

Last week we saw how Jesus could not get away from the vast crowds who wanted him to teach them.

In the story Jesus teaches them for some time; and at the end they find themselves hungry and far from home, out in the wilderness with no easy way to solve the physical problems of staying alive.

So Jesus now takes a radical step, and feeds the people with bread. It's radical, because it's one thing to teach people: that can be thought of as a spiritual matter. When bread comes into the situation we're into *politics*. Crossing that boundary starts to light up the radar of the authorities. The Chinese Government doesn't persecute Catholicism for spiritual reasons. It persecutes it because of politics, as the behaviour of Pope John Paul II towards the Polish Government was directly related to the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of Soviet Communism. Jesus' gift of bread will bring life to them; but it will eventually bring death to him.

The people who are fed know that he has crossed this boundary, and their response is immediate: *they decide to make him king*; and that is preceded by another, sinister phrase : they will *take him by force* and make him king.

*The taking of Jesus by force* will happen: but it will be the beginning of his death. And by very deep paradox, our evangelist will show how his death is mysteriously bound up with his kingship: Pilate will be told "he makes himself Christ - a king!" the chief priests assume that will seal his fate. But Pilate explores his mind far enough to know that the kingship of Christ is "not of this world" - that is, *not of the Roman world* - and is reasonably sure that Jesus poses no threat to Roman rule in Palestine. The great exchange between them is this: Jesus says "I came into the world to bear witness to the truth: and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice." Pilate grimaces, and says: "*Truth? What is truth?*" The only truth he cares about is military truth, like the two legions drafted into Jerusalem and kept off the streets during Passover, in case of national rebellion.

The irony is that, unknown to Pontius Pilate, truth *is* the final arbiter of power. Jesus bears witness to the truth of God, and there is no power that can outbid that. Because he is the Son of God, Jesus is also bearing witness to the truth of himself; that is why he is so peaceful before the might of the Roman Prefect who has *power to release him, and power to crucify him*. One day the truth of God will once more reign over the creation, and to that judgment Jesus bears witness.

The centrality of the giving of bread is something we have never forgotten. Because on the night before he died, Jesus took bread, and giving thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying *Take this all of you, and eat it: this is my body given up for you. Do this in memory of me*. So this giving of bread is the sign of his presence through all the ages, whether the power of God is acknowledged or not, until he comes in glory and dethrones all other powers.