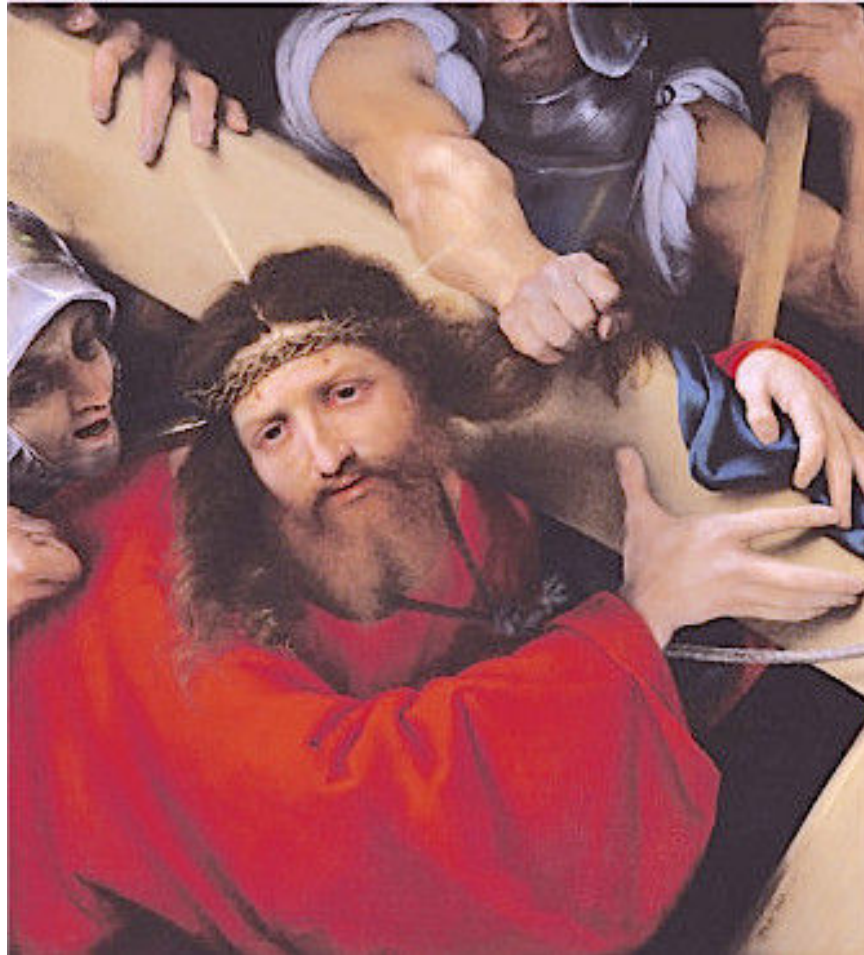


Holy Week Readings



So they took Jesus and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called, 'The Place of the Skull'.

(John 18 : 16 – 17)

GOOD FRIDAY (c)

GOOD FRIDAY

the passion of Jesus according to John ¹

introduction

Today we consider John's carefully written version of the passion and death of Jesus. John's account affirms the identity of Jesus. To those who are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, he says: "*I am he*", a formula frequently used by John and repeated several times in today's gospel. Pilate, somewhat indifferently, asks Jesus, "*Are you the king of the Jews?*" Jesus answers, "*My kingdom is not from this world.*" In other words, "*My kingdom is not like the one you know,*" (that is, like Caesar's whom Pilate represents). Yet it is a kingdom that impacts on the present. Pilate seems to have understood that, "*So you are a king?*" Jesus doesn't deny it: "*You say that I am a king.*" The kingdom Jesus represents isn't one of domination like Caesar's, but a kingdom of service.

first reading: Isaiah 52 : 13 – 15 ²

[the Suffering Servant]

See, my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.(13) Just as there were many who were astonished at him - so marred was his appearance, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of mortals (14) so he shall startle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him; for that which had not been told them they shall see, and that which they had not heard they shall contemplate. (15) Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?(53:1) For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. (2) He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account.(3) Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.(4) But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed.(5) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.(6) He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.(7) By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.(8) They made his grave with the wicked and

¹ Cover Image: Christ Carrying the Cross, Lorenzo Lotto, 1526.

