18. The truth is Christ

When the centurion had left, Pilate remained motionless, with his gaze fixed on empty space. The question came to mind that he had posed to the Nazarene: “What is the truth?” (Jn 18:38). It seemed to him that the response that he had not waited for had come to find him when he least expected it, and by means of someone from whom he would never have expected it. Is it possible that each time he asked something about Jesus, about his death, the response was not the narrative of mere facts, but… his Person? Even after he had asked him, “What is the truth?” he thought he could not expect any response from that man, and yet when he saw him brought back disfigured from the flagellation, dressed as a king and crowned with thorns, as he looked at him he felt arise in his mind a thought that he hurried to get rid of: “Behold the truth!” To the people he said, “Behold the man!” but in his heart what he wanted to say was this: “Behold the truth of man, the truth of this man whom you all hate, the truth of the king whom you all fear, the truth about those who hate him to the point of reducing him to this state, and the truth of that religion, which for centuries had been prepared to welcome this Messiah.” And Pilate realized, with a pang of heart, weighing all his hypocrisy, that that man was also *his* truth, the truth of himself, the truth of his life, of his career, of his power, of his hypocritical and cowardly dependence on Caesar.

Pilate mysteriously intuited that, if Jesus was the truth, the truth of his life and of everything, then he was truly King, the Lord of the universe. Indeed, what great freedom he felt in Jesus! Free and true, the one glimmer of truth in the midst of all the deceit that everything and everyone was immersed in, that fell like thick darkness on the whole of reality that each person thought he was manipulating to his own advantage. Everything was false, everything was dark. There was nothing true and real in the midst of everything but the small flame of that Man, of that face, of that gaze, of that voice, of that silence. The Nazarene expressed only the truth, whether he spoke or was silent, whether he looked right at you or lowered his eyes. Everything in Him was truth. Not even the cruel antics orchestrated by his soldiers defeated the truth of this Person. Precisely with that crown of thorns, that red rag on his shoulders, that reed in his hand as a scepter, exactly all this revealed that truly He was a King, the King of kings.

Pilate had not tolerated all this truth, and for this reason he hastened to throw it all away: Jesus, the Jews, the priests, the scribes, but also himself, also his conscience, into the dark sea of the deception expressed by everyone, used by everyone, with no more reason than that of extinguishing that unique flame of truth, of sincerity, that unique flame of *reality*. Into that abyss of lies he had also thrown Caesar, making them recognize him as their king, and pretending that he too was serving him with loyalty, while he knew perfectly well that the Jews would never have recognized him as their king, and that he himself did not serve Caesar except to serve himself, and that he did not worship Caesar except to worship himself and the power and wealth that he thought he would earn with this idolatry.

He had had Jesus condemned in a hurry, without reflecting or thinking about it more. He was tired of being tormented about this Man. He sent him to death to rid his conscience of him, to extinguish that little flame of truth that emanated from that Man, that spread to him and burned in him like a fever.

He started hating the centurion too, but without managing to despise him, because his words, his gaze, his eyes shining while he spoke of the death of the Nazarene had reawakened everything, had rekindled the charcoals that he thought he had totally suffocated.

But if the Nazarene tormented him even when dead, what way out remained for him? He felt the puff of that last breath of Jesus like a whistle of wind in the desert that no one can interrupt, because you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. He did not want this truth in his life, *of* his life, but the more he ran from it, the more he distanced himself from it, the more he felt that his destiny, his king, his life were sinking into the abyss of deception.

While the centurion was embracing with his whole heart the mystery of that Truth, Pilate, perhaps, chose the absurdity of denying it, fleeing toward nothing, condemning himself to the desolation of a man who does not want to be with Jesus, with Jesus who is with us all days until eternity, with Jesus who is our Paradise in person.

But who knows if deep down in that inferno, Pilate too, and Judas, did not meet the extreme truth of Christ: his gaze of mercy, accompanied by that phrase, that prayer, that burst hell open: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!” (Lk 23:34).

God does not judge sinners by arguing with them, but by talking about them to himself, between the Son and the Father, in the breath of the Spirit, like parents do when they lovingly discuss some problems and mistakes of their children. And the more serious the problems and mistakes are, the more they harm their children, the more too do the parents speak of them in love, with desire to embrace them.