

THE LORD'S PASSION, 2026

Palm Sunday and Good Friday are the only times of the year when the rubrics for the Liturgy say that the Homily should be brief, and brief I will be.

It strikes me that in St. John's Gospel, sung on Good Friday, the Lord Jesus does not tell Pilate that He is not a King. He indicates, instead, that He is a quite different kind of King from what Pilate imagines. "You say I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the Truth. Everyone who belongs to the Truth listens to My voice." Jesus of Nazareth has no army. He doesn't even have a bodyguard. His small band of almost entirely unarmed followers could never have gone up against Herod Antipas in rural Galilee, let alone Pontius Pilate in Jerusalem. His Kingship was not about political power, but about Truth. I am careful NOT to say that Jesus' Kingship is not about power, because Truth has a power of its own.

That confused Pilate, and it still confuses people today. Can there be any power that is not political? I suppose that even the power of Truth is indirectly political, since Truth changes people, and if people change politics changes. I insist, however, that Truth is only indirectly political. It is little concerned with the mechanics of law, bureaucracy, elections, or armies. It is little concerned with who precisely manages law, bureaucracy, elections, or armies. It is concerned with what goes on in the hearts of those who staff and manage law, bureaucracy, elections, and armies.

Should politics be secular? What can we say but "yes" and "no"? Politics should be secular in the sense that religious Truth cannot tell Caesar exactly how to do his job. Politics should be religious in the sense that religious Truth can and should tell Caesar how to be a good man. Religious Truth can and should tell Caesar that there is a God, to whom Caesar will answer for how justly and charitably he does his job. Religious Truth can and should tell Caesar that there is One, Jesus Christ, Who can forgive his sins, heal his heart, ease his mind, save his soul, and ultimately raise up his body. Religious Truth will not give Caesar instructions about how to manage laws, bureaucracies, elections, or armies. Religious Truth will tell Caesar that if Jesus Christ is Lord and Master in his heart, Caesar will be a blessing to the world and not a curse.

Laws, bureaucracies, elections, and armies must exist. Since they must exist, they must be managed by somebody. When they are incompetently or wickedly managed, laws, bureaucracies, elections, and armies hurt people. When they are competently and virtuously managed, they produce good order, peace, and maybe even a certain amount of basic decency. They cannot produce Salvation.

What Jesus Christ died and rose to give us is Salvation. He died and rose to bring us that peace that surpasses all our understanding, that love that surpasses all expectation, and that life that surpasses time itself. Such ultimate peace, love, and life, we call the City of God. Laws, bureaucracies, elections, and armies cannot bring us there. Only the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ can bring us to the City of God. The King of the City of God calls us here and now to the saving Faith that shows to us the Way to that City, and to the righteous Works that let the light of that Heavenly City shine on this earthly one.