² The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.(9) Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. (10) Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.(11) Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors. (12)

Isaiah affirms Israel's God's control over human history. The setting is the return of the Israelites from exile. The servant's joyful speech, reveals God's salvation at work among the suffering ones.³ Like Moses, *the Servant* suffered on behalf of the people. Isaiah's song begins by recalling Israel's suffering even as the glory of restoration becomes clear. *The servant* who returns, still bears the scars of suffering (v.14). *The servant* witnesses to the Lord's restoration of a sinful people. They have a new future. The Israelite return from exile reveals the divine action. The divine plan of restoration is full of memories of *one* who, "*was taken away by oppression and judgement.*" Israel never ceases to be *the Lord God's chosen servant* – even in exile. Nor had God abandoned the determination to "*bless all the nations through the blessing of the offspring of Abraham*".

Throughout Israel's times of suffering in exile, the Lord sustained this intention to save. Israel's role was exercised through humiliation. The prophet seeks to understand and declare the Lord's saving purpose, both in the agony of exile and in the surprise of restoration. Even in restoration times the past could not be discarded and the future still seems uncertain. Was the Lord to be trusted? The prophet reassures. The poetry affirms the Lord God's saving ways with failed and broken humanity. Neither Israel's experience of suffering nor their hopes for the future are diminished. Both experiences are within the Lord's purpose.

response: Psalm 31 : 1, 5, 11 – 12, 14 – 16, 24

[prayer and praise for deliverance from enemies]

*In You, O Lord, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in Your righteousness deliver me.(1) . . .
Into Your hand I commit my spirit;
You have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.(5) . . .
I am the scorn of all my adversaries,
a horror to my neighbours,
an object of dread to my acquaintances;*

3 *Is.52:13-53:12* – is the last of the four "*Servant of the Lord*" oracles. An extraordinary description of the sinless Servant, who by his voluntary suffering atones for the sins of his people, and saves them from just punishment at the hands of God. Only in Jesus Christ is the prophecy perfectly fulfilled.

*those who see me in the street flee from me.(11)
 I have passed out of mind like one who is dead;
 I have become like a broken vessel.(12) . . .
 But I trust in You, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."(14)
 My times are in Your hand; deliver me from the hand
 of my enemies and persecutors.(15)
 Let Your face shine upon Your servant;
 save me in Your steadfast love.(16) . . .
 Be strong, and let Your heart take courage,
 all you who wait for the Lord.(24)*

The speaker begins with a passionate address and an urgent petition (vv.1-2) to the Lord, who is, "*refuge; . . . rock, . . . fortress.*" Being vulnerable, exposed and defenceless, the speech mobilises Israel's language of deliverance by appealing to the Lord God. Israelites believed that lament addressed to the Lord makes for a different redistribution of power in the life of the petitioner and in the life of the community. The speaker addresses the covenant partner, the Lord, about the pain and the hurt of the loss, but doesn't dwell on the people's predicament. Instead, attention shifts to the fidelity of God. The petitioning one has no claims to make on God – except that of trust in God's character and intentions.

The language (v.5) anticipates the statement of Jesus from the cross.⁴ "*Into Your hands*", expresses faith in the utterly reliable power of God. The speaker entrusts his life to God at the very moment when life is in extreme jeopardy. No longer can the speaker sustain life; it is enough to entrust life to the Lord God. A sweeping act of trust, submissiveness and confidence (v.15a) recognises that people and communities face many different seasons and circumstances – good and bad. Every moment has its mixture of newness and risk. All these variations are entrusted to and willingly handed over to the Lord.

The speaker has no doubt that God presides over and brings good out of every circumstance of life. On the basis of this affirmation of trust in the Lord, the speaker, who is neither strong nor resourceful, asks God for deliverance from danger, blessings and salvation (vv.15b-16). The speaker takes the initiative with the Lord, developing the strength and identity necessary for responsible trusting faith. It is the belief that the Lord will re-focus all of life. That is, every time and circumstance will be re-ordered towards well-being of the petitioner/s. Confidence arises as a consequence of submissive trusting.

second reading: Hebrews 4 : 14 – 16 & 5 : 7 – 9

[Jesus the Great High Priest]

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession.(14) For

⁴ [v.5] *Into your hand I commit my spirit:* in Lk.23:46 Jesus breathes his last with this psalm verse. In *the Book of Acts*, Stephen alludes to these words as he is attacked by enemies (Ac.7:59). The verse is used as an antiphon in the Divine Office at Compline – the last prayer of the day.

we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin.(15) Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.(16) . . . In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.(5:7) Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered;(8) and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.(9)

