

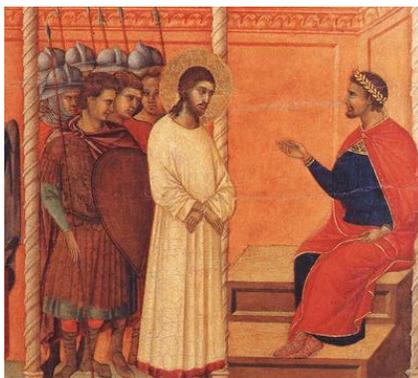
When I attended the Church of St. Clement near here in Alexandria, we took special note of two saints whose feast days fell two days apart. December 4th and 6th, respectively, were days on which we remembered Clement of Alexandria in Egypt; and Nicholas of Myra in what is now Turkey.

Clement was a third-century theologian, one who pioneered expressing his Christian faith intellectually. On the other hand, Nicholas was a fourth-century bishop, a rich man who embodied Santa Claus, the gift-giving spirit of Christmas.

One year, our main Sunday service at St. Clement featured two complete processions—each with a crucifer, torch-bearers, choirs, Eucharistic Ministers, and priests—bearing down on each other from opposite aisles in a way only a church with a central altar could pull off. The “priest” in Clement’s procession had an orange-colored bowl on his head, a play on clementine oranges, no doubt, whereas Nicholas was carrying and dispensing a huge bag of wrapped presents. They each claimed to be the authentic procession, the “true” route to God.

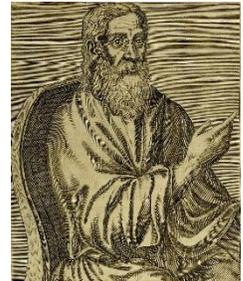
So, I hope you now can visualize the event that is forever in my memory, two royal personages each representing a different approach to truth: head and heart. We know both can be effective. After all, we find truth when we seek God, for God alone is truth.

Jesus of Nazareth told us HE is “the way, the truth, and the life.” He meant he is the way to God, he is the truth of God, that he IS God. And Jesus told us that no one can approach God, no one can find truth, can find true life, except through him.



In today’s gospel lesson, Jesus told the person who would hand him over to death that the purpose of his existence was to testify to the truth. What did Jesus mean? Jesus embodied truth by his presence in human history and in his words and actions. Everything Jesus said and did is TRUE, true to the Truth that is God.

Jesus affirmed that our existence is “very good,” that the last will be first, that we lead by serving others, that God loves us beyond measure, that light conquers darkness, that love endures, that mercy and justice prevail, that life is eternal, that our eternal life has already begun, and that God has come in person to be with us through the joys and pains of existence.



Did I leave anything out? Oh, yes: Jesus taught that God’s kingdom is his kingdom and that his kingdom can be our kingdom. Jesus taught that his kingdom is IN this world but not OF this world, is not only what we perceive with our five senses and does not operate according to the values of this world. And here’s the BEST part: Christ Jesus is coming back “soon and very soon.”

Today’s gospel lesson shows us the cosmic choice Christ Jesus and Pilate each made, the very moment on which their lives pivoted. Christ Jesus revealed Truth, revealed God, at the cost of crucifixion. Pilate chose to pretend truth doesn’t even exist, or (hedging his bet) to act as if truth is unimportant.

The choice made by Jesus and Pilate is the same as the choice we face in our life: Do we embody the truth, whatever the cost? Or do we choose the lie? We embody truth when we show mercy to others, when we choose to not judge them, when we care for the poor and marginalized, when we give back to God some of what God has given us, when we reject falsehood and lies and even half-truths, and when we spend our life for others confident that God loves absolutely everyone. If we embody the lie, we deny Truth and thus deny God.

The basic question for us today is this: “What will rule our lives?” Power? Money? Fear? Deceit? Critique of others? A false sense of entitlement or superiority? Or will our lives be ruled by love, joy, peace, hope, serenity, and Truth?

Pilate handed Jesus over to death, but love won. If the power-choice had won, had beaten the love-choice, we wouldn’t even know who Jesus was and is. But the Good News—the greatest news of all time—is that God gave Christ Jesus new life, confirming all that Jesus taught.

So, in the ancient words of the prophet Isaiah (41:10), “**Do not fear**, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.” Jesus himself added these words of comfort, “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

I began by telling you of competing liturgical processions celebrating the feast days of St. Clement of Alexandria and St. Nicholas of Myra. The irony is that both processions embodied truth. Clement wrote “Let us put away, then, all blindness to the truth, all ignorance: and removing the darkness that obscures our vision like fog before the eyes, let us contemplate the true God.” Nicholas agreed with Clement; he wrote, “The giver of every good and perfect gift has called upon us to mimic his giving, by grace, through faith, and this is not of ourselves.”

Truth be with you!
[**And also with you...**]