

St Pius & St Anthony Christ the King Feast Year B2

On this Feast of Christ the King, a real showdown is shaping up in the gospel between Jesus and Pilate. In fact, between Jesus and the whole Roman Empire. What can I compare this confrontation to? Think of it as Jesus standing before Pilate, a little like *(do you remember)* back in 1989, the brave and bold Chinese man who stood in front of, and blocked, the whole long line, column of tanks in Tiananmen Square, China. He stopped their advance. With this gospel, what is going to happen when Jesus stands here against the Empire?

There is a great line in the movie called “V for Vendetta”, where the character “V” had invited everyone to make a stand by peacefully showing up (everyone) on the anniversary of the 5th of November, standing together in front of Parliament to take back their role in a ‘citizen-led’ republic. In the scene, two government officers are talking, and the assistant inspector Dominic asks his boss, “I drove by Parliament, and have never seen anything like it - tanks, anti-aircraft, infantry - it makes you wish no one would show up tonight. *But if they do, what do you think will happen?* And the captain Finch answers, “***What usually happens when people without guns stand up to people with guns.***”

So, in this showdown with, Jesus and Pilate, what happens? Well, the empire attacks and takes Jesus to the cross (in this world), UNTIL he transcends and rises again (revealing world beyond). And we rise with Him. So, between Pilate or Jesus? Who is king?

Our gospel recounts such an intriguing exchange between them. Their dialogue offers a lot for us to consider. Who is in charge here? We’d think governor Pilate, but it is Jesus who stands His ground and actually has something to stand on (an eternal kingdom). So, who rules in this exchange between Jesus & Pilate? I’d say, Kingship means two entirely different things for each—Jesus & Pilate- and they are worlds apart!

It's clear Pilate can't relate to nearly anything Jesus says – he has nothing to offer (In 26 verses of their dialogue, from Jn 18:29-19:15, Pilate asks 11 questions, demonstrating that he doesn't know where to begin handling Jesus! The only language he knows is the sword-militarism-force & violence. And Jesus all but confirms this, when He says, ‘my kingdom is not of this world’ (Jn 18:36). His kingdom is founded on truth (eternally standing) not on violence – the power of the word, not the sword. So, Pilate doesn't know anything of what Jesus is talking about! Pilate confirms being in over his head, with regard to Truth, when after Jesus mentions ‘Truth’ Pilate sarcastically asks, “What is that?” (Jn 18:38) Typical politician, not holding firm to any principle, but only pulled around by the polls

(recall those 11 question of his, that was polling, he was following the winds of opinion, asking the mob, asking the power elite-Priests and Sanhedrin-seeking only the opinion of the day)

So what an other-worldly contrast of what it means to be king! Scholars point out that Jesus never uses the word 'king' in the gospel (with its emphasis on the sole leader at the top). That's Pilate's obsession. Instead Jesus always speaks about the 'kingdom', the realm, the people (all of us). Pilate, as a typical boss, is only concerned about himself-**his power** (*Lording his authority, he tells Jesus in Jn 19:10 'Do you not know, that I have power to release you and power to crucify you?'*), while Jesus, He is only concerned about **His people** (*In Jn 18:8, protecting his people, Jesus says to the soldier-agents from Rome, 'If you are looking for me, let these men go.'*). That is unlike what we expect from typical leaders in power.

As Jesus, said, His style is not of this world. Pilate as a 'wanna-be dictator', his type is a dime a dozen, but Jesus-He is different. What a contrast? On the platform side by side, Jesus rules, He outshines Pilate hands-down or hands-tied!

Notice how each of them stands-what is it, that they stand for?

- 1) Pilate hoards power and lords it over people, while Jesus empowers others as when He gave his authority to disciples/apostles when going on mission (sending them out in His name- for service)
- 2) Another difference, Jesus exercises authority through service-by washing other people's feet, while Pilate doesn't even wash his own feet-he enslaves others to do that for himself.
- 3) Pilate's leadership evokes terror in people, even in otherwise calm times, while Jesus brings peace to people even in terrorizing times (think of the peace and serenity exuded by the first Christian Martyrs (St Stephen smiles)
- 4) Pilate's minions imitate him using force and violence to conquer and divide, while Jesus says 'put away sword' and freely invites others to unite/unify
- 5) Pilate's authority is like sifting sand, as inconstant as Caesar's tastes, while Jesus' authority originates from the Eternal Father, it lasts forever!

So who has power here, who is free between Pilate and Jesus?

I like what the Roman philosopher statesman Seneca, wrote in one of his letters (Ltr 113:30-31). He says, 'the Greatest emperor is the one who has command of himself' Control of oneself, because you know yourself and can keep a check on enslaving or unruly desires or passions within oneself. That person is serene, noble and free! So between Pilate and Jesus, who is free?

Jesus appears powerless (the one tied up) but He is in control. Jesus has Truth-His Power, (Jn 8:32 'Truth sets free') He is not afraid (1 Jn 4:18 'perfect Love casts out all fear'). And Pilate appears powerful but admits he is not in control, he doesn't know. In John 18:35, he admits "They brought you to me" He is doing their work – the pressure of the mob, elites of the Temple. Pilate doesn't know where he stands. Yet, again, Jesus knows exactly on what He stands (Truth), who he glorifies(Father) and who stands with Him (His People-Disciples).

The best news of all about Jesus' ruling, is that He stands alongside us, Remember He doesn't use the word king focusing only on himself, No, he focuses on the kingdom, all of us. His heart is with His People. Especially in the Father's kingdom, Jesus' preference is not with power & prestige, but for humility and helpfulness. Jesus' style of leadership is to identify with the lowest & littlest among us, such as when He spoke of the 'the least is the greatest' (Luke 9:48), 'the last will be first' (Matt 20:16) or all of the Beatitudes 'Blest are the meek...' (Matt 5:3-11). That is our shepherd-king who rules, because He knows, He knows us -this Shepherd who was once a lamb like us, (John 10:11 and John 1:29, 36) And Jesus calls us to lead lives just as humbly as His, lifting up others through service of them.