The theme of the priesthood of Christ runs through *the letter to the Hebrews*.⁵ The author characterises Jesus' priesthood by: his sympathy for the weakness of humankind; the answering of his prayer for deliverance; and his learning obedience. The real sacrifice that *the Holy One* demands of humankind is the perfect offering of themselves in obedience. Because of sin, they are unable to offer this sacrifice. The priestly sacrifices of the old covenant also failed to take away sin. The author says that God's sending the Son has provided what humankind cannot do. Would-be disciples are caught up into Christ's self-sacrifice and enabled to offer themselves together with his sacrifice. There's a transformation of the inadequacy of our self-offering, by the adequacy, and then some, of Christ's sacrifice.

gospel reading: John 18 : 1 – 19 : 42

[the Passion of Jesus]

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered.(1) Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples.(2) So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.(3) Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?"(4) They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus replied, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them.(5) When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they stepped back and fell to the ground.(6) Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth."(7) Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go."(8) This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me."(9) Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it,

5 The author here alone calls Jesus a great high priest (*Hb.4:14*), a designation used by Philo for the Logos; perhaps he does so in order to emphasise Jesus' superiority over the Jewish high priest. He has been tested in every way, yet without sin (*Hb.4:15*); this indicates an acquaintance with the tradition of Jesus' temptations, not only at the beginning (*Mk.1:13*) but throughout his public life (cf *Lk.22:28*). Although the reign of the exalted Jesus is a theme that occurs elsewhere in Hebrews, and Jesus' throne is mentioned in *Hb.1:8*, the throne of grace (*Hb.4:16*) refers to the throne of God. The similarity of *Hb.4:16* to *Hb.10:19-22* indicates that the author is thinking of our confident access to God.

struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus.(10) Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"(11) So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. (12) First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.(13) Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.(14) Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, (15) but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.(16) The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."(17) Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.(18) Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.(19) Jesus answered, "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret.(20) Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said."(21) When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, "Is that how you answer the high priest?"(22) Jesus answered, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?"(23) Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest. (24) Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, "You are not also one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it and said, "I am not."(25) One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?"(26) Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.(17) Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover.(28) So Pilate went out to them and said, "What accusation do you bring against this man?"(29) They answered, "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you."(30) Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." The Jews replied, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death."(31) [This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.](32) Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?"(33) Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?"(34) Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?"(35) Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my

kingdom is not from here."(36) Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."(37) Pilate asked him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him.(38) But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"(39) They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.(40) Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. (19:1) And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe.(2) They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.(3) Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him."(4) So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!"(5) When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him."(6) The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God."(7) Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.(8) He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.(9) Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?"(10) Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."(11) From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor."(12) When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha.(13) Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"(14) They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor."(15) Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus;(16) and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. (17) There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.(18) Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."(19) Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.(20) Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'"(21) Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."(22) When the

soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.(23) So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, 'They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.'"(24) And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.(25) When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."(26) Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.(27) After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."(28) A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.(29) When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.(30) Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.(31) Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him.(32) But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.(33) Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.(34) [He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.](35) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken."(36) And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."(37) After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body.(38) Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds.(39) They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews.(40) Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid.(41) And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.(42)

When a Judas-led cohort of Roman soldiers and Jewish police came to the garden where Jesus was, they announced they were looking for Jesus the Nazarene. Jesus said, "*I am he*" (vv.3c – 4a). "*I am he*" is an ambiguous expression. It is a form of the divine name. The evangelist plays on this ambiguity.

The moment Jesus says, "*I am*," the arresting party step back and fall to the ground. In John's account there is no prayer in the garden; no scene where Jesus

falls to the ground and asks God, "*let this cup by-pass me.*" According to John, the soldiers of the greatest military power on earth and the temple police of the Jewish high-priest, are rendered utterly powerless when Jesus chooses to show his power. In Israel's tradition the revelation of the divine was made to Moses. The Lord God as, "*the ONE who IS,*" spoke to Moses. When Moses approached the Pharaoh about letting the people go – the Pharaoh wanted to know who this god of the Israelites was. Moses refused to tell and Pharaoh refused to let the people go unless he found out. Finally in exasperation Moses used the name of the Lord God – "*the ONE who IS*" – and Pharaoh fell to the ground. The tradition reveals the Israel's sense of the power of *the name of God*.⁶

