

SPIRITUALITY

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Mark 11:9, 10

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!

Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is to come!

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 18:33b-37; L161B

Pilate said to Jesus,

“Are you the King of the Jews?”

Jesus answered, “Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?”

Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I?

Your own nation and the chief priests handed you over to me. What have you done?”

Jesus answered, “My kingdom does not belong to this world.

If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews.

But as it is, my kingdom is not here.”

So Pilate said to him, “Then you are a king?”

Jesus answered, “You say 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.”

Reflecting on the Gospel

Stories of kings and queens are often relegated to fairy tales or medieval gallantry. Sometimes, of course, we see modern royalty in the media, and many might remember the wedding of Prince Charles and Princess Diana decades ago, and more recently their son Prince William’s wedding to Kate Middleton. But modern royals tend to be figureheads rather than political heads of state. So it can seem a bit odd to celebrate Christ as King. He is certainly more than a figurehead.



Of course, the image of king is deeply rooted in the ancient world, and not limited to biblical texts. Oftentimes in antiquity the king, or supreme ruler, approached the status of the divine. For example, Julius Caesar’s clan was named for Julius, the son of Aeneas (the prince of Troy), who was said to be the son of the goddess Venus. Julius Caesar received honors of divinity in his lifetime, and after he was assassinated the Roman Senate officially declared him divine. Centuries before, the kings of Judah and Israel were sometimes called divine, or sons of God.

The biblical authors also applied the title of King to God, as Yahweh was “the great God, / the great king over all gods” (Ps 95:3, NABRE). By

the time Jesus was on the scene, the Roman occupation of Judea led the people to long for their own king, to establish the kingdom as independent once again. It’s no surprise that the Romans, always on the lookout for those who might attempt insurrection, crucified Jesus as “King of the Jews.” The mocking, derisive sign became something the early Christians did not shy away from, but proclaimed. In essence, the early Christians said, Jesus was in fact king, but he was king in a way unforeseen.

The gospel reading for today brings us into the scene between Jesus and Pilate. Of course, we know how it will end, ultimately with the crucifixion and the antagonizing sign proclaiming Jesus, “King.” But here in the midst of the conversation we hear eternal questions that cause us to consider, “What is truth?” Jesus makes a straightforward claim, that he is a king, and he has been sent to testify to the truth. Pilate, vested with political authority, including the power to inflict capital punishment, is wrapped up in a semantic argument about the nature of truth. He doesn’t see the incarnation of truth, the King of Kings, standing before his very eyes. And in Pilate’s blindness, he will put to death Jesus as King of the Jews.

So the early Christians, and even us today, continue to proclaim Jesus as King. He is no mere figurehead. Instead, he shares the title with Yahweh, “great king over the gods.” What Pilate said in mockery was utterly true. Jesus Christ is King.

Living the Paschal Mystery

The mocking tone of the political authority in calling Jesus “King” seemed to squelch this minor upstart who might have led an insurrection. But Jesus’ followers began to proudly proclaim that mocking title. Jesus was King. But his kingship was of an entirely different kind than that expected by the people. Rather than a military conquest of an occupying force that restored the inde-

pendence of the Jewish people, Jesus' kingship involved suffering and death, which then led to resurrection and exaltation. The kingship of Jesus is not one of splendid pageantry. It is not even the sort of medieval gallantry. Instead, he is enthroned in heaven, with our great God who is king over all gods. As Jesus underwent death before his exaltation, so must we. Our own path to glory, exaltation, and ultimate resurrection comes through a dying to self.

Focusing the Gospel

John 18:33b-37

We celebrate the kingship of Jesus with John's gospel account of what is perhaps Jesus' most humiliating moment: his appearance before Pilate. It is a strange exchange: Pilate, a government functionary with power to inflict punishment, is being encouraged ("you are not a Friend of Caesar" [John 19:12, NABRE]) by the religious authorities into executing Jesus—but it is the accused who dominates the meeting and takes on the role of inquisitor. In their exchange, Jesus refuses to accept Pilate's narrow understanding of power and truth, explaining to the procurator (to no avail) that Jesus "rules" a kingdom not of this world—power that Pilate does not comprehend.

Focusing the First Reading

Dan 7:13-14

The prophet Daniel has a vision of the heavenly court in which "one . . . coming, / on the clouds" (that is, from God) unites all nations and peoples of the earth into an eternal dominion of peace. The "Son of man" (a title Jesus will use to describe himself) that Daniel envisions is the perfect mediator between God and his people to inaugurate God's reign on earth.

Focusing the Responsorial Psalm

Ps 93:1, 1-2, 5 (1a)

These verses for Psalm 93 (one of the Psalter's "enthronement" psalms) celebrate the universal kingship of God, a reign that transcends all times and places.

Focusing the Second Reading

Rev 1:5-8

The visionary John, in the opening to the book of Revelation, has a vision similar to Daniel's in the first reading, but identifies the one "coming amid the clouds" as Jesus, "the firstborn of the dead"—the first to experience the resurrection. Christ's sovereignty is centered in his love for us, his freeing us from sin, and his making us into a kingdom and priests of God.

PROMPTS FOR HOMILISTS, CATECHISTS, AND RCIA TEAMS

What is the essential "truth" revealed by Jesus in the gospels?

What are the characteristics and the values of the kingdom of God?

What does the title of "King" help us to understand about Jesus?