

Christ the King B 2018 SML
JN 18:33b-37

Prior to His crucifixion, Our Blessed Lord underwent two trials: the trial of Christ the Messiah before the Sanhedrin, followed by the trial of Christ the King before Pilate. The Sanhedrin condemned Our Lord for being too Divine because He is God; Pilate condemned Our Blessed Lord for being too honest because He is Truth.

When a higher court hears a case presented to it by a lower court, there is always continuity of charges. The Sanhedrin, the religious leaders, the lower court, did not have the power of life and death, since the Romans had conquered their land. One expected, then, that when Our Blessed Lord was led before the higher court of Pilate, the exact same charge would have been filed against Him, namely, blasphemy. But that was not the case, as the Sanhedrin knew full well that Pilate could care less if Jesus were a blasphemer. The Jews had their God. Pilate had his gods.

In order to understand the dynamics, I'd like to spend a minute on why the Jews hated Pilate and Pilate hated the Jews. Pilate was the Roman procurator of Judea and he held that office for some ten years. His arbitrary and cruel way of

ruling led to repeated uprisings by the Jews which he suppressed by violent means.

The second reason why the Jews hated Pilate and Pilate hated the Jews is because Pilate had stolen some of the temple treasury money in order to build an aqueduct. Some of the Jews from Galilee were murdered in a riot during the building of the aqueduct, and it could have been during this that Barabbas was arrested as a leader of the rioters.

The third reason why the Jews hated Pilate and Pilate hated the Jews is because Judas once ordered portraits of the Emperor to be brought during the night into Jerusalem and set up in the temple. Pilate threatened to slay the Jews with the sword if they protested, so the Jews offered their necks to Pilate and went over his head to Herod, who had the portraits removed.

As a result, Pilate's "mode of operation" was to walk a fine line: he was hated by the Jews and Rome had already not supported Pilate in his dealings with the Jews. There was a real lack of transparency, to use a modern buzz word.

Back to the trial . . .

Blasphemy was not the charge the Jews brought before Pilate. Instead they brought three charges against Our Blessed Lord in order to force Pilate to hear the case:

- ✓ We found this man subverting our nation,
- ✓ opposing payment of taxes to Caesar,
- ✓ and claiming to be a Messiah, a king. LK 23:2

The charges were false and every word was a lie. If Christ had been a ringleader of sedition or if there had been any signs of insurrection connected with His name, Pilate would surely have heard about it. So would have suspicious Herod; but never had the slightest complaint been brought against Him previously.

As for the charge that He failed to give tribute to Caesar, only a short time before when an attempt was made to entrap Him in the temple, He had told the people “to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s.”

The third charge – that He was a king – that too was a lie, because John 6:15 states very clearly: “Since Jesus knew they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.”

To Pilate’s question, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered:

My kingdom does not belong to this world. If it did, my followers would be fighting to save me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not here.

Prodding further, Pilate asked, “Then you are a king?” So Our Blessed Lord hit the nail right on the head. In so many words, he made it clear that:

- ✓ He did not subvert the nation;
- ✓ He did not oppose the payment of taxes to Caesar,
- ✓ and He was not a king.

Bottom line is, Pilate, what’s on trial here is truth:

For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. v.37

Our Blessed Lord obviously hit a nerve, because Pilate was unable to hide his cynicism. “What is truth?” he sneered.

Pilate ended up being the one on trial and he was found guilty. A governor, a leader of the people, it is expected that Pilate would have been truthful. Rather, he tried everything he could think of to get himself off the hook:

- ✓ from declaring Jesus’ innocence,
- ✓ to a choice between prisoners,
- ✓ to a scourging,

- ✓ to an appeal to sympathy,
- ✓ to a change in judges.

And none of it worked.

Pilate personified broadmindedness. Broadmindedness, when it means indifference to right and wrong, eventually ends up in a hatred of what is right. Those who are so tolerant of error as to deny an Absolute Truth are the ones who crucify Truth.

As I explained in last Sunday's homily, each year, as the liturgical year comes to an end, and today's Feast of Christ the King is the last Sunday of the Church year, the scripture readings at Mass are eschatological in nature. Eschatology is the study of last things:

- ✓ judgment,
- ✓ the end of the world,
- ✓ the second coming of Christ,
- ✓ heaven, hell and purgatory.

In today's gospel of the "Trial before Pilate," judgment comes to the fore. The difference between Our Blessed Lord before Pilate and us before Our Blessed Lord is vast. It's obvious that the trial of Jesus before Pilate was fixed and unfair from the get go.

All of us are familiar with the buzz words and catch phrases that are used today:

- ✓ Transparent
- ✓ Forthright
- ✓ candid
- ✓ being a straight shooter
- ✓ telling it like it is
- ✓ being open and honest
- ✓ having nothing to hide
- ✓ having no inside agenda
- ✓ being straightforward
- ✓ so as to pass the red face test

All of us want and expect these words and phrases to describe how things are done, from:

- ✓ running the Vatican
- ✓ to running a diocese
- ✓ to running the government
- ✓ to nominating a supreme court justice
- ✓ to reporting the news

None of these words and phrases could be used to describe Jesus before Pilate, yet all of them could be used to

describe us before Our Blessed Lord. Someday, each and every one of us will stand before Our Blessed Lord to give an account of his life, an accounting that can be described with the buzz words and catch phrases I listed earlier. Take great comfort in the fact the day you stand before Our Blessed Lord will be the fairest day of your life.