

Sermons at Saint Paul's

A Wellspring of spiritual; nourishment; A river of service in Jesus' Name

Christ The King
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There has been a lot of terror within the past several days that make you wonder what in God's name is happening in the world. Not that the violence we hear about is new, rather it is so close and it is so in your face, that they, in some way, make us look helpless. One problem is the lack of a broad strategic benefit other than scaring people into fearful living. The tactics the terrorists use is no different from those that the Roman soldiers of the first century used in instilling and perpetuating fear among people.

But there was one person who was too meek, too humble and too weak to withstand their brutality but yet the weapons of war, which often was the mouthpiece of the state, could not subdue nor break him. They could kill him, and in fact they did, but they could not silence the voice which his life echoed. There was something unique about the life of Jesus Christ, that even his detractors, could at least acknowledge in private.

And as he himself indicated to Pilate, he did not command an army, because if he did, they would have been fighting on his behalf, but because he did not, he is alone by himself. What Jesus meant to tell Pilate was, the kind of kingdom he sought and seeks to build is one that does not have an army, possess any weapons of war nor is it violent. The kingdom does not seek to subdue others through violence but it is one that goes against the grain, one that turns the weapons of war into ploughshares, it is a kingdom that uses the instruments of war to uplift the human spirit. It is a kingdom that turns the human life upside down-offering hope to the hopeless, healing to the sick, and release to the prisoner and sight to the blind.

That is why Jesus can use his life and ministry of healing and restoration as a testimony against his accusers-for his kingdom is one that thrives on the hope of human possibilities, of what can be. It is a kingdom that turns the world inside out, bringing out the best that resides within each one of us. The point is, Jesus' accusers were not necessarily bad people, they were folks who were incredibly passionate about their faith, and they like the terrorists of our time and some, have found within the holy scriptures of the Bible and Koran, not the kind of liberation which empowers us to find peace within these texts, but a desire for a kind of truth that only generates conflict because this kind of truth superimposes itself on others and claims the conviction of being absolute. But where and how can we find that truth? And that is the question Pilate asked Jesus, "What is truth?", What is it? Pilate asked.

From time immemorial, humans have engaged each other in the search of that which is true. Although different communities assumed their version of truth to be the absolute, none seemed satisfactory or fulfilling. And so Pilate's question not only captures the historical dilemma of the human struggle with what truth is, but it also expresses our own despair of what truth is. For we also are engaged in the business of asking the same question-what is truth? The problem, however, is that because some of us believe we have the answer, not only do we seek to make this determination for others, but we seek to impose our versions of it on them.

The reality is, we are not free if we cannot tolerate the way of life of other people. We are in some sort of bondage if we refer to our truth, especially as regards religion, as the ultimate truth-for religion may offer deep emotions and passion but it should not claim to have truth, what it should claim is a way of life. And during his trial before Pilate, Jesus testified that for those who accept the truth, it is a way of life.

John in his gospel makes us aware that the truth which Jesus spoke about was not a doctrine, but a reality which was himself-when he stated that "I am the truth." This is a direct shift for those of us for whom statements or actions are either true or false, for now we experience truth not as an ideology but as a reality which does not deceive if we accept it and live with it.

In Christ therefore, that which is true, that which is genuine-that which is God Himself is present as an undistorted unadulterated reality. And at his trial before Pilate, he bore witness to the truth that he was not the truth because his teachings were true, but his teachings are true because they express the truth which is Himself, the teachings embody an incarnational truth which is himself, because he expresses God as a way of life.

The Jewish authorities found in Jesus the kind of authenticity which they themselves lacked. They knew he was more than his words, and he was more than any word said about it. And it is precisely because of this idea that they could not stand him, and so handed him over to Pilate with a charge of blasphemy. The overall benefit of their actions; the bizarre charges and the proceedings led these Jewish authorities to deny God's kingship over them and to embrace the rule of Rome.

The Jewish leadership got the desired results: the crucifixion of Jesus. But paradoxically, it is in his crucifixion that Jesus' kingship becomes more visible and apparent-for that is when Pilate actually hangs an inscription-King of the Jews over the crucified Jesus. Jesus was accorded the very title for which he was killed.

See, the strength of a religion lies in its ability to renounce power, that is why it makes sense for Jesus to claim that his kingdom is not of this world, because his kingdom is not about power. This world is accustomed to power, we love power for the sake of its ability to control others. But Jesus separates the kingdom of this world from his kingdom, for his kingdom is made manifest in the vision that John portrays to us in Revelation, it is not of war, or violence, nor is it about the domination of the other. It is as Daniel reveals, a kingdom, where all nations and peoples and languages will participate because they are welcome. It is one where Jesus offers an alternative to the precarious nature of a world lost in its pursuit of a truth it already possesses.

Today we will welcome Maurin into the household of God through the sacrament of baptism. We are not baptizing her into an ideology, but into a truth which is a way of life. Like all baptized, she has to reach the truth by doing it; by making Jesus' being her own being, and the being of the world, by participating in Jesus. The truth which liberates all people is the truth in which we all can participate; because it is a part of us, and we a part of it-the truth abides in us because we abide in it.

True discipleship is when we are able to participate in the life of the truth, which is always a way of life.

Jesus had no empire, nor an army, he simply offered a different example of how to believe, think and live. His was a peaceable kingdom where the truth which liberates is the power of love, for God is love. I encourage you therefore; to be strong, strong enough to distrust any claim for truth if you do not see that that truth is united in one with love. I encourage you to trust only the truth which has taken hold of you if love has taken hold of you, and if love has begun the process of setting you free from yourself so you and I and others can all participate in that peaceable kingdom. Amen.