

## **How much of Pontius Pilate is in each of us?**

When we stand in our worship to affirm our faith in the words of the Apostle's or Nicene Creeds we say the words "suffered under Pontius Pilate" or "he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate". There are only two other people named in these creeds, Jesus himself and his mother Mary. So in the early days of the Christian faith, we are talking here of the fourth century, when these creeds were written, the figure of Pontius Pilate was clearly seen as the main perpetrator of Christ's death, primarily responsible for handing him over to be crucified. This is in spite of Pilate's clearly stating, on more than one occasion, that he found no case against Jesus.

So was Pilate guilty of ordering Christ's crucifixion? Or has he been merely made a scapegoat? Is he a Roman leader who wished to release Jesus but simply didn't have the bottle to go against the wishes of the Jewish religious leaders and the crowd who demanded his crucifixion? And when we consider the position of our own faith, our belief in the Crucifixion and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, how often do we bottle out, seek excuses, keep ourselves in a safe place by simply saying nothing or, more likely, say the thing we want our friends and others to hear? How much of Pontius Pilate is in each of us?

Little indeed is known about Pontius Pilate, apart from the prominent role he plays in the trial and Crucifixion of Jesus. He was prefect of Judae from 26 to 36 AD, when Tiberius was Emperor of Rome. He lived in Caesarea, but because of the large crowds which had gathered for the Feast of the Passover he was in Jerusalem to help keep the peace. He probably disliked the Jewish religious leaders and they definitely had no fond feelings for him. Note how they didn't enter the headquarters of Pilate because entering the house of a Gentile, where the law was never kept would make a Jewish person religiously "unclean" and so unable to take the Passover meal. How discourteous was that? And the fact it was early in the morning as well, it was no wonder that Pilate didn't wish to have anything to do with this man. "Take him yourselves," he said, "and judge him according to your law." How often in our own lives and in our own acknowledgement of faith do we decide to have nothing to do with Jesus because it's too inconvenient, the wrong time or because there might be better things to do? How often might we put off our acts of Christian charity in favour of more self gratifying activities?

Pilate can be seen as a career politician, a diplomat and pragmatist, politically correct, who tried to keep things quiet, avoiding major disasters so that he could present a good front to those at home in Rome. He would have heard of Jesus, how a few days earlier he had entered through the gates of Jerusalem in great pomp and glory, how he had performed some amazing miraculous acts. The last thing he wanted was trouble so he comes up with "the deal". Offer those religious fanatics and their followers the release of either Barabbas, the criminal or Jesus, the simple fool who had a good way with words. There bound to take Barabbas. This way he'll save his face as well as save his job. So it may sometimes be

with ourselves. In order to make the right impression, to present a good front we'll avoid talking about our Christian faith; we can't always be seen as standing up for Jesus and his radical ways, it might not be seen as diplomatic or the right thing to do. There's a time and a place for everything even for Jesus. We don't want to upset any one. Let's keep it comfortable.

So our faith challenges us with the question that Pilate asked of Jesus, "What is truth?" Is Jesus the king of your world? Do you believe as Jesus said to Pilate, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Christ is crucified again and again when good people don't stand up for him and their belief that he is the Saviour of the world. As Jesus travels to the cross John tells us that He is the eternal Word which took our flesh. Look at this man and you'll see your living, loving, bruised and bleeding God. Keep strong in faith. Stand by him!

Bill Pattinson

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