Thursday of the Fifth Week of Lent

Gospel text (*Jn* 8:51-59): Jesus said to the Jews: “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.” So the Jews said to him, “Now we are sure that you are possessed. Abraham died, as did the prophets, yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? Or the prophets, who died? Who do you make yourself out to be?” Jesus answered, “If I glorify myself, my glory is worth nothing; but it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God.’ You do not know him, but I know him. And if I should say that I do not know him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know him and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad.” So the Jews said to him, “You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?” Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.” So they picked up stones to throw at him; but Jesus hid and went out of the temple area.

“Abraham your father rejoiced to see my day; he saw it and was glad”

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Today, Saint John places us before Jesus' revelation in the Temple. Our Savior reveals something unknown to the Jews: that Abraham looked forward and rejoiced when he saw Jesus' day. They all knew God had made a promise to Abraham, by assuring him of great promises of salvation for his seed. However, they were unaware of how far God's light could reach. Christ reveals to them that Abraham did see the Messiah in the day of Yahweh, which Jesus calls my day.

In this revelation, Jesus appears as having God's eternal vision. But, above all, He appears as someone preexistent and present in Abraham's time. Later, in the heat of the discussion, when the Jews said to Jesus that He is not yet fifty years old, He tells them: “Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.” (Jn 8:58). This is a notorious statement of His divinity, which they could perfectly understand, and which they could have also believed, had they better known the Father. The expression “I AM” is part of the holy tetragram Yahweh revealed to Moses in Mount Sinai.

Christianity is much more than a collection of high moral norms, as can be perfect love, or even, forgiveness. Christianity is faith in one person. Jesus Christ is True God and True Man; “Perfect God and Perfect Man”, says the Athanasian Symbol. Saint Hilary of Poitiers writes in a beautiful prayer: “Impart to

us, then, the meaning of the words of Scripture and the light to understand it, with reverence for the doctrine and confidence in its truth. Grant that we may express what we believe. Through the prophets and apostles we know about you, the one God the Father, and the one Lord Jesus Christ. May we have the grace, in the face of heretics who deny you, to honor you as God, who is not alone, and to proclaim this as truth."

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "Christ is risen. His rising brings life to the dead, forgiveness to sinners, and glory to the saints. And so David the prophet summons all creation to join in celebrating the Easter festival: Rejoice and be glad, he cries, on this day which the Lord has made." (Saint Maximus of Turin)

- "The doctors of the law did not understand the joy of the promise; they did not understand the joy of hope. However, our father Abraham was able to rejoice because he had faith. These doctors of the law had lost the faith: they were doctors of the law, but without faith! Moreover: they had lost the law! Because the centre of law is love, love for God and for neighbor...." (Francis)

- "Only the divine identity of Jesus' person can justify so absolute a claim as 'He who is not with me is against me' (Mt 12:30); and his saying that there was in him 'something greater than Jonah,. . . greater than Solomon' (Mt 12:41-42), something 'greater than the Temple' (Mt 12:6); his reminder that David had called the Messiah his Lord, and his affirmations, 'Before Abraham was, I AM' (Jn 8:58), and even 'I and the Father are one' (Jn 10:30)." (Catechism Of The Catholic Church, Nº 590)