

B52: Solemnity of Christ the King/Reign of Christ
John 18:33-37
November 21, 2021
Father Michael Renninger

“Will you marry me?”

As a Catholic priest, who has taken a vow of celibacy, I don't actually get a chance to ever ask anyone that question – not unless I want to get into *big* trouble with my parishioners and my bishop!

But I *do* have the privilege of hearing brides and grooms tell me how *their* life changes when someone gets down on one knee, and asks, “will you marry me?”

That's one of those questions that literally changes your life.

People have told me about *other* questions that changed their lives.

Like the time someone asked, “would you like to come to our university to study?” *That* changed a life.

Or when someone asked, “would you like to come work with us?” That changed a life.

Or that day when my pastor said to me, “Michael, have you ever thought about being a priest?” That question changed my life.

Or the woman I know who is now in her 80's. Early in her marriage, her husband was unfaithful. And in the terrible aftermath of that infidelity, he asked her, “would you be willing to at least try to save our marriage?” And through the grace of God and the strength of the marriage vow, she said ‘yes – I am willing to try.’ And now, surrounded by her husband of 50 years, her children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, she realizes how that question changed her life... for the better.

This weekend, as the flow of the liturgical year draws to a conclusion and we look forward to the beginning of the Advent season next weekend, many of our churches celebrate a special focus today. In some of our churches, we call this the Solemnity of Christ the King. Other denominations refer to this weekend as the celebration of the Reign of Christ.

Whatever we might call his weekend, we all hear a powerful portion of John's Gospel during our worship.

As we read John's Gospel, Jesus is on trial. The Jewish authorities have already called for his crucifixion. Now Jesus stands before Pilate, the Roman Governor. In Roman trials, the usual legal practice was that the *governor* asked the questions, and the prisoner *answered*.

So at first, everything seems to go according to the legal standard. Jesus stands before Pilate, and Pilate asks him the question – “Are you the king of the Jews?”

But, immediately, we discover that Pilate is not the only one asking the questions! Jesus questions PILATE. And the question that Jesus asks could have changed Pilate’s life... if Pilate had paid attention.

Pilate asks Jesus a question – “are you the King of the Jews?” It’s not clear if Pilate really understands what this question implies. Pilate is a political leader. And it seems that he is viewing Jesus through a purely political lens. Pilate’s question implies that he thinks that Jesus has come to collect earthly power – just like any other geopolitical player.

Later in this scene, Jesus does answer Pilate’s question. Jesus IS a king – but he is unlike any king the world has ever seen. His kingdom is not a geographic territory. He has no earthly troops ready to fight a Roman legion. Jesus is not seeking to take dominion over a certain territory.

His kingdom is not like any *here and now kingdom*... but his kingdom is *real*. Because his kingdom, his reign, is revealed whenever anyone *listens* to the truth of God, and *puts God’s truth into action, especially in our relationships with each other*.

Pilate first asks Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” And according to Roman legal practice, Jesus should simply have *answered* Pilate. But instead, Jesus puts PILATE on trial, by asking HIM a question! Jesus asks, “Are you saying this on your own, or have others told you about me?”

Notice how this unfolds. Pilate first asks, “Are you a king?” Jesus immediately asks, “Are you saying this on your own, or are you saying this because someone else has told you about me?” If Pilate had really paid attention to Jesus’s question, it could have *changed his life*.

Why do I say that? Because Jesus’ question contains a fundamental truth. And the truth is this – Pilate’s life, your life, my life, will not really be changed if our only experience of Jesus comes from what OTHER PEOPLE TELL US ABOUT HIM.

Pilate’s life, your life, my life, will be TOTALLY transformed if WE HAVE PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF JESUS’S LOVE AND LORDSHIP, HIS REIGN, IN OUR LIVES.

When Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you a king,” he question was based on what other people had told him about Jesus. But Pilate’s life would have been *changed* if *he* had listened to the truth that Jesus preached, or pondered the power of his compassionate miracles, or simply paid attention to the way that Jesus treated the least of his brothers and sisters.

If Pilate had listened to the Good news and personally allowed Jesus’ truth to take root in him, he would have realized that Jesus is, indeed, a king unlike any other. He can and does rule our hearts, our minds, our spirits, if we let him. He speaks a truth that addresses every human need. He pours out a love which changes lives.

But Jesus can only be king of your life, you can only participate in his reign, if you open your heart and, personally, accept that gift that is offered. Your life will not be changed by simply listening to someone else talk about Jesus – your life WILL be changed by creating enough space for Jesus to speak to you. That is how the reign of Christ is unleashed in your heart. It is INTERESTING to listen to someone else tell about THEIR experience of how their spouse asked, “Will you marry me.” But YOUR life *is actually changed* when someone gets on a knee, and asks YOU that question!

Similarly, it’s interesting and instructive to hear *someone else* talk about how Jesus is Lord of *their* life. You can even come to church and say, “Jesus is Lord.” But your life is actually changed when Jesus looks at you and asks, “Are you saying this on your own, or has someone else told you about me?”

Are you ready to let Jesus’ questions change your life?

2000 years of Christian experience demonstrates that Jesus will ask us lots of questions, every one of which can change your life, if you listen.

For instance, Jesus may say to you -

+ it’s nice that you wear a cross or crucifix around your neck. But do you really have my spirit in your heart?

+ it’s good that you *know* that you are a sinner. But are you ready to *confess* your sin and *do something* to stop it?

+ it’s good that you are a member of a church. Still, are you simply an *observer* of the faith, or a believer and doer?

When I stand before the throne of Christ, I don’t think he’s going to ask me:

+ How many scripture passages have you memorized? But I suspect he *will* ask me, how much of the scripture did you obey?

+ I am not sure that Christ will ask me; How often did you receive communion or participate in the Lords’ Supper? I suspect He *will* ask me, how did your sharing in the Bread of Life make you more Christ- like?

+ I don’t think Christ will ask me: How often did you hear a sermon or preach a sermon about forgiveness. He will ask me, how often did you actually forgive.

+ I don’t think Jesus will ask - How many promises did you *make*. He will ask me, how did you KEEP the promises you made?

+ Christ won't ask me - How much earthly wealth did you amass. He will ask - How did you give away what the Living God gave you?

+How often did you pray for justice in the world? How did you actually work to make the world just?

+ How many things could you cram into one day? He *will* ask, how did you put your spouse first, your children first, PEOPLE first?

We are not on trial today. But We are worshipping Jesus Christ, the king of kings, the Lord of Lords. The beginning and the end. The one who knit us together in our mother's womb – the one who will welcome us when we pass through the doorway of death.

That savior loves you so much that he is asking you a life changing question today – do you, YOU, want Jesus to really, truly, *lead* you, *guide* you, *teach* you, *change* you? Do you?

He's popped the question. Please say, "I do."

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