

“What Is Truth?”

In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, the King, grace to you and peace.

I am 58 years old. For those of you my age and older, I'll get to you younger ones in a moment, I want to take you back 49 years ago, this past Friday, two days ago. On that Friday afternoon, I was in the fourth grade at Franklin Road Public School in Hamilton. We had just finished the weekly Friday spelling test, always on Friday, when the bells in the church across the street, began to ring. It wasn't like a funeral, with just one church bell, it was all the bells. Then the siren at the fire hall over on Upper Sherman Ave., began and we wondered aloud to our teacher, what was going on. There was a knock at the classroom door. Our principal, stern, brush cut gray, Mr. Grass, very proper and more stern than usual came into the room. His eyes were glistening. "The president of the United States, President Kennedy, has been killed," he said. "We are letting you go home early." In those days, you often still found a parent, usually a mother, at home.

Some kids started to cry, rather remarkable really because how many Canadians 9 years old, knew who JFK was? As the church bells, across the street continued to peal, our teacher offered a brief, inarticulate prayer. Then the most extraordinary thing happened. My Catholic classmates, this being the days before Catholic education was publicly, funded, began softly to pray the Rosary: "Hail Mary, full of grace, blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus, Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and in the hour of our death. Amen."

By the time they had repeated the prayers several times, the Protestants among us almost learned the words. I remember thinking if we can pray to God, then maybe what has happened isn't quite so terrible.

We went home early, walking through that cold November afternoon. When I arrived home my grandparents, who were taking care of us, ironically because my parents were visiting New York City, were listening to the radio. Then my brothers and I, I don't know where my sister was, turned on our black and white TV set. We saw a sombre shocked widow with a blood stained blouse, bewildered children, stunned brothers. My grandparents said how this day, November 22, 1963 would be seared into our memory.

We watched, I think, because we were afraid. Madness had disturbed the calm of our lives. We watched for the reassurance that the world was not going to come apart. And we went to church that Sunday, with my parents, who had rushed back from New York, to pray that the order of the world would remain.

John F. Kennedy's assassination marked a turning point in my young life. I began to realize, in an immediate way, that there was great evil in the world and, quite frankly, there would be many more times in the ensuing years when I would sense that evil – when Martin Luther King Jr. And Robert Kennedy were assassinated. And, Canada is not immune to this evil, when Pierre Laporte was assassinated during the FLQ crisis in October of 1970 or the 14 university students, all women, gunned down at the Polytechnique in Montreal in December of 1989.

Of course, not to forget those of you younger than my generation, what November 22, 1963 is to people my age and older, Tuesday, September 11, 2001 is to people younger than me. Those dates and events attached to them take on mythic proportions. Maybe because they are the times we have lost our innocence.

How many times have I wondered, how could this possibly be God's kingdom, the way we were told in Sunday School, with so much wrong all around us. We struggle to make some sense of this crazy world we live in, sometimes evil world, sense we will probably never make.

My friends, we Christians are quite ready to admit that Jesus Christ is King. Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord gives us a sense of belonging, of trust, of confidence, even security. We hang crosses around our necks and in our homes. We put his picture on the wall. His picture on book jackets and CD covers. Although our culture is no longer overwhelming Christian, Jesus' likeness is not difficult to find.

The stained glass window, above our altar, I'm often drawn to it, an artist's depiction, Jesus with his large, great eyes looking out at what is going on. I often come here, at night, when it is quiet and dark, I turn the light on behind the window, and stare at those eyes. They look a little sad to me. I believe that many artists picture his eyes as very sad because what he sees is not his kingdom at all.

We are quite ready to admit that he is our King. We are even willing to admit that he should rule our hearts, our inner most beings. But Jesus' ruling all of human life is very difficult for us to conceive. Human life is fraught with evil, with vast arsenals of bombs and a constant readiness for war, with ethnic cleansing, with people starving because their political opponents use food as a weapon. Yet, human life is precisely the realm of Jesus. Calling Jesus our King means that his kingdom should relate to all that we do in all our lives. Jesus Christ is Sovereign and Lord, not only of our inner "best selves," but of human life, in all its richness, in all its poverty, in all its goodness, in all its evil.

And, as today's gospel reading from John shows, Jesus' kingship does not only depend on him. Note the brief exchange between Jesus and Pilate. Pilate asks him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Yet he must know. The Jews accuse Jesus of having blasphemously made that claim. Jesus must realize the seriousness of the question, but he cannot answer in a way that Pilate would understand. You see, whether Jesus is a real king or not does not depend solely on him. His sovereignty, his lordship, includes our recognition, it also depends on us. That is why Jesus later says to Pilate, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born and this I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice."

If we say "Jesus is King," then we are acknowledging a reality. Jesus is, and will be, our Lord, our Sovereign. And if we don't say it, mean it, then we are, in effect, denying the deep truth of Scripture.

My brothers and sisters in faith. Jesus Christ is, and should be, King because Jesus really is the only certainty in the wilderness and chaos of our life in this world – in a world upside down in 1963, or 2001, and so many times thereafter, in the world upside down today. Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Sovereign. The only King I know we can depend on. Let us pray:

Eternal and everlasting God, whose will it is to restore all things to your beloved Son, whom you anointed priest forever and king of all creation. Grant that all the people of the earth, now divided by the power of evil, may be united under the glorious and gentle rule of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.