Jesus insists to the Roman cohort and temple police that his disciples be free to go. Rather than being mistaken about his choice of disciples, John suggests that Jesus consented to their going to fulfill the saying that he does not lose anyone that the Father has given him (v.9). Jesus is in control. Not even failing disciples can cast shadows on his control. Jesus warns Peter not to use his sword to prevent him (Jesus) from "*drinking the cup the Father had given him.*" He is arrested, bound and first taken to be interrogated by the high priest (v.20). Jesus' answer is also partly the answer of the Christian community to defamation of Jesus in later Israelite religious tradition. Christians had to answer the charge of defamation, that Jesus was a corrupt magician who deceived people; that his disciples hid the fact that he had died by stealing his body etc. . . . Already in the gospel there's evidence of the beginnings of such answers. The idea that Jesus taught nothing in secret, maintains that he was not a deceptive figure. The Israelite tradition about Jesus, found in the Babylonian Talmud, is that he deserved to die because he duped Israel; that he was a sorcerer and a wicked person; and that he was a false prophet.

The high priest was within his rights, according to *Deuteronomy*, in the passage where Moses speaks about the future. Moses talks about a future prophet like himself who would re-teach Torah-keeping and straighten out anything that was not clear. But Moses also warns about false prophets who are to be put to death immediately to prevent them doing further damage to the community.⁷

Annas sent Jesus, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. Earlier in John's gospel,⁸ when Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, a session of the Sanhedrin was called immediately. Caiaphas came before the Sanhedrin and said if they let Jesus

6 Sometimes we miss many of the biblical expressions like, "*in His name*" because we simply read them as we would one of our own expressions that we come to in the name of Jesus – that isn't what the Scriptures mean when they record that, "*Peter healed 'in the name' of Jesus.*" It means Peter had the power of God's name because that is how the apostle healed - in the same sense the power of the name is involved here.

7 Cf *Dt.18:17-20*

8 *Jn. ch.11*

go on he will win over the whole people. He wanted Jesus put to death; *"Its better for one person to die than the whole people perish"*. He was afraid the Romans would come and destroy the temple in Jerusalem. John comments with sarcasm that Caiaphas didn't know he was uttering a prophecy,⁹ because Caiaphas meant to get rid of one person. But the phrase becomes a prophecy that through this one man's death, all the people will be saved.

They then led Jesus from the house of Caiaphas to Pilate the Roman governor. They bring a charge against Jesus that he was stirring up the people. Pilate asks Jesus, *"Are you the king of the Jews?"* (v.33). The religious authorities condemned Jesus for having declared himself *the Messiah*. Pilate didn't care about that. For Pilate considered such claims were purely a religious matter. So Jesus' accusers present Pilate with a charge that Jesus is guilty of a political crime, because he was coming to change the world.

In the Sanhedrin, which was a religious court, they had condemned him for a religious crime because he had declared himself, *"Son of God."* Before the civil court they accuse him of having proclaimed himself king. It is like saying he's coming to make a revolution. Jesus replied to Pilate's question: *"Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others said it to you about Me?"* (v.34). Jesus asks him this before answering. He wants to tell Pilate that the issue is about the understanding of *'king'*. Does he understand kingship in a Roman way, or as an Israelite understands it? He's not a king as the Romans understand *'king'*. He is a king as Israelites understand it. For them *the King* or *Messiah* comes to change the world. Jesus tells Pilate that that his kingdom is political, but has no army.

In John's gospel *'world'* means sin; the world of injustice, the established order that we now call, *'the system'*. A little earlier, at the Supper, Jesus has told his apostles that they are, *"in the world but are not of the world"* – which was like saying they were in the system but not part of it. The proof that his kingdom is not *'of this world'* is that his followers have not fought to keep him from becoming a prisoner. It is not a proof to show that his kingdom is not of this life, or that it's not political. His kingdom was political but of a different order of politics. It was not political in the sense of the politics of the time. If it had been, it would also have been a slave kingdom and the bringing into being of this kingdom would have been a false revolution. If Jesus had assured Pilate that his kingdom was not political, but *'spiritual'*, Pilate wouldn't have condemned him.

Pilate is not reassured (v.37a). Jesus answered, *"It is you who say that I am a king. I was born for this. I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth; and all who are on the side of truth listen to my voice"* (v.37).¹⁰ Jesus' position was

⁹ Jn.18:14

¹⁰ Jesus was coming to change the whole system; not just to shake off Roman domination. That wouldn't have been a true revolution. His doctrine was not only putting an end to the slavery, but ending the feudalism; capitalism and socialism, until he creates the perfect system for humanity – God's reigning.

not that of the Zealots – the guerrilla fighters of that time. They were accusing him before Pilate, of being a Zealot. Jesus preferred the confusion of that charge (and being condemned to death for it) to the confusion of considering his reigning merely spiritual, apolitical and non-revolutionary.

