

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Solemnity of Christ the King  
November 23, 2014

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Many people are initially surprised that Christ as King is acknowledged mostly during His Passion. Most of this recognition comes from Christ's *enemies*. Of the people who declared Jesus to be King on the day of His death, none was a disciple or follower of the Lord.

The Jews were disappointed in Jesus and sought His execution because His Kingdom was *not* of this world. Pontius Pilate had no very clear idea what the Jews were clamoring about, and so here was the Roman governor actually asking the prisoner what the charges were! In the end, Pilate executed Jesus on the ground that His Kingdom *was* of this world!

Truth be told, Pontius Pilate was not much interested in *either* Christ or the Jewish charges against Him. Pilate's world revolved around political office, power, and money. He worked for a difficult boss. The Emperor Tiberius was a jealous and nervous man. Tiberius took comfort in the success of his provincial governments. But there was one exception: *Judaea*. The Jews had caused rebellion three times. Judaea and its governor had a red flag on their file! Under the *lex majestatis* it was sufficient for a charge of treason to lead quickly to beheading. Pontius Pilate's principal patron would suffer that fate the very next year. At the moment God Incarnate was standing before the Roman governor's seat, Pontius Pilate was the one feeling the heat! In comparison with all the complications in his life, concern for truth was negligible.

It is a waste of time for you and me to shake our finger at a first century Roman governor. It is more profitable to wonder if there is not the making of a Pontius Pilate in most all of us. For the plain fact is we all allow our love for other things to complicate our obedience to truth and therefore to Almighty God.

When Christ said, "My kingdom is not of this world" it does not follow He meant His Kingdom does not belong *to* our *in* this world. The force of His statement is that His Kingdom *does not arise* out of the world. Yet Christ's Kingdom does have dealings with the world. As evidence of this, Jesus the King appeared as a helpless prisoner in Pilate's court. From the Divine perspective this might all seem bothersome. Many saints have spoken of the weariness of dealing with the world.

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But you and I are working out our salvation here and now, because we cannot do it anywhere else. Oliver Wendell Holmes remarked, “If you can’t be a Christian where you are, you can’t be one anywhere.” You and I are spending the only lifetime we have making practical use of our convictions that Jesus, not Pilate or Tiberias, is King, and that in God’s truth, not the world’s conventional wisdom, is our operational kingdom. Jesus bound as a prisoner on Pilate’s pavement is part of the Divine involvement and engagement supporting you and me in our discipleship.

The divine Suffering Servant had said in Pilate’s court, “What I was born for, what I came into the world for, is to bear witness to the truth. And whoever belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Few noticed at the time. But already, amidst the horrifying events of Good Friday, a little group was gathering. At Calvary the followers of Christ consisted of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Beloved Disciple. They gave Him their deepest sympathy, consuming love, and adoration. The saying of the Lord Jesus was already coming to pass on Good Friday afternoon. “Whoever belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”

Everyone who forms his character on truth is instinctively drawn to Truth Incarnate. That is the testimony of the accused in Pilate’s court. Men and whole societies and false religions may rage against it. But the declaration of Christ is like metal filings drawn to a magnet. The Word of God does not return to Him empty. Given freedom and dignity, souls seek harmony with this man on the cross and wherever He is. When and wherever that happens, *Christ reigns*.