

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Christ the King  
November 26, 2017

+

What do we mean when we say Christ is King? The Mass gospel shows us *two* types of kingships. A Roman governor represented one type. The *other* kingship just so happened to be 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 they were all tied not to the merits of the situation but to *the person of the king*. When he was congratulated on his great friendship with King Henry VIII, St Thomas More replied, "If my head could win the king a castle in Portugal I would lose it by morning!" 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 local people. For him religion and ethics were only a complication. The main question Pontius Pilate made 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 said, "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." Rather, 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.

Francis Bacon famously remarked, "'What is truth?' said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer." So the confrontation between the Son of God and the Roman governor was more like ships passing in the night. But this confrontation reveals a choice given to all of us. 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 the other is false. But what 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."

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on the Solemnity of Christ the King  
November 26, 2017

+

That world is *passing away*. So says the gospel. That does not mean that at 6:47pm this evening we will be done with it! Rather, to say it is “passing away” means that the world is something like a man’s shadow. The shadow has no reality separate from the man who has it. The shadow isn’t the main player. But the man has to deal with his shadow. It is a factor. 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 because many of the Saints have spoken that way. To them the world is a necessary bother. Bothersome, but *serious business* nevertheless! Why serious? It gives us the opportunity to serve the Lord. And bothersome because the world has the potential to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ!

Christians spend a lifetime making practical application of the conviction that Jesus, not Pontius Pilate’s boss, is King, and that God’s truth, not the world’s speculations, 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 the truth and teaches falsehoods.

The main and preliminary part of that fight 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 *all* are made in the image and likeness of God. And everyone who comes to the truth becomes a subject of Christ the King.