Truth is the law of love (v.38). Jesus brought that truth. It is the incarnation of the commandment of love. That's why he says to Pilate: "*I was born for this.*" At the Supper he said: "*I am the truth.*" He says all those who obey the truth listen to what he says. He himself is the commandment of love. He doesn't say that those who listen to him (the Christians) live in accordance with love. He says the opposite; that those who live in accordance with love are his followers. He tells Pilate that he's king and that he came to tell what the truth is.

It would seem there is nothing common between being king and telling what the truth is. But they'll have a lot in common – his reign and the truth – the organization of a just society. That's the truth of humanity that Christ came to tell; what the truth is; what justice is; and that justice will be God's reigning. Pilate, in asking what was truth, turned his back on truth because in facing the truth he would have had to resign his position. Instead he asked the crowd to choose between a bandit named Barabbas and Jesus. Luke adds that this Barabbas was in jail because of a rebellion. Barabbas was a guerrilla fighter. Pilate understands Jesus is the same kind of criminal. He proposes to exchange one subversive for another. At that time the government called guerrilla fighters '*bandits*', just like now! The word '*bandit*' applied to Jesus in this sense.

After Pilate had Jesus scourged, the soldiers mocked him by twisting thorns into a crown and dressing him in a purple robe and slapping him in the face saying, "*Hail, king of the Jews!*" (v.3). Jesus had come to be the '*king*' of the poor and humiliated of the Earth. When they put a rag on him his true role is manifested – as king of all the poor, the humiliated, the beaten, the tortured. He was a king but not like the kings the guards knew. That's why they thought their taunts were amusing but he was king of the people oppressed by the kings.

The religious leaders told Pilate they had a law that condemned to death people like Jesus for claiming to be, "*Son of God*" (v.7). At this, Pilate's fears about an uprising increased and he asked Jesus where he came from (v.9a). Galilee was a centre of rebellion and there was always armed struggle there. A few years before, during Jesus' childhood, a great rebellion in Galilee had been suppressed by the crucifixion of two thousand revolutionaries. Jesus came from Galilee but he would not answer Pilate's question (v.10). He comes to establish a just society that clearly did not then exist. Pilate by killing him would be much to blame – like anyone who orders the death of an innocent person when he had no authority to act. But for the others – those who knew the message of God's WORD – it was the Messiah they were rejecting.

It comes down to hatred of change. Reactionaries often refer to the phrase, *"all authority comes from God."* This is like saying that it comes from the people. All authority – maybe – but not abuse of authority. The subversion of the status quo, when it happens also has authority. It's the authentic authority of the people as opposed to the false authority of those who abuse power. Authority for the revolution comes from God and this is clarified in the next incident when Pilate presents Jesus to the people as their king. The chief priests answered, *"We have no king except Caesar"* (v.15c). The upper class was also oppressed by Rome and they didn't really like Caesar, but they preferred to accept foreign control as long as they could kill the liberation which Jesus embodies. They prefer foreign dictatorship to the Messianic kingdom. The Caesar was Tiberius, one of the cruelest emperors that Rome ever had.

Pilate handed Jesus over to be crucified (vv.16-19). Jesus' death is the way people opposed to the system die. Like many others he was accused of being a communist; an agitator; a dangerous person; a revolutionary leader who was stirring up the people. Crucifixion was the Roman punishment for political crimes. Jesus had repeatedly spoken of his death on the cross and what he was saying was, that he was going to be condemned by the Romans as a subversive. He knew it had to be that way.¹¹

prayer:¹²

*Holy and powerful God,
by the suffering and death of Your Son
You dissolved the legacy of darkness and death
that had fallen to the lot of every generation.
We were shaped in the likeness of Adam
and must bear the image of his earthly nature.
Reshape us in the likeness of Christ,
that we may bear the stamp of his heavenly glory
through the sanctifying power of Your grace.
We ask this through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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11 Christian proclamation of the cross begins with an understanding that even in Jesus' utter abandonment, God was still present. John's gospel account shows that presence through the sign that proclaims Jesus, *"King of the Jews,"* and through Jesus' own declaration that, *'all is fulfilled'*.

12 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.