

**Last Pentecost, 2006, November 26
St. John's
Fr. Alan Sutherland**

25 weeks ago we celebrated the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Now we come to the end of the season of Pentecost and celebrate Christ the King. We look back over 25 weeks and remember how we have contemplated the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth as given to us in the gospel of St. Mark. We look back at what we have learned and what that has meant for us as disciples of Jesus.

Today is the end of year for us and next week begins our new liturgical year.

I think it is pretty normal that, at the end of something, the tendency is always to look back on what has happened. When you look back there is always a mixed sense of achievement and failure. When you look back you always ask yourself what could I have done differently that would have made an improvement.

To look back is to be a Monday morning quarterback and we all have that syndrome. But it really does not matter because none of us can go back and change what happened, we simply may have a different perspective.

I'm sure Jesus did not know what a Monday morning quarterback was but I am sure that as Jesus was standing before Pilate there was a

sense of looking back and wondering why he was there.

Jesus stood alone in the praetorium with Pilate. Pilate was not sure of the charge against Jesus, but he was sure that the nations' representatives had brought him there for nothing less than the death penalty.

They wanted the death penalty to be carried out that day because the next day would be a holiday and you certainly cannot kill people on a religious holiday.

The Jewish authorities had finally got Jesus exactly where they wanted him. Under arrest.

You see all through the ministry of Jesus there had not been much that had been honest in their dealings with Jesus. There had been little integrity. Little compassion. No openness.

What there had been was a conspiracy behind the back of Jesus. There was blindness to the goodness that Jesus had done. There was deliberate denial of his love. There was a repugnance to his message that ordinary people could get right with God. The authorities were threatened that Jesus assured ordinary people that they could enjoy a relationship with God who had heart of forgiveness, a soul of love, and a body of joy.

The authorities looked only for the bad in Jesus

and by looking so hard for the bad they failed to see the goodness and they wanted him dead.

But they could not do it.

Their law would not allow them put a man to death. So they brought him to Pilate to sentence him. And Jesus stood on the inside of the praetorium with Pilate, and they stood on the outside.

It is pretty ironic that the authorities stood on the outside thirsting for a man's life, willing him to be put to death, yet they could not go into the governor's house because it would make them ritually unclean. What did Jesus say about it is not what you do on the outside, it is what you are on the inside that really matters.

So Jesus stands alone. Pilate talks with him about Kingdoms and kingships. The charge Pilate pursues is that Jesus claimed to be king and Jesus asks who told him that.

Pilate says, "Look your own people have handed you over-what have you done?"

And Jesus says, "My kingship is not of this world."

The sovereignty I exercise has nothing to do with political struggles but with people's relationship with God.

The sovereignty I exercise is not one that gets its authority and power from its subjects and depends upon their loyalty to keep it.

My kingship gets its authority not from earthly subjects but from God.

The quality of an earthly kingdom depends upon the outward observance of laws. You can be a keeper of the laws but still think all kinds of other stuff. My kingdom is not concerned with outward observances, but with people's hearts and souls and minds.

My kingship is not of this world.

And here in the praetorium, in front of one of the most powerful men in the world, stands Jesus of Nazareth, who is about to be sentenced to death.

And he is talking of his kingship and his kingdom. And his crown awaits him.

Is he misguided? Maybe.

Is he tired of people's hardness of heart, their stubbornness, their unwillingness to listen, their selfishness, their judgment of others, their prejudices? Maybe.

Is he scared? Maybe.

Is he really a king and does he really have a

kingdom? No maybes but a definite yes.

In Jesus of Nazareth, under a crown of thorns, we see a King who has no place called a kingdom except in people's hearts. A king who has no country except in people's souls. A king who has no subjects except for those who choose him.

He has no law except for love.

No government except for love. No expectation except for love.

A king with a kingdom that is only visible when people love one another. For that kingdom we all are taught by Christ our King to pray; "Thy kingdom come."

Amen