

## Solemnity of Our Lord Christ the King B II

Dan 7:13-14; Rev 1:5-8; Jn 18: 33-37

November 21, 2021

On this last Sunday of the Liturgical Year, we might think of judgment – the Last Judgment and our own individual judgment after death. Today's gospel probably comes as a surprise, because the one being judged is Jesus, the one we call our King.

Sometimes in a court case it can happen that it's not so much the accused who is on trial, but the judge. Indeed, sometimes it's the very concept of justice itself that is on trial.

You may remember the 1997 case of Louise Woodward, the 19-year-old English au pair whom a jury in Massachusetts convicted<sup>1</sup> of killing eight-month old Matthew Eappen, who died in her care. But many people who followed the trial were convinced that a miscarriage of justice had taken place. In view of conflicting medical evidence, it was hard to see how the jury could have found beyond a reasonable doubt, that she had killed the baby. Her defense team appealed the verdict.

At the start of the case, Louise was the one on trial. But now the focus shifted to the judge, Hiller Zobel, who was reviewing the verdict. As everyone waited for his ruling, questions were raised as to his character. It was said that he was a very independent –minded man, a man not swayed by popular opinion, or one who bowed to pressure. The verdict he reached would show if those claims were true. Now, it was Judge Zobel who was on trial.

After careful deliberation, Judge Zobel changed the jury's verdict of second-degree murder to involuntary manslaughter. A child was dead, and Louise bore some of the blame for his death, but she was not a murderer. And since she had already served seventeen months in prison, he set her free.

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<sup>1</sup> In 1988

In the eyes of most neutral observers, his verdict was a fair one. Judge Zobel emerged from the trial with an enhanced reputation. He was shown to be a man who was passionately concerned about justice.

Picture the scene in today's Gospel. Alone and unarmed, Jesus stands before Pilate on trial for his life. He has been accused by the Jewish leaders of stirring up trouble among the people, and of telling them that it was wrong to pay taxes to Caesar.

However, Pilate soon saw that Jesus was innocent of the charges. He even declared him innocent before the religious leaders. But the leaders began to exert political pressure on him. They threatened to report him to Rome for letting (allowing) someone they claimed was an enemy of Caesar go free.

Now the focus shifted from Jesus to Pilate. Pilate was now the one on trial. Would he see that justice was done? Jesus made it easy for Pilate by declaring that his kingdom was no threat to Caesar. Pilate struggled with the question, but then he began to compromise. He tried to appease Jesus' accusers – by having Jesus scourged, and then by releasing Barabbas. When this didn't satisfy them, he bowed to the pressure and handed Jesus over to them.

Pilate knew what he had done. He called for water and washed his hands in the hope of cleansing himself of the stain of innocent blood. In the end, Pilate is the one who stands condemned. With just the wave of his hand, he could have set Jesus free. Yet, out of fear for his own position, he allowed an innocent person to go to his death. His cowardice contrasts with the quiet courage of Jesus.

Today, political leaders are frequently subjected to similar pressures. Special interest groups apply pressure on them, threatening to put them out of office unless they get their way. At one time or another, all of us come under pressure. All of us find ourselves on trial.

By the way we live, especially by our attitude toward truth and justice, we declare whether we are on the side of Jesus and his kingdom, or whether like Pilate, we take the way of avoidance and cowardice. It is not possible to remain neutral.

Who judged Pilate? He judged himself. We, too, judge ourselves and we shouldn't wait for the Last Judgment. Judgment is happening now. It takes place every day, in little ways. Long before their death, people will already have judged themselves. In a thousand ways they will have already chosen for or against the truth. God's judgment will not accomplish something new. It will merely show what already is.

We shouldn't forget that the Father's love and mercy are at the heart of the Kingdom. Jesus didn't tell us to fear the last day, only to be ready for it.

What a joy it is to belong to Jesus the Christ and his kingdom and to let our lives be ruled by his spirit. In our own small way we must work for the spread of Jesus' kingdom; a kingdom of truth and life, holiness and grace, justice, love, and peace.