

St Pius & St Anthony Homily Christ King Sunday Year B2

Jesus has been called up to stand and answer, in front of Pilate. I remember one time being called up: I was sitting in English class and the two-way intercom came on and the voice announced: "Ms Hurm, please send Brian Johnson to the office". Oh, no! I gathered my books and started the green mile walk, but I did stop by the coke machine and had one last diet Pepsi on the way to face the boss. I must confess the biggest question in my mind was not, "Well, why does the principal want to see me?" No, it was "For which thing, might I be being called about- slipping into homeroom late; parking illegally in the school lot, or running in the halls, or who knows?" The longer I thought about it, the more nervous it made me over not knowing which sin to plead mercy from the principal over? Long story short, it turned out to be none of that at all-it was about my wallet finally being found on the band bus after the last weekend's competition.

But for sure, there is no comparison of that to what Jesus is undergoing in today's gospel as he is dragged before Pilate for judgement. This picture amazes me. Can you imagine the drama? This is Pilate (not messing around) He is the front-face of the Empire. As Roman Prefect, he can speak for Caesar the ruler of the known world. Also, He has troop authority over Jerusalem, so he has the armory behind him and he is in political alliance (key to the Sanhedrin's corruption-they control the Temple. So here stands Pilate with Caesar's voice and Caesar's swords, facing Jesus a meek peasant Jewish teacher from Galilee. That Jesus even has a hearing- like an audience from Pilate is astounding to me. So, I want to add a little detail about Pilate's background as Roman governor. Pilate (like Caesar) is into raw power-brute (brutal) force. Historically it is said that Pilate rules-oversees the Judean area (Jerusalem) from about 26-36 AD (ten years is long for that position-how does that happen-you guess?) Yet, a couple times Pilate himself is called to Rome to answer Caesar, or sent messengers from Rome to give an account for what is up with the unrest and disturbances around Judea. It is recorded that Pilate more than once offended the religious sensibility of the Jewish leaders & people provoking riots, protest and strikes (which more than anything Rome hears because it means the tax stream dries up). One time he posted some Roman Insignia-signage (coats of arms-images) of Caesar around the Temple. It enflamed people and led to a standoff in a local arena with Pilate threatening to kill everyone, but the Jewish faithful called his bluff, saying 'we'd rather die here than live under your pagan idol banners'. Pilate backed down,

relenting and withdraws his troops/taking down the signs, which got him called to Rome to explain why he made the empire look weak and why he couldn't have prevented the whole showdown diplomatically. Then another time, Pilate did shed major blood, ruthlessly put down a whole mob around the Temple by his soldiers' swords for protesting when he installing Roman shields in Herod's palace (another time he confiscated the Temple Treasury to build an aqueduct).

I am sharing those events in Pilate's governorship, to say, that he could be brutal, and as ruthless, bloodthirsting and cruel as any of the worst gangsters or cartel bosses. So, it surprises me that Pilate even gives Jesus a hearing at all. He could have just dispatched (liquidated) Jesus in a second, through some lieutenant. Probably he would rather have had Jesus just been stabbed by soldiers in custody, than to dedicate any time offering what he knew was a 'SHOW' trial. It amazes me that Jesus even gets a minute of this personal time with the Roman Governor. But maybe that is God's point. How close can Jesus come to converting Pilate? So true to form, Jesus **holds** the attention of Pilate. I think Pilate is interested genuinely in what Jesus' mission is. This is what makes their dialogue so intriguing. The back and forth when Pilate basically says, "I like you- you are not like any other criminal dragged before me ever- what have you done to so upset so the Sadducees and Sanhedrin- Why are you here?" Pilate wants to know more of Jesus' mind and heart. He senses a rat and trouble, and like a skilled politician he is not going to waste any crisis. In the end, his concern to stay in power/rule overcomes his search for truth and full life. His questioning and back and forth with the people and high priests is more about discovering leverage to use later over Herod and the Sanhedrin (Pilate is going to extract way more than Judas' 30 pieces silver to do the Sanhedrin's dirty work of eliminating Jesus).

On a note of defense for Pilate, he is wise. He realizes that by giving this religious rebel-Jesus a hearing, he is giving Jesus room enough to string up his own rope (so Pilate can't be blamed later for any fallout-the whole handwashing scene). It is like he is telling Jesus "Here is your microphone to the world-anything you say is broadcast all over the world- Make a name for yourself!" And Jesus says nothing! Asked twice (18:33,37) 'Are you a king?" Jesus doesn't answer. Had Jesus said 'I am king, God's anointed to rule", then Pilate would say "Case closed- you violent revolutionary challenging my and Caesar's rule, and you will be dead before the ink dries on the execution decree I sign." But, Jesus has been here before. Offered positions to wield abusive power, control (land and money), all the swords, taxes and roman flag pageantry, Jesus has no interest in any of it.

That is Pilate and Caesar's language, not Jesus'. That is what Jesus means by saying, "My kingdom is not of this world- I am not interested in subjecting people to my desires, making people serve me. That is not my Father's business. Our kingdom is of justice, peace and the human fulfillment of every person all created by and bearing the image of the living God within their soul. That is the kingdom I represent. A kingdom of pure religion, honoring God and loving God's image in other human beings." Jesus' kingdom is not about lording authority over others, it is about people living together in peace and mutual flourishing. Everyone is great and blessed in Jesus' kingdom, not just the top powers. Jesus does not worship a sword or kneel at the bench of political power over others (we have to remember that Satan offered all of that back in the desert to Jesus, when he tempted, 'Bow down to me, and I will give you all the kingdoms of the world—Matt 4:9, Luke 4:7). Of course, Jesus told Satan to go on back where he came from, so I find Jesus here being gentler with Pilate by giving him time to consider his eternal purpose (maybe Pilate's redemption!) And this is what is so impressive to me. Might Pilate have come around to Jesus on a better day! Jesus offers/tries. I like how Jesus asks Pilate, 'Do you say that I'm king on your own or are you just parroting those fabricated charges?' Is that Jesus' "Do you believe?" moment for Pilate? Pilate misses the opportunity though. I like how Jesus is dragged before Pilate to be judged and Jesus ends up issuing the verdict on Pilate and all such power plays. Jesus' judgement 'My kingdom is not of this world' stands. Jesus is convicting as bankrupt the power politics of Rome (even in charge of the empire what have you got- no God there-no lasting justice, no peace-where is Caesar's kingdom today?) Pilate even demonstrates this guilt, when he who is supposed to be sitting in this holy high seat of roman court determining facts/rulings, he has to ask, "What is Truth?" Did he just ask that? His rule is not going to last. Nothing lasting there. Which brings us to the bottom line in today's gospel. Jesus is the Way, Truth and life (John 14:6). He doesn't need earth kingdoms or (territories like in the board game of Risk); he simply wants to lead and guide our souls into living at peace with one another and God. As king of our hearts, Jesus wants us to thrive with one another, to be fellow builders of a heavenly lasting eternal kingdom of brother and sisterhood with one another. No one forcing, bossing others around, but simply living, cooperating and working together for each other's fulfillment and redemption. It is a matter of the heart holding Jesus as all in all. That is the Christian way. That is the kingdom we pray to come in every 'our Father' making Jesus' own words our own. Let us be part of one kingdom under Jesus, of truth, justice equally concerned, protective and giving to each other-loving as Jesus loves. May that kingdom come.