

A recent cartoon depicts a dog who died and went to the gates of heaven, where he discovers that a cat complete with wings and halo guards the entrance to the gate. The dog says to himself, "This could be trouble."

Pontius Pilate has no idea how much trouble he is in. To all outward appearances, Pilate has charge of this gospel. Jesus stands under arrest. He must answer to Pilate. Pilate will judge whether he lives or dies. What Pilate does not understand is that he himself is on trial. The ultimate judgment comes from Christ. Even Christian history has judged Pilate poorly. Every Sunday we pronounce his name in our creed as the one under whom Jesus suffered. Sunday after Sunday for 2000 years in churches all over the world, Pilate receives his judgment again and again.

The feast of Christ the King this year gives us what you might call a dummy image of Christ the King. To look at this bedraggled, wounded man, powerless before Pilate, we would never guess that this is our king. Our feast this year serves us warning that our king and our judge stands where we do not expect. It invites us to search for him not in the halls of greatness, but among those whom we oppress.

Who will guard the gates of heaven on the day of judgment? Will it be our friends, the causes we trumpeted? Or will some other judges be standing there? The charities who asked our support? The kids and spouse who sought more time? The people of a different color whom we did not esteem? The aged in nursing homes? Other drivers? Imagine being judged for all eternity by other drivers? I'd rather be judged by a cat.

This much I know. We'll live more peacefully if we let the oppressed judge us now, if we correct our lives with charity. The one Pilate least expected to meet in heaven turned out to be his judge. How different it would have been for him if instead of judging in fear he had listened and learned. How different it can be for us.