

I think for Pilate, Jesus is just a nuisance. For the Scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of the Jews, Jesus is seen as a real threat. He is claiming to be the Son of God, and, in their minds, that is blasphemy and Jesus is a threat to their religion. Their hearts are so closed to the truth of it, their minds are so stifled with their own idea of religion, that they simply are unable to see God standing before them.

But Pilate is not concerned with the spiritual realities. Pilate is the Roman Governor of Judea. All he cares about is Roman rule, Roman order and so he must make sure that Jesus is not a threat to the Empire, someone who is claiming to be an authority against Rome.

So, he asks Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” but Jesus does not answer Pilate directly because Pilate just won’t get it. If He says “yes” then Pilate and everyone else will think that Jesus came to take earthly political power over Israel. If He says “no” then He would be lying because He is the King of the Jews – and Jesus cannot lie because He is the truth.

And so we have the key line in the Gospel passage. Jesus then says, “My Kingdom does not belong to this world.” Jesus is a King. Not an earthly, political king, but the King of life, the King of holiness, the King of justice, love, and truth, the King of our hearts and souls, the King of the universe. His Kingdom does not belong to this world.

This feast we celebrate today, the Feast of Christ the King was inaugurated by Pope Pius XI. He did so at a time in history when nationalism and secularism were growing around the world. Pope Pius had the foresight to realize that secularism could soon wage awful wars against the church. That indeed happened, in Mexico, Russia, and of course in Nazi Germany. Atheistic regimes threatened not just the Catholic Church, but civilization itself. In the midst of this, Catholics could cling to Jesus, our King.

As we’ve been talking about for the last year or so, religious tolerance for Catholic teaching and practice even here in the U.S. is on the decline. And so our response now more than ever must be to cling to Jesus, the one true King of the universe.

It means that we must stand fast in His teaching – which comes to us through the Church – no matter what opposition might come. It also means making sure that our spiritual house is in order, meaning that nothing in this world should become our be all and end all. It means that from nothing in this world should we expect perfect happiness, perfect fulfillment; not from a new house, not from a car, not even from our spouse or our family. Not even from a Notre Dame win over USC. But don’t we say to ourselves sometimes, even if only subconsciously:

“If I just had a new house then I’d be happy.”

“If my spouse were just this way instead of that way, then I’d be happy.”

“If my kids weren’t so ‘whatever’ then I’d be happy.”

“If I had perfect health, then I would be happy.”

If I had a perfect body, then I’d be happy.”

When we do that we are chasing after fantasies. When we do that we are trying to make ourselves subjects of this world. But Jesus' Kingdom does not belong to this world. It is in His Kingdom that we can expect perfect happiness and fulfillment.

So while we are here, we use the things of this world to prepare us to be permanent residents of the heavenly Kingdom. We understand that the house we live in is a gift from God to be used with gratitude as we make our pilgrim way to heaven.

You love and cherish your spouse now as a gift from God to be a partner and helpmate on the road to holiness. If you should lose your spouse, as difficult and painful as it is because of your love for them, keep your eyes on your Kingdom, which is not in this world, but the next.

God wants us to be happy, but remember that nothing in this world was designed to give us perfect happiness. Only in God's Kingdom will we have perfect happiness because only God Himself can make us perfectly happy. That's what we were designed for.

So in these days of increasing opposition to what we believe, to what Jesus teaches, may God give us the strength to stand firm with Him as our King and the grace to allow Him to rule over every part of our lives.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on November 25, 2012, Christ the King.