

The Feast of Christ the King B, November 24, 2024
"Truth... what is that?"

When I began to think about this feast that we celebrate today, my mind immediately jumped to the Gospel of St. Matthew, to the famous twenty-fifth chapter, where we find Our Lord separating the sheep from the goats. In this passage, we find the goats on the left, asking Our Lord the same question that the sheep ask: "Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or away from home or naked or ill or in prison and not attend Thee in Thy needs?" And Jesus tells them: "I assure you, as often as you neglected to do it to one of these least ones, you neglected to do it unto Me." (St. Matthew 25. 44-45) What is so interesting about this whole scenario is that *both* the sheep and the goats, both the righteous and the unrighteous, ask Jesus the *same question*: "When did we see Thee hungry...?" The problem is that one group, the good sheep or the righteous, though seemingly blind on one level - they don't seem to see Jesus - yet, they *do* see Him in the poor, the naked the down-trodden; that is to say, they *see* Jesus with the eyes of the heart; they *hear* Him in the cries of the poor. The other group, i.e., the goats or the unrighteous, are blind and deaf altogether. They do not see or hear. They seem to be oblivious to anyone but themselves. They have become blind and deaf. What has happened? A better understanding of our Gospel today can help us.

In this Gospel of St. John, we need to remember, first off, that the Passion Narrative begins with the heartbreaking sentence: "Before the Feast of Passover, Jesus realized that the hour had come for Him to pass from this world to the Father. Having loved His own in the world, He would show His love for them to the end." (St. John 13. 1) And we must understand that Jesus' 'showing of His love to the end' is really a stand, once and for all, for Divine Truth. Why do I say that? Well, if you look at this passage which we proclaim in the Holy Mass today, you might notice that we end on a triumphant note (no doubt because we are celebrating a Feast); we end with verse thirty-seven of the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel of St. John. But, what is the very next verse? Immediately after Our Divine Lord says to Pilate: "Everyone who belongs to the Truth listens to My voice," Pilate responds with a question which will ring, hauntingly, down through the ages of man: "Truth – what is that?" (18. 38)

Those four words: "Truth – what is that?" are the words of a man who is beaten. Those four words are the words of a man who once knew better; who once wanted something far greater, far better, far nobler. Those four words are words that come from a man who has simply, (to borrow a phrase from a very great playwright) "given out, given up, given in." Jesus stands for the Truth.

Jesus is going to die for the Truth. Because, as He tells us in His own words: "I AM the way, the Truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me." (St. John 14. 6) The words of the great medieval mystic, Thomas à Kempis, are apropos at this point: "Follow Me: I AM the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Without the way, there is no going, without the truth there is no knowing, without the life, there is no living. I AM the way thou must follow, the truth thou must believe, the life for which thou must hope." (1)

But, what do these beautiful words this mean in the concrete existence of our daily lives? Very simply, if we do not learn to know Christ – *as the Truth* – we become blind, not only to Him, but to those around us. That is why, for instance, we are living in a society that has an abundance of technological wonders and advances that really should be making our lives much simpler, much more advanced, and, yet, we find that the world in which we live, strangely enough, seems to be *regressing* instead of *progressing*. Mankind, for all its technological prowess, because it will not accept the sweet yoke of Christ and His Church, is becoming more and more barbaric. Tragically, I wrote most of these words many years ago. Who could have foreseen the devastation in the last years in regards to militant Islamic extremism... who would have suspected the looming tragedy that has struck Paris, and threatens our own country, and even strikes at Rome? And what about the so-called pandemic with the Covid virus? There should be no question now about the need for the world to recognise its King.

There are two wonderful psalms that have always touched me deeply, expressing as they do the connection between our bodily sight and our spiritual insight. Those psalms are Psalm 115, vs. 1-8 and its counterpart Ps 135, vs. 15-18. Let the Word of God open the eyes of your soul:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy Name give glory because of Thy kindness, because of Thy Truth. Why should the nations say: 'Where is their God?' Our God is in Heaven! Whatever He wills, He does! Their idols are silver and gold – the work of human hands. They have mouths, but speak not; eyes that see not; they have ears that hear not; Noses which smell not. They have hands which feel not and feet which walk not. No sound utter forth from their throats. Their makers shall come to be like them, everyone who trust in them. (Ps. 115, 1-8)

Interestingly, another psalm, Psalm 135, has a section that is almost if not completely identical:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. They have mouths but speak not; eyes which see not;

they have ears that hear not; nor is there any breath in their mouths. Their makers shall come to be like them, and so everyone that trusts in them. (Ps. 135. 15-18)

An old saying runs: "You are what you eat." Perhaps even more to the point: "We become what we worship." Do I go too far? I think not. Listen to the words of the psalmist: "*I have said 'You are gods, and all of you Sons of the Most High, yet like men you shall die and fall like any prince.'*" (Ps. 82. 6-7) Indeed, the whole *raison d'être*, the whole meaning of the Eucharist is that we become the One Whom we receive! No?

