June 28th: Memorial of Saint Irenaeus, Bishop, Martyr and Doctor of the Church

Gospel text (*Jn* 17,20-26): Jesus said, «I pray not only for these but also for those who through their word will believe in me. May they all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us; so the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the Glory you have given me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. Thus they shall reach perfection in unity and the world shall know that you have sent me and that I have loved them just as you loved me.

»Father, since you have given them to me, I want them to be with me where I am and see the Glory you gave me, for you loved me before the foundation of the world. Righteous Father, the world has not known you but I have known you, and these have known that you have sent me. As I revealed your Name to them, so will I continue to reveal it, so that the love with which you loved me may be in them and I also may be in them».

«May they all be one as you Father are in me and I am in you. May they be one in us»

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Today, under the patronage of Saint Irenaeus de Lyons, we associate ourselves with Jesus' unity request: «Holy Father, I pray (...) for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you» (Jn 17:20-21). Unity! here is the expression of love, a sign of good health and a guarantee of sustainability for a family.

Unity is not "uniformity", something we Christians have very clear from the very Pentecost day, when all - Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea-- understood the preaching of the Good News, each in their own language (cf. acts 2:9-11). It is unity around the Word of God.

This Word has reached - generation after generation - our ears. It is tradition! It is not stagnation but the tradition of a family, the Christian one. It is as a sort of mighty "river" that has been swelling - enhanced – throughout twenty-one centuries of Christianity. Christ – the incarnated Word of God – can be found as the absolute origin of this "flood". Close to Him, as a faithful transmitter of the truth, we find St. Irenaeus

of Lyons (+ AD 202)

Irenaeus, born in Smyrna (now Izmir, Turkey), was a disciple of St. Polycarp, who – on his side – developed under St. John Evangelist. The young Irenaeus moved to Gaul, where he was consecrated as a Bishop. «Irenaeus was - first and foremost - a man of faith and a Pastor. Like a good Pastor he had a good sense of proportion, a wealth of doctrine and a missionary enthusiasm. In short, Irenaeus can be defined as the champion in the fight against heresies» (Benedict XVI).

Actually, at that time - in the emerging church - already appeared the first heresies, particularly the Gnosticisms, genuine threat to the unity of Christianity. St. Irenaeus fought them, and did so with saintliness and theological reflection. He is the first great theologian of the Church! Saints close to apostolic times, writers and faithful to the truth are the three characteristics of the Fathers of the Church: St. Irenaeus can be found at the beginning of this wonderful Tradition of Fathers.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “The Son and the Holy Spirit constitute the two hands by which the Father touches us, embraces us, and shapes as ever more in his image and likeness. Son and Holy Spirit have been sent into the world to dwell among.” (Saint Irenaeus of Lyon)

- “Saint Irenaeus was first and foremost a man of faith and a Pastor; he is the champion in the fight against heresies.” (Benedict XVI)

- “The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity. But even now we are called to be a dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity: ‘If a man loves me’, says the Lord, ‘he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him, and make our home with him’ (Jn 14:23).” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, nº 260)