

YOU SAY THAT I AM KING - Biblical Commentary Father Alberto Maggi OSM

John 18, 33b-37

So Pilate entered his headquarters 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 delivered you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.” Then Pilate said to him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.”

John’s gospel presents us with the first of Pilate’s interrogations of Jesus. Pilate already knew of Jesus, he had contributed to his arrest by sending his guards. Let’s read the gospel.

“So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Pilate’s question seems to express all his surprise because they had said that this Jesus is the long awaited Messiah, the king of the Jews; the one who by a revolt would have to throw out the whole system of power, he would have to throw out all the Romans. Evidently, the figure of Jesus does not give the idea of a militant revolutionary, so Pilate expresses his surprise.

Well Jesus does not reply. Jesus, the accused, asks a question of the judge that must judge him. Jesus asks : *“Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”*

Jesus does not give a reply but invites Pilate to think for himself. As he had already done with the guard that had slapped him - Jesus had said *“If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?”* (v. 23) - with this he hopes to convince Pilate to think for himself. But Jesus’ question causes a furious reaction in Pilate, who reacted by saying: *“Am I a Jew?”* Expressing all the contempt of the prosecutor towards the people that he was to govern.

And here is the complaint: *“Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me. What have you done?”* Everyone is against Jesus. John in his prologue had written, *“He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him”* (John1.11). But not only those that have the power. The high priests

can understand because Jesus' message takes away power and Jesus' God is not one of power, but love that is put to the service of humanity - but also the people because they are dominated and this dominance of the religious institutions gives them security.

Therefore, they are against Jesus. And here is the question: *"What have you done?"* Pilate already knows because the authority had said, *"If this man were not doing evil, we would not have delivered him over to you."* (v. 30) And here, finally, Jesus replies to the first question (*"Are you the King of the Jews?"*) *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world."* Jesus is not opposing the heavens to the earth, not two different worlds; he is saying that his kingdom is not of this world, meaning it is not like this world.

This does not mean that his kingdom will not be in this world; therefore, Jesus is not setting heaven against the earth. And he says it *"My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews"*.

Jesus does not have servants because he is the one that serves. His kingdom is that from which every form of power, dominance, violence and oppression are excluded. So Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, it is in this world, but it is an alternative society

Pilate, still even more bewildered, asks him; *"So you are a king?"* Well then, Jesus stops this argument of regality that does not interest him and replies: *"You say that I am a king."* meaning " This is your opinion" then Jesus stops because he is not interested to talk of regality, but replies to talk about what will be his mission.

"For this purpose, I was born and for this purpose, I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." When he spoke with Nicodemus Jesus had opposed the good with the bad. Therefore, to be in the truth, to do the truth, means to do well. If in one's own life, the good of humanity is not considered as an absolute value and one does not orientate one's own life to obtain the good of humanity, the Lord's voice cannot be understood. You can hear but not understand.

So Jesus does not say: "Who listens to my voice puts himself in the truth" but the contrary. To hear the voice of the Lord one must choose: orientating one's own life to the good of humanity. Naturally, all this is incomprehensible to Pilate because he represents power. Actually, Pilate, like Jesus is not interested in the question of regality, but that of the truth.

He said to him, *"What is truth?"* (v.38)