

“Who Gets the Final Say?”

“Jurisdiction” – from the Latin, it literally means “law saying” – or, what does the law say? It has to do with the extent of the law – who has the power to say what the law says in this particular situation. Or simply, who gets the final say in this matter?

So, with the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ – who’s jurisdiction is it? The chief priests and the scribes, Pilate, Herod? Who’s in charge here? Who has the power and is responsible for carrying out justice with this Jesus of Nazareth fellow? Who has the last word?

The chief priests and scribes bring Jesus to the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate – and their hypocrisy is showing. They will not enter the judgment hall “so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.”

In Numbers 9 it was ordained by God that if one entered a home with a dead person inside, they were regarded as ceremonially unclean. Of course, the Jews added their own man-made regulations – that if one entered a house in which an evildoer was to be sentenced to death – that too would make them unclean.

They didn’t come to hear Pilate’s ruling – they came to get a death sentence out of him. Pretending to be concerned about God’s Law, they make a show of their holiness – even as they are handing over the Passover Lamb to be sacrificed.

They have already declared Jesus innocent by the very fact that they had to raise up false witnesses to bring false charges against Him – and yet, they are offended when Pilate asks about the charges being brought against Jesus. “Just do what we are asking you to do. Just believe us when we say this man is guilty. To question our motives is to insinuate that there is something faulty in our judgment.”

“Fine, go and judge Him by your own laws then. Why bring Him to me? Handle this within your own jurisdiction.” Well, the truth is that the Romans didn’t allow the Jews to do what these religious leaders wanted to do. They could have their own laws and trials and judgments – but they could not put a man to death. They didn’t have the authority to do that.

In other words, they need the Romans. They need Pilate to sentence Jesus to death. If it were up to them, in their own jurisdiction, they would have taken care of this matter already.

There is a certain honor, and responsibility, that comes with jurisdiction. Pilate is very accommodating to these Jewish leaders. He goes out of his way to meet with them – but he will not depart from “the Roman way.”

The Roman way was that there must be a trial and inquiry before there is a sentence. How can one have the last say without getting the facts, without knowing the truth? That’s why he inquires as to the charges against Jesus.

In essence they charge Jesus with being a heretic, a rebel, and a king. In other words, they know how to push Pilate’s buttons. Pilate isn’t much concerned with whether the teachings of Jesus agree with the Jewish teachings, or not – and His teaching of “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s” was widely known. But this bit about being a king – there was some potential problems with that.

Having questioned Jesus about being a king, and hearing that His kingdom is not of this world – Pilate determines that Jesus is no threat to the empire, and once again He is declared not guilty. But the chief priests and the scribes are not about to give up – they “kept laying one charge after another against Him.” When Jesus would not answer a word, “they pressed their charges more vehemently.”

Pilate realizes that things are getting out of hand – and he is supposed to be in charge here. He’s responsible for the *Pax Romana* in this part of the empire. If the *Peace of Rome* is shattered by an uprising, Pilate will be in trouble with his boss, Caesar himself.

So how does he carry out his responsibilities without these religious leaders getting even more riled up?

“Wait! What? Did you say this man is a Galilean? Great! I’ve got an out! I’ll send Him to Herod. He has jurisdiction over the Galileans. I’ll let him handle this.”

Herod and Pilate had butted heads before over jurisdiction – when Pilate mixed the Galilean’s blood with their sacrifices (Lk. 13). But now Herod is delighted that Pilate has sent Jesus to him. Doing so acknowledged Herod’s jurisdiction – and – now Herod also has the opportunity to see a miracle from this man whom he’s heard so much about.

Jesus is not here to put on a show. He remains silent – and the religious leaders scream all the more – but in the end, Herod finds no guilt in Jesus, signified by clothing Him with a white robe and sending Him back to Pilate. Notice, He’s innocent – but still they mock Him. Herod and Pilate, like friends, treat Jesus the same way.

The chief priests and scribes, Pilate and Herod have all shown Jesus to be innocent. Judas knows it. Pilate’s wife knows it. Jesus is paraded through the streets of Jerusalem in a white robe as He is sent back to Pilate – that everyone might see His innocence. Behold, the Lamb of God – the pure, undefiled Passover Lamb with no deceit in His mouth. He is silent, like a lamb being led to slaughter.

We, however, would not be quiet. We’d scream “Not fair!” Barabbas is the guilty one, not Jesus. Injustice! Pilate, you say He’s innocent, but you’re going to punish Him and then release Him? You strip and flog and spit and beat an innocent man – and in the end, sentence Him to death anyway? Not fair!

Do you want to talk about “fair” and “justice”? God says, “the wages of sin is death.” Jesus is a King, and in His Kingdom, truth cannot be denied. It is precisely because our first parents set aside God’s truth that God’s Son comes in the flesh in order that He might live by every Word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

The truth is that the whole world has sinned. True justice calls for everyone to die for their sin. God’s justice declares that there must be death – and so, in His Kingdom, He gives His own Son to die in the place of all sinners. His sentence is handed down – that all who believe in Jesus’ death for the forgiveness of their sins – shall not perish, but have eternal life.

This is God’s jurisdiction. No one is exempt from His Truth. He has the final Word in all things. Yes, even here, in the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ – God is in charge.

While some want to charge God with child abuse by doing this to His only-begotten Son – His justice is carried out so that you, the sinner, might be saved. Jesus suffers and sheds His blood so that your sin (and the excusing of your sin) might be atoned for.

Jesus suffers and dies because you have abused the jurisdictions that God has arranged – abusing the power entrusted to you – forsaking your responsibility as a father or mother – running from the duties that God has assigned to you.

Jesus willingly endures His Passion, so that you may not be lost – but be forgiven, reconciled to God, to live with Him for all eternity.

That new life begins already now as you live as a citizen of His kingdom in this world. Having given Himself to rescue you eternally, He is also example for you here in this life. You too will be falsely accused, slandered. You will suffer injustices. Yet, even in the midst of all that – like Jesus – you commend yourself to the One who knows all truth, because He is the Truth.

You live by faith in His Word – in His “not guilty” sentence handed down each time you are absolved – and whenever you eat and drink His Body and Blood.

“What is truth?” The truth is that you are saved eternally, because of all that Jesus willingly suffered for you. The truth is that God loves you. He says so – in the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.