews.

“**Behold the Man.** Here is your king, this weak, frail, scourged, beaten and crucified man.

Look at His crown of thorns. Here is your king, whom you wanted me to execute.”

Within the Jewish leaders, we see a weakness that pervades all humanity.

We see a desire for glory and greatness, over and against the humble service of our true King/Lord.

Even we, who are grateful that Jesus did suffer and die in order to serve and save us,
are often tempted and, at times, fall into the sin of being embarrassed at our Lord’s humility.

Especially now that Jesus is exalted to the Father’s right hand of power and glory,
we are incensed when His Church is disgraced or looked down upon by the world,
or when laws and policies are put in place to interfere with the Church and her mission.

Now this doesn't mean that we shouldn't use our rights as citizens to contend for fair treatment, but we are mistaken when, with pride, we toss aside the government's restrictions and brag about our open defiance.

If there was ever a time to do such a thing, Jesus' trial was it.

There He claimed to be the King of a kingdom much more powerful than any earthly throne.

But what does Jesus say about His trial, suffering, and death,

"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him." John 13:31

So what should be the attitude of the Christian in the face of unjust treatment for our faith?

We look to Christ for the answer.

We uphold the truth—never shrink from the truth—boldly confess the truth,

but then we patiently endure whatever comes from it and pray for those who persecute you.

As Jesus said, this is how God is glorified, not in overpowering earthly kingdoms by force.

But that is so difficult and against our proud, sinful nature.

We don't want to suffer injustice, especially for something we know to be good and right.

We don't want our reputation to be smeared with a label such as anti-science, or unloving, or racist, or sexist, or bigot, or any other number of labels.

And so, we see that mingled in our desire for God's name and reputation to be upheld and honored there is also a bit of our own self-glory as we would seek to avoid insult or injury for God's sake.

Thanks be to God that it was not only for the sins of the Jews and Pilate that Jesus suffered and died.

It was also for ours. For your pride. For when your will is directly contrary to the Father's will.

When you would seek glory for God and for yourself,

while the Father and the Son desire to be known in His humility and service.

The cross, thankfully, has been put before us and imprinted in our minds and hearts.

We even make the sign of the cross on the head and heart as we are baptized,

showing where our true glory lies - not in ourselves, but in the humble sacrifice of Jesus.

Though His **kingdom is not of this world**, doesn't mean that His kingdom is not in this world.

And He spreads it, not through pride and worldly glory, but in humble simplicity,

through water and bread and wine and Word, and often accompanied by patient suffering.

The cross always accompanies the truth of our King and Lord,

And so we sing the next verse of Bishop Kingo's hymn, perhaps a little more familiar:

15 On my heart imprint Thine image,

Blessed Jesus, King of Grace,

That life's riches, care, and pleasures

Have no power Thee to efface.

This the superscription be:

Jesus, Crucified for me,

Is my Life, my hope's Foundation,

And my Glory and Salvation.¹

Soli Deo Gloria

¹ Christ's Crucifixion, Suffering, and Death (Hymn for Good Friday) by Thomas Kingo. Stzs. 14, 15