

Homily for the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

November 24-25, 2018

Readings: Daniel 7:13-14; Revelations 1:5-8; John 18: 33B-37

Preacher: Sr. Joan Sobala

Worldwide and in our country as well, authoritarian leadership continues to grow stronger. The reverse of such leadership that dominates, oppresses, and encourages similar patterns in other people is what Jesus offers in today's Gospel. Jesus stands face to face with Pilate, the symbol of Roman power in their world. There is a deep divide between Jesus and Pilate, even as each takes the measure of the other. What Pilate doesn't realize it that Jesus has come as a humble leader in a fundamentally new way to serve people and raise them up from evil and destruction. These are not Pilate's goals, nor Rome's goals or style.

Jesus embodies the humble servant in Isaiah, who is marked by justice, peace and love. The Jesus who stands before Pilate is the same Jesus who only a few hours earlier had taken off his outer garment and clothed only in his inner garment, washed the feet of his disciples. There's a mystical way of describing Jesus' inner garment. It is, as Ronald Rolheiser writes, his "knowledge that he has come from God, was going back to God and therefore all things were possible for him, including washing the feet of someone whom he already knew would betray him." By washing the feet of his disciples, who would not do this for each other, Jesus had reached across a divide. That's always what Jesus did.

Now, standing before Pilate, knowing he was of God, Jesus did not argue or attempt to explain himself to Pilate. He did not crumble, nor did he back down. With his inner peace, Jesus reached across the divide. It is Pilate who refused to budge.

There are important lessons here as we face the authoritarian structures of our times. Wearing the inner garment of our baptism, which made us one with Christ, we face the powers that deny God and the common good—powers that destroy

life. The divides we have with our fellow citizens of church and society can prevent us from speaking to one another in a way that seeks truth and respects the other. All too often, we are selective in our conversations, sometimes because we do not know what words to use, sometimes because fear holds us back, sometimes it's because of our perceptions.

Perceptions stand between people, races and nations. The "Other" is perceived as hateful, desirous of taking from us what we believe is ours. Truth-seeking means the undoing of perceptions. It means that each of us belongs to the truth, has a piece of the truth and is destined to share that truth with others.

"What is truth?" the humble One asks. Pilate has no answer. Do we?

At this moment, as elsewhere in the Gospel, Jesus was eloquent and clear about the fact that he is who he is. He would not accept the images and aspirations others placed on him. He claimed his identity and said no to the forms of power that the world values. He was totally devoted to the reign of God breaking into human life.

We too need to be committed to the truth of who we are and who we are becoming. If we do this as individuals then we need to do it as a community. Naysayers point at our Church, noting the Church's considerable failures. But we are more than our failures, and if we are faithful and true to our Christ, then we are committed to the truth of who God is.

Jesus, Our Brother and Lord shows us who God is. Our dangers as believers are subtle and many. For one thing, we unthinkingly confine God—restrict God's presence and action in our world (as if we could!) But God is free and welcoming, beyond our tabernacles and churches. God embraces those who lack the embrace of other human beings: prisoners, refugees, asylum seekers, thieves, murderers. The list is endless.

Yes, for Christ the King, who rejects no one, God is free and welcoming. God is everywhere people live, grow, suffer, contribute to life, and die. Love is the proper name of our relationship with this God who embraces us faulty human beings so ardently. And here's the incredible thing: God loves us before we even know it.

That's the truth.