

12. March 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN “Pilate wants to free Jesus”

Jn 19:1-12

Then Pilate took Jesus and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head, and arrayed him in a purple robe; they came up to him, saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” and struck him with their hands. Pilate went out again, and said to them, “See, I am bringing him out to you, that you may know that I find no crime in him.” So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, “Behold the man!” When the chief priests and the officers saw him, they cried out, “Crucify him, crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no crime in him.” The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God.” When Pilate heard these words, he was the more afraid; he entered the praetorium again and said to Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.” Upon this Pilate sought to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar.”

Pilate, the Roman procurator, could not resist the pressure of the Jews and had Jesus scourged, even though he had found that He had committed no crime. Scourging was a cruel punishment that left the sufferer seriously wounded. Pilate commits a great injustice here and contradicts himself. If he found no guilt in Jesus, he could not simply inflict this cruel punishment on Him. In some expressions of Christian piety, the scourging of Jesus is associated with the sin of impurity, which offends God, strips human beings of their dignity and unleashes a chain of misfortune. Jesus suffers this punishment in atonement for the lust of mankind.

But as if that were not enough, the soldiers mocked Jesus and dishonoured Him. Unfortunately, this happens all too often. Victims are not only robbed of their rights,

they are also robbed of their honour, which is intended to destroy them on all levels. Behind such acts we can perceive the influence of the forces of evil, which incite men to commit such degrading cruelties, for the only limits their malice knows are those that God Himself sets for them.

Pilate declares that he finds no crime in Jesus. Evidently, he was impressed by Him and wanted to avoid the situation. However, the chief priests and the guards demanded His crucifixion. They showed no compassion and no sense. On Jesus fell all the hatred of the enemies of God: both the hatred of the demons, who were in the background, and the hatred of those who were influenced by them and gave in to their evil inclinations. All this our Lord had to endure.

Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus to death by crucifixion. In fact, he wanted to get rid of this situation that was beyond him as soon as possible, so he told the Jews to take Him themselves and crucify Him. However, the Jews were not allowed to do this, even though they had already passed a sentence of death on Him. The Roman procurator now heard from the Jews this sentence: *"We have a law, and by that law he ought to die, because he has made himself the Son of God."*

Then Pilate was even more terrified. What could be going on inside him? He could not understand all this, and now he had to face the accusation of the chief priests against Jesus, who claimed to be the Son of God. So he wanted to question Him, but the Lord did not answer him. Pilate, surprised by His silence, made it clear to him that he had the power to release Him and crucify Him. However, Jesus revealed the true reality from God's perspective: Pilate has no power of his own. It is God who holds all power in His hands, of which He makes the procurator a sharer by his position. As the Roman governor, he must exercise this power justly in this situation. In this, Pilate will fail. However, those who handed Jesus over to him are more to blame.

Once again, Pilate attempts to release Jesus. Had he done so, he would have acted justly and not abused the power entrusted to him. But the Jews set a trap for him from which he could not escape. They knew how to trap him and they tightened the noose more and more. They sensed where his weak point was and where he might be susceptible to corruption: *"If you release this man, you are not Caesar's friend; every one who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar."*

Though Pilate tried once more to release Jesus, he was already broken inside. The threat that by releasing Jesus he would oppose Caesar had taken effect and would serve to make Pilate eventually give in to Jesus' enemies.