

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction
on the Solemnity of Christ the King
November 20, 2016

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What do we mean when we say “Christ is King?” The Mass gospels for this solemnity show us *two* types of kingships. A Roman governor represented one type. The *other* kingship is represented by a prisoner bound by a rope.

Pontius Pilate knew all about kings. And what he knew he didn’t like! He knew that all kings were trouble; they were potential enemies. If kings were friendly it wasn’t for very long. Pilate knew that kings create barriers and make treaties and that kingly actions were all tied not to the merits of the situation but to *the person of the king*. Sir Thomas More also knew this about kings. When his son-in-law congratulated him on his warm friendship with King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas replied that if his head could bring the king a castle in Portugal, he would lose it that very night! So, knowing what he did, Pontius Pilate wanted to know if Jesus was a kingly threat to the Roman tax structure. Pilate didn’t give a hoot about the religious scruples of these bothersome Jews. For that matter, Pilate would have chosen any other governor’s post in the Roman Empire. It was Caesar who had sent him to Jerusalem. So much for kings! For Pilate religion and ethics were only a complication. The main question Pontius Pilate put to Jesus was, in effect, “Where is our battle ground?” “What are we going to fight about?” And so the Roman governor simply could not understand the answers to his questions.

Our Lord Jesus replied: “My kingdom is not of this world.” That was *not* a conciliatory statement. Jesus was not saying, “You have nothing to worry about; I am not a rival to your authority.” Christ’s response gave Pilate much to worry about. It is *the Lord* Who holds authoritative power, and it makes no difference whether this authority is acknowledged or not. By contrast, the authority of Pontius Pilate was merely a fabrication cobbled together by political myth making. The Roman governor wearily asked, “What is truth?”

So the confrontation was more like ships passing in the night. This confrontation took place at a location called “The Pavement.” And you and I were not there. But it gives all of us a choice. Those who call themselves Christians have opted for the Man bound with the ropes of a captive. We assert that truth and reality ultimately lie with this Man. We assert that what the other man represents is false. But what

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then do we *do* with Pontius Pilate and his world? After all, we live in that place; we work in it, and, as Christians, try to be “*in the world but not of it.*”

That world is *passing away*. The gospel puts it that way. But this does not mean that at 6:47pm this evening we will be done with it! Rather, to say the world is “passing away” means that the world is something like a man’s shadow. A shadow has no reality separate from the man who has it. This means a shadow isn’t the main player. To an extent, the fact the man has a shadow is a factor in his life. The man has to deal with it. If you are reading a book by sunlight and a time comes when your shadow blocks the sunlight, you have to adjust your position so you can continue to read. The world is like that. It is a *bothersome* sort of thing we have to put up with in this life. That idea won’t sound strange to you if you have read the lives of the saints. Many of the Saints have spoken of the world as bothersome, boring, and dull. It is indeed bothersome, but *serious business* nevertheless! Why serious? Because that bothersome world has the potential to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ! St Paul warned the Roman Christians about that. The apostle declared nothing in this life is worth separating us from the love of God in Jesus Christ.” *Nothing*.

Christians spend a lifetime making practical application of the conviction that *Jesus*, not Pontius Pilate, *is king*, and that God’s truth, not the world’s assertions, governs the true kingdom. In this lifetime we are not at war with the world. We do not fight the world any more than a man fights his shadow. But we do combat as evil anything that divides mankind from sovereign truth and thereby teaches falsehoods. Anything separated from sovereign truth contains less than the whole picture. Moral relativism is no part of God’s creation. When you go on safari in the African wilderness the flora and fauna are incredibly beautiful. And you may be witness to new life and violent death. But there is no moral relativism. A cheetah is a perfectly designed nocturnal, carnivorous, killer. But there are no shades of moral relativism in his hunting. He kills not because he is a mean critter but because he is hungry.

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In the place you and I occupy in God's creation, the main, and preliminary, part of our battle is mostly interior. And Christ reigns when and where we assent to values and make choices that conform to His sovereign will. Our Lord Jesus has said, "I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth." He *is* the Truth. Truth has a compelling power over human hearts because those hearts are made in the image and likeness of God. And everyone who comes to the truth becomes a subject of Christ the King.