

In our Gospel lesson this Christ the King Sunday we are given audience to, arguably, one of the most unique trials in all of human history. Throughout we have the clash and interplay of personalities and, this morning, we'll take a brief look at all who were present and participating. *'The Jews'* were present at the trial, a people allowed a bit of self-governance, but always subject to the Romans, and unauthorized to carry out the death penalty. This is why *'the Jews'* bring Jesus to stand before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate. *'The Jews'* from start to finish were seeking to use Pilate for their purposes.

*'The Jews'* clearly hated Jesus, to the very hysteria of hatred...a shrieking, maddened crowd, howling like wolves: *'Crucify him! Crucify him!'* *'The Jews'* did not hesitate to twist their charge against Jesus, originally bringing the charge of blasphemy [Mt. 26:65], but certain Pilate would consider this a religious, not a political, matter they should settle themselves. So *'the Jews'* bring a charge of rebellion and political insurrection. They accused Jesus of claiming to be a king, knowing full-well that their accusation was a boldfaced lie.

*'The Jews'* go so far as to make the astonishing claim: *'We have no king but Caesar.'* Their words likely took Pilate's breath away, as *'the Jews'* were prepared to abandon every facet of their faith in order to eliminate Jesus. In their intense, insane hatred, they even forgot God.

Turning, now, to Pontius Pilate, whose conduct is so very difficult to comprehend. Pilate knew *'the Jews'* were lying, that Jesus was entirely innocent of the charge, and that he did not want to condemn Jesus to death...but, that's precisely what Pilate did. Pilate refused to put his foot down and tell *'the Jews'* that he was unwilling to participate in their insidious plot against Jesus. Whereas hatred diverted *'the Jews'* from what they believed, fear diverted Pilate. The Jews, basically, tell Pontius Pilate that if he doesn't do as they

demand, they will immediately report him to the Emperor and Pilate would, likely, be readily dismissed. Pontius Pilate crucified Jesus for one simple and clear reason: In order to keep his job! Pilate compromised, even sacrificed, the truth to retain his employment!

The central figure throughout the trial is, as you likely know, Jesus. There is, though, no sense that Jesus is the one on trial. It is always true that when a person faces Jesus, it is not Jesus who is on trial. Throughout, Jesus appears in control and Pilate is bewildered and floundering in a situation he doesn't understand or control.

Jesus, with command and directness speaks of his 'kingdom' as '*not of this world.*' [Jn. 18:36] There were upwards of 1 million people in Jerusalem for that Passover Festival and Pilate only had a few hundred troops on duty in the City. Jesus could have, easily, called forth a huge insurrection against Roman authority that day, but Jesus makes it clear that his kingdom resides in the hearts of people...not people in the heart of his kingdom.

Jesus' kingdom is not about politics, but always about proclaiming the truth. Jesus' kingdom is never about human power, but always about humble servanthood. Jesus' kingdom is never about demeaning people, but always about declaring promise and purpose to every person. Jesus' kingdom is never about war, but always about winning over the hearts and minds of men and women and youth and children with love, grace, and mercy!

*'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.'* [Jn. 18: 36] The other place is precisely from where Jesus came, to where Jesus returns, and from where Jesus will come again...heaven itself. Described in our OT lesson with such awe and wonder: *'Thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was*

*white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze.*' [Dan. 7:9-10]

It is God the Father who gives '*authority, glory, and sovereign power*' to His Only Begotten Son Jesus. Upon Jesus is bestowed kingship, such that '*all nations and peoples of every language*' will one day worship him. '*His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.*' [Dan. 7:14]

This is the proclamation of joy and victory that permeates every believer on this Festival of Christ the King Sunday! This is the promise Martin Luther wrote of in his most famous hymn: '*God's Word forever shall abide, No thanks to foes, who fear it...They cannot win the day. The Kingdom's ours forever.*' To Christ belongs the kingdom, the '*everlasting dominion that will not pass away*', and each of us by the water and the Word, are invited to dwell therein...with Christ the King...forever and a day!

Amen.