

Sunday's Word

Feast of Christ the King

November 22, 2015

**THE SOLEMNITY OUR
LORD JESUS CHRIST,
KING OF THE UNIVERSE****Dn 7:13-14**

Son of Man coming on the clouds

Ps 93:1-2, 5

The Lord is King, robed in majesty

Rev 1:5-8

Ruler of kings of the earth

Jn 18:33-37

Pilate engages Jesus in conversation

[http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/
112215.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/112215.cfm)**REV. ROBERT
R. BECK, D.MIN.**

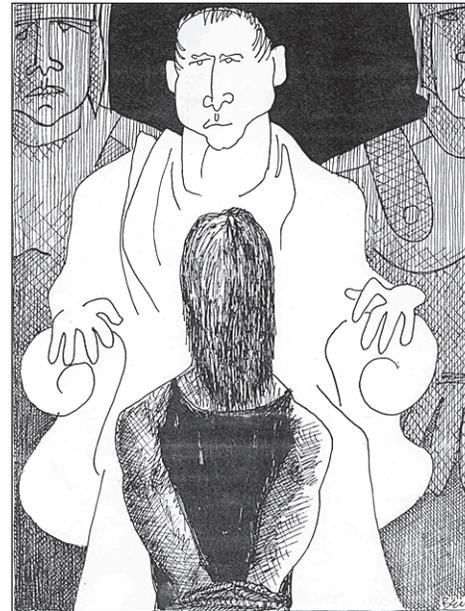
Robert.Beck@loras.edu

not previously been mentioned in John. In fact, the charges of the Council against Jesus take place off stage, between 18:24 and 18:28, when Jesus is before Caiaphas. We have been paying attention to Peter's denial at the time, and so our attention is elsewhere.

In John's handling of the story, the Council is setting Jesus up, with a claim that Rome would find threatening. Rome was well known to allow no opposition and should be expected to deal with any such claim harshly.

Pilate seems aware that Jesus is being set up. In the second scene that is only in John, Pilate and Jesus have a discussion about authority. Pilate informs Jesus that he should speak up (that is, respect his office) because he has the authority of life or death over Jesus (19:9-12). Jesus responds by saying that Pilate has no authority but that given him "from above."

This term ("another" in Greek), is ambiguous, as we know from Jesus' earlier conversation with Nicodemus, who was confused about being "born from above" or "born again," since the word can mean



both (3:4). Now, Pilate is also confused. We realize that Jesus is speaking of God-given authority. But Pilate thinks about his authority as delegated from Caesar. We are alerted to another set of concerns entering the picture for Pilate.

The Council threatens him, with what little leverage they have at hand (19:12). The title, "Friend of Caesar" (*Amicus Caesaris*) shows special status (think "friend of Bill"), and is jealously guarded. So the Jewish leaders are making an implied warning: They will report him for not scrupulously ridding the territory of all threats

to Roman dominion. Pilate knows that Jesus is not a threat, but he is also sensitive to damage such as that threatened by the Council. So he goes along with them, condemning Jesus.

However, he gets back at the council. Notice the amount of attention given to the title on the cross: "King of the Jews" (19:19-22). The Council doesn't want it, because they do not like the idea of having Jesus named as their king. Pilate knows that, but takes the position that they can't have it both ways. Either Jesus is a legitimate candidate for claiming kingship, and therefore must be dealt with, or he is not, and must be released. So Pilate turns the tables back on the Council for putting him on the spot.

Meanwhile, Jesus is crucified.

John's readers, who are followers of Jesus, and not party to the dispute between Pilate and the Council, take their own lessons from the story, knowing that Jesus' authority is larger than Rome's, since it derives from the author of the universe. We know that the real story that is taking place here is not the squabble between Pilate and the Council, but something they are scarcely noticing. History is being turned upside down, and theology is finding a new beginning.

For reflection: How is it that we celebrate Christ the King by referring to the crucifixion of Jesus?

Father Beck is professor emeritus of religious studies at Loras College, Dubuque.