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May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Some of you know that my husband Charles and I have three children. They are all grown now, which is a wonder and a blessing. I enjoyed very much being their mom and spending time with them, putting off my career to be with them. Lately, my mind brings up memories of taking them shopping at Regency Mall in Richmond. Mind you, shopping is not something I enjoy. I do it when I have to do it. But when you are a stay at home parent, you spend lots of time doing things that you really don't enjoy but are required to do out of necessity; and most times we stay at home moms and dads make the most of it.

One of the things that I had to do out of necessity was taking each of my children to the DMV on the day they became eligible to apply for a learner's permit to drive. Oh how I dreaded that task. It was bad enough when I had to go to the DMV for myself. But when I had to bring the kids with me it was so much more painful. Waiting in line was something I could tolerate on my own, but with three kids in tow it was a serious challenge to maintain patience and civility. Once or twice, maybe all three times, waiting in line was just the beginning. The real pain came when I arrived at the registration desk only to find out I needed yet another form of identification that, of course, I didn't have with me.

Thankfully, things have changed with the DMV. A fully developed website helps us to know ahead of time exactly which of multiple forms of identification to bring with us to prove that we are who we say we are; and our kids are exactly who we say they are. I exaggerate. But, seriously, I did an information check this week in order to find

out just what is required to affirm one's identity when applying for a license. After all, it's been more than 10 years since my youngest child was 15 and 6 months old. (I wonder how many people sat around a table and determined that age criterion. Probably the same folks who decided that you need to have the following four items to prove your identity: proof of a social security number, a primary proof of Virginia residency, a secondary proof of Virginia residency, and proof that you are a US citizen or proof of legal presence here.)

So it gives me pause when I hear the words from Pontius Pilate in the gospel text from today asking Jesus who he is. Pontius Pilate, the figurehead of the Roman Empire in Jerusalem, had summoned Jesus to appear before him. He didn't have any particular crime in mind, but the leaders in Jerusalem were particularly troubled by Jesus. There were rumors going around that Jesus called himself "king of the Jews." Pilate knew that Herod Antipas was the King of Israel so that meant he was King of the Jews, right? Was this Jesus pretending to be someone he wasn't?

When Jesus came into Pilate's court, he came alone. He did not have an army of attorneys representing him. He didn't even have the disciples there to stand up for him. The way Jesus dressed might have reinforced Pilate's curiosity. He would have been wearing simple garments, probably one of two or three that he owned. He would have appeared to be tired from travel. His sandals would have been well worn from the miles and miles of walking. He would not have been wearing garments that would lead anyone to believe he was of royal lineage or even part of the merchant class. According to the gospel text, Pilate looked at Jesus and asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

Imagine how dumbstruck Jesus must have felt upon hearing those words. After all, Jesus had spent the previous three years or more making the case that God our creator is the king of kings - not himself or any other human being. Jesus had been working hard to reveal that the hope for humanity does not lie in hierarchies of human power. Instead, Jesus consistently claimed that there is only one who can and does reign over us, and that one is in this world but not of this world. That one is in this world through us, the ones God created. What might Pilate have thought when Jesus replied that his kingdom is not of this world? What do we think when we hear it?

This scene from the gospel of John is assigned for the lectionary on this Christ the King Sunday every year. We acknowledge today that Christ is King, but he is king in a very different sense than the meaning of that word that Pilate construed. Pilate understood king as one who reigned over a specific geographic region and over the people who dwelled within it. But the sense of the word king that we celebrate today comes from the Greek word *pantocrator*. *Pantocrator* is the sense of the word king that Christ reveals to us. This word is used once in Paul's letter to the Corinthians and nine times in the book of Revelation. *Panto* comes from the genitive case of the Greek word *pas* that means all. The genitive case means *has all/possesses all*. All of what, you might ask. The compound word that follows pants is *Crator*. *Crator* comes from the Greek word *kratos* that means strength, power or might. So then, Jesus Pantocrator is Christ who is Ruler of All or Sustainer of the World; it has also been translated as Almighty God or Lord of Hosts.

As we commence with the liturgical season of Advent next Sunday, the four weeks of preparing for the birth of the Christ Child, the revelation we receive this

Sunday is a little like finding the secret stash of Christmas presents before they are wrapped. We are being shown the meaning of Jesus ministry in all its fullness so that we can truly value what is about to come into the world at Christmas. Pilate revealed in asking Jesus the question about his identity that he had no knowledge, and certainly no reverence for, Judaism and their deep connection with a transcendent God. It is evident that Pontius Pilate was face to face with the incarnation of God the pantocrator. It's clear that Pilate did not understand that the realm in which Jesus is king is God's kingdom, the kingdom that is transcendent and yet is at hand.

It would have been so much easier for Pilate if Jesus could just have produced the proper documents to prove who he was. It would be so much easier for us, too, wouldn't it, if we could just tell everyone that our Lord, our God Almighty has a photo ID and credentials that prove that he is the great I AM. But then, people today might not believe it; they might consider that news fake.

In Pilate's world, the world was controlled with might. The emperor ruled with force and power and the threat of violence. He should have known, as we should know today, that force and power and violence don't bring about peace. Human ingenuity and the instinct to survive and to compete leads us to think up ever more ways to be more clever, more violent and more powerful. Maybe we should try a different way.

Maybe this Advent we can prepare ourselves to receive into our hearts and into our lives the incarnated spirit of the God we know; the God who is constantly creating, constantly compassionate, constantly merciful and consistently just. I'm convinced that if we do allow Him into our hearts, one by one the world will be a better place.