

5. February 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

“Before Abraham was, I am”

Jn 8:48-59

The Jews answered him, “Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?” Jesus answered, “I have not a demon; but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it and he will be the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death.” The Jews said to him, “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets; and you say, ‘If any one keeps my word, he will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God. But you have not known him; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” The Jews then said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple.

Jesus' dispute with the Jews, who had closed their minds to His message, reached its first climax when they picked up stones to throw at Him. They do not understand the language of Jesus - and probably do not want to understand it. They do not realise that before them stands the Son of God, who cannot be understood or judged by human criteria, but must be heard, His words assimilated, His works seen, and from there, by the grace of God, believed. The Jews were particularly scandalised when Jesus tried to reveal His divinity to them and to make them see that He, the One sent by the eternal Father, existed before the creation of the world. He existed before Abraham was born; He has always existed.

Today, as believers, we confess in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed that Jesus is *“God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father. Through him all things were made...”*

The rejection of this divine dimension led the Jews to claim that Jesus was possessed by a demon. In the Synoptic Gospels we find the same accusation, when His opponents claimed that Jesus had cast out demons with the power of Beelzebul (Mt 12:24; Mk 3:22; Lk 11:15). This is a satanic perversion of the truth that in Jesus we are given God's salvation and that He bears witness to the Father's love. In everything He does and says, Jesus seeks the glory of the Father, but He is rejected by those who, because of their position and knowledge of the Scriptures, should be the first to recognise Him. To know Him, however, requires a true relationship with God. In the previous passages Jesus had already made it clear why the hostile Jews were closed to Him. In today's passage He puts it very simply: they did not know God.

Indeed, knowledge of God is not simply the result of studying the Scriptures, but comes primarily from love, which leads to an encounter with the Lord in the depths of one's being. In this way we see that often the simplest people have a very personal and direct relationship with the Lord and understand Him. Others, who have great intellectual gifts and a lot of knowledge, sometimes find it difficult to understand the simple language of love. They tend to get caught up in their own understanding instead of allowing themselves to be taught by the Holy Spirit and to enter the school of love that would enable them to know God in truth.

Jesus, as the messenger of divine love, does not glorify Himself, because, as He says, "*If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing*". It is His Father who glorifies Him.

So Jesus gives us another guideline on how to follow Him properly. Our focus must always be on God. It is His works that we praise. If He does them through us, we thank Him for using us and we refer those who wish to praise us to the Author of all good, the Good One par excellence. Whatever gift we have been given, it would be a great folly to place ourselves in the limelight and seek the honour and approval of men. We leave it to God to judge our works and put everything in its place. Our task is to glorify God with our lives, as our Lord did.

Jesus' time had not yet come. He did not allow them to stone Him, but hid and left the temple. His mission to preach and heal the people was not yet complete. The light was still among them, so that the blind might see.