August 13th: Saint Maximus the Confessor, abbot

Gospel text (*Mt* 5:13-16): Jesus said to his disciples: "You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father."

"You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world"

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Today we honor the memory of Saint Maximus—rightly called "the Confessor." He suffered greatly—even to the point of losing his life—for heroically professing the faith on a crucial point: the controversy surrounding the human will of Jesus Christ. As Pope Benedict XVI once explained, "There had emerged the theory of 'monothelitism,' which held that Christ had only one will—his divine one. In order to defend the unity of his person, they denied that he had a true human will."

Some, in trying to "solve" a mystery—the mystery of Christ's two natures—ended up destroying the mystery. But God has not entrusted his mysteries to us so that we can solve them like equations. Rather, He invites us to contemplate them in reverence. From his youth, Maximus devoted himself to prayer and the study of Scripture. That's the path we're all called to walk!

Together with Saint Maximus, we must respond firmly: If Christ did not truly have a human will, then what kind of man was He? A man without a human will—"amputated" at the core of his being—how could He stand in solidarity with us? How could He enter into our suffering? What are we to make, then, of Jesus in Gethsemane? Was it all just a fiction?

Gethsemane! —How many times have you been there, keeping watch with Christ in his agony? We still have some of Saint Maximus's reflections on Jesus' agony in the garden. Let's consider one of them: "Jesus, who for our sake became one of us, was speaking in a human manner when He said to the Father: 'Not my will, but yours be done.' He who by nature was God also had, as a man, the will that the Father's will should be fulfilled in all things." Therein lies the very heart of our blessed destiny: to love the will of our Father and Lord. That is true freedom!

For our comfort and hope, there stands Jesus—no illusions, no theatrical performance: “Jesus, struggling, draws the resistant human nature toward its true essence,” wrote Pope Benedict XVI. And what is that essence? The freedom of God’s children—those who love the will of the Eternal Father, to whom we owe everything. To heal our broken freedom, Jesus Christ sweat blood. Saint Maximus endured exile and torture. Yet his theology was confirmed by the Third Council of Constantinople, and he was venerated as a saint not long after his death. Salt of the earth, light of the world!

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- “[Christ, in Gethsemane], revealed himself as the one who desires our salvation according to the two natures that constituted his Person. On the one hand, he consented to our salvation together with the Father and the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, he ‘became— for our salvation— obedient unto death, even death on a cross.’” (Saint Maximus the Confessor)

- “St Maximus declared with great determination: Sacred Scripture does not portray to us an amputated man with no will but rather true and complete man: God, in Jesus Christ, really assumed the totality of being human - obviously with the exception of sin - hence also a human will” (Benedict XVI)

- Created in a state of holiness, man was destined to be fully "divinized" by God in glory. Seduced by the devil, he wanted to "be like God", but "without God, before God, and not in accordance with God" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 398)