

11. March 2025

## THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN “The true King”

Jn 18:25-40

*Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They said to him, “Are not you also one of his disciples?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” One of the servants of the high priest, a kinsman of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” Peter again denied it; and at once the cock crowed. Then they led Jesus from the house of Ca'iaphas to the praetorium. It was early. They themselves did not enter the praetorium, so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered him, “If this man were not an evildoer, we would not have handed him over.” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law.” The Jews said to him, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” This was to fulfil the word which Jesus had spoken to show by what death he was to die. Pilate entered the praetorium again and called Jesus, and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?” Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me; what have you done?”  
36 Jesus answered, “My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my kingship is not from the world.” Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice.” Pilate said to him, “What is truth?” After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them, “I find no crime in him. But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?” They cried out again, “Not this man, but Barab'bas!” Now Barab'bas was a robber.*

Peter cannot cope with the situation and denies Jesus again. The Gospel according to Luke relates that as soon as the cock crowed, Peter realised that he had denied his Lord and remembered His words: *‘Before the cock crows today, you will deny me three times.’* (Lk 22:61). No doubt it hurt him deeply that he himself, who had even assured Him: *“I will lay down my life for you”* (Jn 13:37), did not have the courage to bear witness to the Lord in the face of a concrete threat. We know that Jesus will forgive him and that, later on,

Peter really will give his life for Him. But at that time he did not yet have the necessary strength.

At His trial, Jesus is brought before Pilate. The high priest Caiaphas and the other enemies of Jesus wanted Him dead. Since their law did not allow them to kill, they turned to the Roman power in the person of Pilate to obtain a death sentence against Jesus.

Evidently Pilate was not comfortable with the role the Jews wanted to assign to Him. He found no fault in Jesus and wanted to leave the matter in the hands of those who had handed Him over to him. But Jesus enemies were determined to carry out their evil plans, and for that they needed Pilate. Pilate questioned Jesus and asked Him if He was the king of the Jews, according to the reason for the accusation. Jesus answered in the affirmative, but at the same time made it clear that His kingdom is not of this world and that He would not conquer it by force or defend Himself in this way. In this way Jesus made it clear that He posed no threat to Roman rule. But he added something beyond Pilate's comprehension: *“You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Every one who is of the truth hears my voice”*.

With these words, Jesus expresses what is decisive: His kingship surpasses everything, because it is the kingship of God, from which all authority derives. No one deserves the title of king more than the Son of God, in whose hands the Father has placed everything (Mt 11:27). Whoever is of the truth and listens to the voice of Jesus recognises this kingship of His. Thus the Lord's dominion over men becomes a reality and they live in the truth.

Pilate does not understand these words of Jesus and asks: *‘What is truth?’* We can see that the Roman procurator is looking for a way out of the situation, even though he cannot measure it correctly. In Matthew's Gospel it is specified that Pilate knew that the Jews had handed Jesus over out of envy (Mt 27:18) and that, moreover, his wife had warned him, *‘Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream’* (v. 19).

However, the Jews would not let him out of the trap they had set for him. Perhaps Pilate hoped that by offering them the custom of releasing a prisoner for the Passover, he could free Jesus. But the procurator was not aware of the wickedness of the Lord's enemies. They preferred to release Barabbas, a notorious prisoner (Mt 27:16), a thief (Jn 18:40) and a murderer (Mk 15:7), rather than let Jesus escape.