

Christ the King – B

November 25, 2018

St. Patrick

It was the morning of the day when Jesus was tortured and crucified. He's on trial before Pilate. Jesus, however, doesn't come across as one terrified by the threats hanging over him. If we really listened closely to this Sunday's Gospel, it is Jesus who turns the tables on Pilate and grills *him*. You see, truth is on trial, and in the end Jesus is clear: **“My kingdom does not belong to this world...For this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”** His is a kingdom not fought with the old ways of warfare. Christ our King won't kill for the truth. He *does* die for the truth.

Pilate was caught off balance. Jesus' trial ends with Pilate asking, the question just left hanging there: **“What is truth?”**

St. Patrick's: Kings are out of place in our American culture. On this last Sunday of the Church's worship year, this feast *does* call us to profess our allegiance to Jesus, to offer him the homage which is his due...and most of all, to **“testify to the truth”**—by *our* daily choices and example.

“What is truth?” Pilate's question was just left hanging there. Friends: I want to snatch that question out of mid-air, and speak of a saint who **“testified to the truth”** and paid a heavy price for his conviction. His name is St. Thomas More. He was a married man with four children. He was a noted statesman in England in the early 1500s, appointed Chancellor by the king. And, he was put on trial for treason because he refused to sign a paper declaring that he thought the recent *remarriage* of King Henry VIII was valid. For fifteen months Thomas More was imprisoned in the Tower of London. In the squalor of prison life, Thomas More suffered from hunger, cold, and vermin. His wife and family tried to coax him to give into the king's demands (1). From prison he wrote a letter to his loyal daughter Meg, writing: “God's grace...has made me content to lose goods, land, and life as well, rather than swear against my conscience.” (2) In the end, he was beheaded for his refusal.

In the famous play *A Man for All Seasons*, there is a dramatic scene between Sir Thomas More and a colleague-friend, one of his prosecutors named Lord Norfolk. Part of the trial goes like this, and I quote:

Lord Norfolk: **“Thomas...frankly I don’t know whether the [King’s] marriage was lawful or not. But damn it, Thomas, look at those names...You know those men! Can’t you do what I did, and come with us for fellowship?”**

Thomas More: **“And when we stand before God, and you are sent to Paradise for doing according to your conscience, and I am damned for not doing according to mine, will you come with me, for fellowship?”**

Then, Thomas Cranmer, prosecutor on behalf of the King, said: **“So those of us whose names are there are damned, Sir Thomas?”**

Thomas More: **“I don’t know, Your Grace. I have no window to look into another man’s conscience. I condemn no one....What matters to me is not whether it’s true or not but that I believe it to be true, or rather, not that I believe it, but that I believe it...”**

Truth is on trial, as we, daily, **“testify to the truth.”** We heard it this Sunday in the exchange between Pilate and Jesus. Truth is on trial...each day. And, St. Thomas More knew that the kingship of Christ cuts across politics, business, family, and lastly, the heart. He *knew* the truth of his conscience, and he couldn’t betray it.

Each day, St. Patrick’s, *we* are called to make our stance of allegiance to his kingship, in every dimension of our daily lives. As Jesus, our King, teaches us, **“Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.”** Listening deeply to his voice, we’re called to be true to our conscience, that deepest part of us, and—truly—to *live* our allegiance to Jesus in every regard. Yes, we’re called **“to testify to the truth.”**

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- (1) See Robert Ellsberg, on “St. Thomas More,” in All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time (New York: A Crossroad Book, 2001), pp. 269-70.
 - (2) Saint Thomas More, A Letter to his daughter, Margaret, in The English Works of Sir Thomas More, London, 1557, p.1454; printed in The Liturgy of Hours, III (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Co., 1975, pg. 1480.

General Intercessions

November 25, 2018

Christ the King

You, O Christ, are our Truth: open our hearts to hear your voice and live by your truth; we pray to you, O Lord—

You are our King: direct world leaders—and us as citizens—to make wise judgments in the midst of the global refugee crisis and our environmental crisis; we pray to you, O Lord—

You are our one High Priest: bring about a wise choice of the new Bishop of Memphis, and give healing within our diocese; we pray to you, O Lord—

You are mercy and justice: make us responsive to the most vulnerable in our midst—especially the homeless, those who face discrimination, and the sick; we pray to you, O Lord—

You are the firstborn of the dead: raise up in the resurrection all who have died with hope, especially all those named in the Book of Remembrance during this month of November; we pray to you, O Lord—

(for the 11:00 a.m. Mass only, add the following, at the end--)

...and also Cesar Augusto Perez, on the 22nd anniversary of his death; we pray to you, O Lord—