

**XXXIV ORDINARY TIME – 28th November 2018**

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

link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvTVqM7vZG8>

**John, 18,33-37**

*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.”*

Jesus’ trial according to John in his gospel chapter 18 is of a rather strange trial because there is a judge who is afraid of the accused and the defendant who asks questions to the judge. Why is this? While Jesus is bound he is fully free, Pilate, who is free, is in fact bound by the conditioning of his convenience and power. But let’s see what the evangelist writes in chapter 18, 33- 37.

*So Pilate entered his headquarters again and called Jesus and said to him, “Are you the King of the Jews?”* Pilate is surprised, Jesus came to him as a criminal, as a danger to the Romans, but he does not seem to see this in Jesus, he has nothing of the appearance of the dangerous revolutionary who would have driven out the Romans with force and violence. So he asks this question. Well Jesus, just as he did with the guard when he slapped him, Jesus who is the free man wants to free people, he wants them to reason with their own heads. *“Jesus answered,..”* And here he is questioning Pilate *“Do you say this of your own accord, or did others say it to you about me?”* So Jesus invites Pilate to reason with his own head, not with what has been said to him by the representatives of the religious institution that captured Jesus with lies.

Pilate reacts in an angry and furious manner, *“Am I a Jew?”* Expressing all the contempt he had for this region that he was called to govern. And here’s the dramatic accusation, *“Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered you over to me.”* The evangelist at the beginning of his gospel in the prologue verse 11 had written *“He came to his own things, and his own people did not receive him.”* Everyone had refused him, not only the powerful but also the high priests and the

people. And he asks *“What have you done?”* Because they told him that Jesus is a criminal. Well Jesus does not respond to this demand and he says that he and Pilate are on two completely different spheres. He says *“My kingdom is not of this world.”* The fact that it is not of this world does not mean it is not in this world. Jesus is not opposing this world and the afterlife, but two different worlds. The world of Pilate which is the world of power and domination, and that of Jesus which is that of love and service. *“If my kingdom were of this world, my servants..”* Jesus does not have servants because he has come to serve, Jesus makes a comparison, *“..would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world.”* therefore it is not of these. Hence the evangelist presents Jesus with two different worlds: that of love that produces life and that of power which produces death.

Then Pilate, even more surprised, asks *“So you are a king?”* But Jesus is not interested in this discourse of royalty and stops it here, *“Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king.”* Meaning it is his opinion, but Jesus is not interested in this, he wants to offer life also to Pilate, to free him. And he says *“For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth.”* What is the truth? The truth in John’s Gospel is not something that one possesses, but something that one is. Jesus said "I am the truth", he did not say I have the truth, we walk in the truth. In the meeting with Nicodemus, Jesus had opposed those who do the truth with those who do evil. So to do the truth means to do good, to do the truth means to be in harmony with God's plan of creation, which puts the good of man as the supreme value. This is the truth in John’s gospel.

And then Jesus gives this precious and valid indication for always, *“Everyone who is of the truth...”* **he does not say everyone has in the truth, because whoever has the truth on the basis of the truth that he believes to possess is considered entitled to judge and eventually to condemn those who do not think like him.** No, *“Everyone who is of the truth...”* so whoever has placed his life in harmony with this feeling of love that keeps the universe alive, the love of the creator for his creatures, *“.. listens to my voice.”* Jesus does not say, as would have been expected, "whoever hears my voice comes from the truth", no. To listen, that is to understand, the voice of Jesus, the message of Jesus it is necessary to make a previous choice, which one? That of putting the good of man as an absolute value for his own existence. Only those who do this understand the voice of Jesus.

The liturgical passage concludes with Pilate who says *“What is truth?”* The first time that the term truth appeared in John’s Gospel was in the prologue where Jesus presents himself full of grace and truth, the last time the term truth appears is here in this chapter, where Pilate appears, the one who is empty of truth.

