

HOMILY 34th SUNDAY CHRIST THE UNIVERSAL KING 2021
WHAT IS TRUTH?

Jn 18.33-37 Dan 7.13-14 Apoc 1.5-8

Welcome to the end of the Church's Liturgical Year B, the 34th weekend of Ordinary Time, the Feast of Christ the King, promulgated in 1925 by Pope Pius XI, a reaction to nationalism and secularism, apart from the Popes being known as "*Prisoner of the Vatican*" for 60 years, from 1870 to 1929, with the Lateran Treaty resolving the issue, the old complexities of Church and State at the centre of it all. And the nightmare memories of World War I devastation were strong and enduring.

As we know, the title is not about might and power and wealth, but connected to Jesus' constant teaching of a Kingdom of God as one of love, peace and justice, which reminds us of our role in it all, as his disciples.

What is truth? is the fundamental question for today. The trouble with truth is that some wish to see it as what they want to believe, or, these days, what they have seen or heard on the internet or social media. Then we have the term *fake truth*, which has been twisted into questioning actual true facts, and countering them with what it suits you or me to think!! Quite delusional, really!

Conspiracy theories have always been around, but seem to have multiplied as time goes by. John F Kennedy's assassination 58 years ago this week, and the Apollo moon landings from 52 years ago still produce new theories, even now! Today, a simple example is the way in which anti-vaccination stories have got around, stirring up fears about the dangers, rather than pointing out the obvious benefits to oneself and to the broader community, particularly the most vulnerable in our society, the elderly and the health-compromised. The real truth is seen in the fact that a person is far less likely to become seriously ill, if vaccinated against COVID, than if not. It's far more dangerous to cross Lincoln Road out there, than it is to be vaccinated. What is more, the traffic lights are there to be used as an added precaution!

My sister Barbara is a rehabilitation doctor who has been treating post-COVID patients, and tells me the effects for some are long-lasting and debilitating. The figures show that a large majority of those in hospital, suffering from the disease, some in ICU, are the unvaccinated. (*Remember, it's still out there too, with 1166 more cases today and 5 more deaths!*).

For the fundamentalists who say *God will protect us*, I say yes, but only in the sense that we apply medical science and its benefits for treatment, using human ingenuity and skill. The wonder is that vaccines have been developed so quickly, and have enabled us finally to get back to some sort of normality because of the protection they provide for ourselves and for those with whom we come into contact.

I quote today's *Age*: "*The overwhelming scientific advice is that coronavirus vaccines in use in Australia are both safe and effective in controlling the spreads of COVID-19.*" So, well done and thanks, to all of you who have observed the common sense approach of being vaccinated. It's why we're here right now! It's all very well to wave protest banners saying: "*Jesus is the answer for the world today*" and *Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14.16)*), but we know that he expects us to take personal moral responsibility for our actions!!

And now, it's back to Pontius Pilate, who asks the fundamental question: "*What is truth?*"

One of my friends insists, gets far too much publicity or press, every time we say the Creed, Apostles or Nicene! Why does he have to be mentioned every time, when he is just a Roman agent or lackey, caught between the jealous and threatened Jewish leaders, and the Roman emperor Caesar, whom Jesus has already acknowledged as a legitimate ruler at the time, even though the Jewish people were subject to Rome, somewhat unjustly.

Certainly, we know that he speaks of a kingdom, but as related to this loving God, whom he reveals in the image of Father, and himself as one who proclaims the qualities of this kingdom in word and deed. In no way does Jesus ever threaten the secular authorities with violence or potential overthrow. He advocates just taxes being paid, and for religious observance to be respected as well.

It's as if Jesus, from the start, is keen to distinguish his role in not being a threat to the state, but more exercising his authentic authority in a spiritual and practical down to earth, role, wherever the people are, here and now, calling us to faith in a God of love, and to live lives consistent with that faith, and the Gospel he proclaims.

Brendan Byrne SJ puts it this way: ***“Truth in the sense of this (John’s) Gospel basically means the revelation of God, as Jesus reveals God to be, and the view of human life that flows from that vision.”***

We come to the end of Mark’s year, interspersed with readings from John’s Gospel, as we have today, as John is more expansive in reflecting the theological dimensions of Jesus’ teaching. In today’s encounter, the dramatic scene is presented with Pilate trying to ease his way out of a difficult spot. He seems to not really want to condemn Jesus, aware that he is innocent of any charge, as the good and just man unjustly brought before him for condemnation, just to appease those feeling jealous, threatened and hostile. Yet, ironically, to keep the peace with the religious leaders in the Sanhedrin, he feels compelled to comply with their wishes to eliminate the threat to their authority, and so, in the end, he does just pass the buck, and hands Jesus over to his awful fate, but that is not to be the end, as we well know!

Monarchy might be out of fashion, apart from QE II, at 95 and 68 years on the throne, and a few others, but we accept that real power is to be with the people, and that democracy is the preferable option for government, for the good of all, and for their voices to be heard. Yet, there is no ideal model.

Jesus does set us an ideal, however, in the way in which his kingdom is to inevitably evolve and grow, through our co-operation, in applying his principles outlined as to how we live as People of God or Church.

Bismarck might have once said, after the unification of Germany in 1871, ***“You cannot govern with the sermon”***, in regard to the Beatitudes, but they do set a high bar for how the Christian should live life, and the attitudes they espouse, reflecting the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus as Christ our King!

Salesian scripture scholar Frank Moloney’s concluding thought is apt here: ***“Jesus is our universal King because his self-gift, lifted up on the Cross, makes sense of the most universal human experience, love.”*** And so he draws us to himself in faith, as John’s Gospel emphasises. Salvador Dali’s depiction of the crucified Jesus (titled *“Christ of Saint John of the Cross”*) overlooking the world from above, also provides a graphic image, a reminder of who and what we celebrate on this day.

john hannon

21st November 2021

Reflection: “King?”

King is your word, not mine; friend I am, and not very choosy, pagans and prostitutes, publicans and sinners, grace is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine; a servant I am, no-one beneath me, feet washer and waiter, serving the least, love is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine, physician I am, all free of charge, touching the leper, expelling the demons, health is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine; a seer I am, seeing God’s Word, in mustard seed and yeast, wildflower and ravens, truth is my kingdom.

King is your word, not mine, tradesman I am, honing my craft, familiar with wood, hammer and nails, hope is my kingdom.

BD Prewer 2002

“The sermon has been criticized as setting too high a standard which remains unfulfillable, but, understood against its Jewish background, it becomes a possible but still high standard of moral wisdom about life.” (JBC)