

King Of The Truth

If you could choose your inheritance, what would it be? Our world has a single crude answer; but think about it a little longer. What use would the wealth of the whole world be, if it separated you from things that *really* matter? Truth, Beauty, Peace, Unity, and Goodness are things that really matter. Few people acquire great wealth or power and still keep faith with them; and in that sense, we trade off these high qualities in exchange for something that - in itself - is neither good nor bad, and which in itself is quite undeserving of all our love.

The Roman Empire

Rome was for a long time a great power in the world which, in good hands, did marvellous things for people. When it worked well it governed fairly and administered genuine justice, backed up with reliable power. Of course, it behaved badly under threat, as most of us do, and it was prepared to kill on the grandest scale to keep its hold on the world. But life under Rome was usually better than life outside its influence, and that is why the Empire went so far and lasted so long; it made most countries a good offer. In Judaea it was dealing with a ticklish race of people with sacred religious institutions. Rome was prepared to accept that (at a price), and the Jewish Priests administered a difficult accommodation with the Romans, where neither side pushed the other too far.

Jesus of Nazareth

I don't think Jesus liked the Romans being in charge of his country, but he did not think it important to resist them. He spoke highly of the centurion who said *I am not worthy to have you under my roof*, and he told people to draw the bitterness from the Roman presence by "going the extra mile" (that is, when a Roman soldier ordered you to carry his weaponry for him he was allowed to extort one mile from you in the name of the law. Jesus said *Give him two.*) Today, on the feast of his kingship, we see Jesus on trial before Pilate, who represents the Emperor. I feel sorry for Pilate, as I believe did Jesus. They have no quarrel with one another: it is the priests who have declared war on Jesus. Maybe this is why the conversation between these two goes so deep. Pilate wants to know the dimensions of Jesus' threat to Rome;

when he hears Jesus say "All who are on the side of truth listen to my voice", he realises that the word "King" can mean very different things, and that Jesus is not dangerous to an empire that works by military power. I always imagine him fingering his baton of military office as he asks, "What is truth?"

What Is Truth?

Because of his awareness of his divine life, his incomparable closeness to his Father, and his complete obedience to the divine plan for the world. Jesus knows that *he himself is the truth*. He is the truth about Caiaphas and Peter and Judas and Pontius Pilate and the good thief and the bad thief and the soldier who will bang in the nails. It isn't something he has to fight about, or in which he feels threatened. So when he is asked what sort of king he is, he replies: *I am king of the truth*. Now, most people have a well-established fear of the truth, because it will make crooks of most of us. We know that our lives are partly counterfeit, that we just get by with the help of our friends and the good luck and friendly dark that keeps our faults hidden in the background. Jesus, by contrast, has no fear of the truth at all; he would have to be afraid of himself to fear it. His only desire is that the whole truth should be known and acknowledged by all; then there would be perfect concord on earth, and between earth and heaven; all would be at peace with themselves and with the future; integrity would come home in every single life. How could that prospect hold fear for him? It dishonours us, if it holds fear for us.

Belonging To The Kingdom

When we pray *thy Kingdom come* we are praying for the truth to be led to victory, and we know we must live this prayer out if we are to be sincere. The longing for secrecy, for isolation, for self-absorption can no longer govern us. When I look at the Church assembled for worship, I want to see this openness and frank honesty expressed in real terms. I don't want to see people shrinking into corners, avoiding each other's glance, hiding behind pillars and shutting their eyes. We must be sharers, good friends, concerned for each other, ready to see and be seen, ready to belong. We must be seen as a people that delights in the truth; and that means delighting in each other. *Fr Philip*