

# Christ the King Sunday

## LIGHT, FOOD, AND HEALING

John 18:33-37

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## Analysis by Norb E. Kabelitz

Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" 34Jesus answered, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" 35Pilate replied, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" 36Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." 37Pilate asked him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that 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."

**Prologue:** "Long Live Christ the King!" The year was 1925 when a young Mexican priest shouted that cry as he was being executed for treason. The Mexican government at that time was hostile to the Church. The Church in Mexico was disenfranchised and its property seized and appropriated by the state. Seminaries were forced to operate underground. Priests were arrested for conducting services and for administering the sacraments. Everything had to be done under cover. Even on his way to make sick calls, Father Miguel Pro took precautions. If he felt he was being followed, the priest walked with a young lady to avoid suspicion. He was finally caught and sentenced to death. The charge against him was that he had been an accomplice in an

assassination attempt. They said he had been seen at a park within four miles of a bombing. He was led to execution in the police courtyard. With arms outstretched like a cross, he shouted this cry as the volley of bullets tore into his body: VIVA CHRISTO REY! Long live Christ the King!

That same year in 1925, Pius XI proclaimed the feast day of Christ the King as a witness against the destructive forces that forever seemed to rear their ugly heads in the story of nations. Many "Reformation" churches, including the Lutheran Church, adopted the proclamation and made it a rousing climax of a year of Sundays, the final "Lord's Day" to highlight the *"goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of civilizations, the joy of all human hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations . . .to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth"* (Eph. 1:10).

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## **DIAGNOSIS: The Reign (Kingdom) of Death**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *A World View of "Kingdom" Is Threatened*

Both Pilate as governor, representative of the empire, and the nation and chief priests are threatened by the claim that Jesus is Messiah-King," "Christened by God" (Luke 4:18). He preached a gospel of the kingdom of God. This "new order" was alien and subversive to the existing order of Temple and Priest. The nation and chief priests seek the death penalty for Jesus as a counterfeit Messiah, charging Jesus with illegally appropriating the title of King with supreme "civil and religious authority." The civil aspect of the claim would be their reason to bring Jesus to trial before the representative of the world empire, Pilate. They demand his execution. While Pilate seems to see in Jesus a delusional religious mystic who did good for the people,

he is pressured to have Jesus crucified as an enemy of Rome: "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). The shouts of the crowd, led by religious authorities, threaten the political stability of Pilate's administration. At the same time Temple authorities and priestly authorities are threatened by loss of power, authority, and religious influence if Jesus is allowed to continue his ministry. Both secular and religious authorities misinterpret and misrepresent Jesus out of fear and unbelief in the role of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Messianic Promise.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : Faithless Fear Seeks Legal Sanction**

While Jesus preaches a "Gospel" of the kingdom, secular and religious authorities preach a kingdom based on "Law." "We have a law" is said both by Rome and the Temple authorities. "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law" (John 18:31). But their charge, "guilty of blasphemy," is one Rome does not recognize as legitimate. While not having the authority to execute the death penalty by "religious laws" (John 19:31b), they now demand Jesus be judged as a subversive according to Caesar's law. Unbelief seeks justification from the law for fear that a "lawless" execution would indict them as lawless. Both Pilate and the Temple authorities now claim to be "justified" by the law. That is the reason for the charge over Jesus' head on the Cross: "King of the Jews." INRI. Subversive!

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Convicted by the Misuse of "Law"**

Messiah kings in Hebrew/Jewish "politics" were anointed to be kings with olive oil, an economic staple valued for its use for light, food, and healing. Therefore to be "anointed" (Christened) meant kings were to be that for the people: light, food, healing. Earthly kings (authorities) have used power for better or for worse. How they use it determines whether they

serve as tyrants or saviors. When unfaith steers kings and governments to use power “over” to control little people and keep them in their place—to use rather than to serve them, and instead serves up good news for the rich and powerful, to trust in human power, law, and military might—we have a recipe for the “reign of death.” Anyone who contradicts or protests this use becomes a subversive: “Let him be crucified!” When that judgment is rendered out of misuse of the law, whether by Church or State, we find ourselves convicted by the Divine Critic. Also, where we have not been “light, food, and healing” for the nations, our kings and empire deserve dis-enthronement, the fall of nations and death. (See 1 Samuel 8, the history of kings and their use and abuse of power.) Does that sound familiar in today’s politics of power “over” rather than empowering a system that brings people light, food, and healing? Both elected officials and those who elect them stand convicted and condemned where policies and law uphold the powerful and dismiss the good for the common people. Not even a fervent singing of “God Bless America” can save us.

## **PROGNOSIS: The Reign (Kingdom) of Life**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** : *The “Reign” of Truth Gives Life*

“I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Jesus recovers the way, truth, and life of the kingdom of God, “not like that of this world,” that is, by force of military might (v. 36) or even “law,” but by his Gospel ministry of light, food, healing. Why then did Jesus allow the legal system of unbelief to destroy him? Might it not be to highlight its failure? Might it be to “be sin for us that we might have his righteousness” (2 Cor. 5:21)? His kingdom is “not from this world” but that does not mean “other-worldly.” It means his kingdom is not grounded in the values and abusive power strategies of this world. In this text both civil and religious authorities are convicted as

decadent and divinely illegal, they misuse the “left hand of God” by condemning an innocent man to death. Isn’t that why Luther said, “by His innocent suffering and death”? The “truth” is this: The Son of God became the “Son of Man” to be the “Messiah-King” who carries out the divine economics and politics of salvation by being “light, food, and healing” for the nations.” For this I was born!” “Born to be King,” says Dorothy Sayers in her titled drama. While not recognized or believed, he allows his unjust conviction—death as a sinner, convicted by the “law”—both religious and civil in our text. He takes our sin and condemns it through the Cross. And, wonder to behold, he also becomes the witness who, by his resurrection, commutes our sentence! “You killed the Prince of Life!” But God raised Him! Without Jesus, there is no “God Bless” in life.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *The Reign of Faith Gives Life*

“Peace be with you.” These words of the Resurrection event suggest what Jimmy Hendrix, pop singer, said years ago: “When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then we may have a world of peace!” Sounds like a line from the Gospel to me! So who believes that? John says those who have faith believe it: “And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5:4-5)! Jesus was on trial for that acclamation. That acclamation is also the Truth that saves us.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) :** *Echoing the Word of Truth*

We have been sent by Jesus to be practitioners of the Truth. “Everyone who listens to my voice, belongs to the truth,” he says. By faith we echo Jesus’ truth. Jesus was “born” to be such a witness. We witness also: “And to all who received him, who believed in his name. He gave authority [exousia] to become

children of God, who were born ... of God" (John 1:12). Children of God exercise power and authority from Jesus to be light, food, and healing for the nations, "and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and the Father" (see Rev. 1:5b). "King" is a title we have come to give Jesus as the Christ. So we celebrate this Sunday as icing on the cake of all the Sundays of the Church Year. Viva Christo Rey! Long Live Christ the King!