If we examine the words of the psalms above, that is, Psalms 115 and 135, the striking thing that comes across to us is the reality that, when we give allegiance to a god, any god, true God or false god, ultimately we will end up by resembling the god we worship. And since every false god is ultimately not alive, but dead, the longer we worship that god, the more we shall become, little by little, piece by piece, dead to ourselves and to those around us. What may begin as a mere curiosity, that is to say, *let's see what this experience is like?!*, will little by little, kill off my humanity, piece by piece. And where there once stood an intellect that was keen to know Truth, and a will that was keen to love the Good, little by little I shall find that my intellect, my mind, is not so clear. And with my mind becoming cloudier, less lucid, I shall begin to choose things that I know, at least in the deepest part of my gut, are really *not good*.

Think for just a minute. A truly bad man does not become wicked in one bold stroke. Oh no. What happens is that he becomes confirmed in his wickedness over a period of time, by making bad choices, choices that become increasing evil. As he makes choices that are increasingly wicked, usually he makes compromises in his mind in order simply to live with himself. After a time, after a sufficient amount of evil has been done, after he has mired himself in ugliness and evil and meanness, the compromises aren't necessary because he's hardened himself to evil. He's learned to live with it. In other words, he's eaten enough evil that he has become evil. He wasn't always that way, because, as the Bible and our Church solemnly teach, man is originally innocent, and only wounded by original sin. Is there no hope for a man like this? Of course!

Our late Holy Father, Pope St. John Paul the Great, wrote in his little book *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, that when a man gets to a certain low point in his life, a point that is so awful, so rotten, often times a thought creeps into his mind. What thought? Simply that there must be something better for him than this! If that thought is allowed to germinate, as it were, then, my friends, there is hope! Many a man, many a

woman mired in the worst places of addiction to drink, to drugs and worse, have been captivated by this little trick of Truth from the Lord.

St. Augustine, the very foundation of the medieval Church, himself having been mired in sin for years, was captivated by this very thought. In his famous book, *The Confessions*, he writes, "Sero te amavi..."

Late have I loved you, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new, late have I loved You. You were within me, but I was outside, and it was there that I searched for You. In my unloveliness I plunged into the lovely things which You created. You were with me, but I was not with You. Created things kept me from You; yet if they had not been in You they would not have been at all. You called, You shouted, and You broke through my deafness. You flashed, You shone, and You dispelled my blindness. You breathed Your fragrance on me; I drew in breath and now I pant for You. I have tasted You, now I hunger and thirst for more. You touched me, and I burned for Your peace. (2)

There are ancient rumours about both Pilate and his wife, Claudia, and what became of them after the death and Resurrection of the Lord. If you remember, Pilate's wife warned him to have nothing to do with "*that holy man.*" As Claudia had told Pilate in a message: "*I had a dream about Him today which has greatly upset me.*" (St. Matthew 27. 19) The rumours, about which we cannot know until we reach Heaven, tell us that Pilate's life with Caesar, after the unexplained disappearance of the wretched Jewish carpenter, was not worth a fig. In some branches of the Eastern Catholic Church, both Pilate and Claudia are said to have converted to the Faith and have feast days attributed to them. A truly interesting fate for a man who once gave up on Truth Itself.

We can deny Truth. We can ignore Truth. But Truth, the Truth Which is Jesus Christ will not go away. Even when we crucify Him. And we shall know Him by His Beauty. That's the darned thing about it. Sin can masquerade in any number of costumes, but the one thing it cannot do is remain Beautiful, consistently and perfectly, always. There you have it. "*Truth, what is that?*" "*Lord... we have come to believe and we know that You are the Son of God!*" (St. John 6. 69)

1. Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book 3, Chapter 56
2. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*