

## Fifth Sunday of Lent

### John 8:46-59

To the Jews it was offensive, what our Lord Jesus said and taught; as it has again become offensive to so many in our day and age. Well, the truth is that what our Lord Jesus *actually* said and taught, the heart of His teachings, it has always been offensive to the many and the most; still, it used to be, in our part of the world, that the many and the most would find *something* in His teaching with which they agreed, and claim that that with which they agreed was the *heart* of His teaching; or they would claim that what they believed was what they had learnt from Him. It used to be that the name *Jesus* represented goodness, and to claim that what you believed was *His* teachings was a way to present yourself as *good*, as someone who is all for *goodness*.

That is not quite the case any more; although there are occasions, usually church events, when even politicians eager to outlaw and eliminate Christian beliefs and practices will boast of their formal church membership, and claim that it is our from Lord Jesus they have learnt to seek to prohibit others from honouring what He taught, and still teaches in Holy Scripture, about marriage, about the sanctity of human life, about Christian worship. To many, however, and particularly to many of those who support these particular politicians, the name *Jesus* no longer represents goodness, rather, to believe in Him is considered an evil thing, as is any and all belief in God.

That was not quite the case with the Jews we hear about today. They were religious people. Usually, when the Gospel according to Saint John speaks about *the Jews*, it refers to the Pharisees, although not always; and this is also the case in what we hear today.

Nevertheless, to them, not only was what our Lord Jesus actually said and taught offensive, He was Himself offensive, also; of course, it would be difficult for His enemies then to claim that what they believed and taught was actually what He Himself said and taught, since He was right there to contradict them; but then, they had no desire to do that, either. To them, He Himself was evil, as was all that He said and taught. *Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?*, as they said it, as we hear it today. It was offensive to them when He claimed that they did not know God. That is understandable I suppose; no religious person likes to be told that he or she does not know his or her god.

It is understandable, also, that it was offensive to the Jews when our Lord Jesus claimed that Abraham knew Him, and rejoiced to see His day, that is: to know that the day would come when He would come into the world; and when He claimed that He was before Abraham, and that *if anyone keeps my Word, he will never see death*. If anyone we knew would make such claims, we might not exactly think that he or she had a demon, but we would definitely think that there was something wrong with him or her, would we not? We certainly would not believe him or her.

On the other hand, what else could our Lord Jesus do? What else could He say? After all, it was the truth. And what can one say, other than that which one knows to be the truth? As we hear it today that our Lord Jesus said it: *If I were to say that I do not know Him, I would be a liar like you; but I do know Him, and I keep His Word*.

In our day and age, His Christians find ourselves in a similar situation, do we not, when it is demanded of us that we set His Word and will aside for what worldly authorities demand that we think and say and teach about marriage, and the sanctity of human, life, and whether or not receiving salvation from God in Christian worship is *essential*, and even about *what* Christian worship is and what it is not. What else can we do, other than follow that which we have come to believe and know in faith to be the Truth, and have come to know to be good and right?

The founding fathers of the country acknowledged this, as does the Constitution: that to obey the god in whom or which you believe, in accordance with what you believe to be the truth, it is not only an *inalienable right*, but also your *inescapable duty*. And again, up until recently, this was considered a given, not only in this country, but in all civilised countries. It would be unconscionable that government and governors would force their own religious sentiments upon the people, not only as to what marriage is, but that religion itself is *non-essential* for religious people, and for Christians, and exactly what the Sacrament is, and whether or not it is permissible that it be received, and exactly how!

Common culture today, though, has lost sight of what it means, to *believe* in something to begin with, in anything. The assumption of common culture is that what you believe is not what you are convinced of as being true, but rather what you choose to say that you believe, only because it seems to be to your advantage, because by pretending to believe what you say you believe you can secure power and privilege for yourself over and against others.

From this the assumption another follows: that religious people can just change their religion, and will, if it is made sufficiently inconvenient for them to maintain it. In Denmark, this is the argument for prohibiting Jews from circumcising their infant sons as Jewish religion requires: the Jews can just change their religion!

Common culture knows nothing of what means is to have conviction, or have a conscience; it ascribes evil motives to all who do not agree with it, because it assumes that all belief is but *hypocrisy*, a matter of expedience, because that is how its own adherents come to accept the popular beliefs of the day. *The thief thinks all men steal!*, as we say where I come from.

The Jews ascribed to our Lord Jesus that He was just a man seeking glory for himself; although we do not hear that accusation spelt out in what we hear today, it is implicit in His response to it: *I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and He is the judge. If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say: 'He is our God.'*

Our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, and God Himself from eternity. This was the claim He made, when He stated that Abraham knew Him, and that He Himself was before Abraham, and that *if anyone keeps my Word, he will never see death.*

The same claim He made, also, when He repeatedly used the phrase, as it is recorded in the Gospel according to Saint John: *I am!*; or rather, as it is in the original Greek: *I, I am!* With such statements, He was referring to the name by which God had made Himself known to Moses: *I am who I am. And thus you shall say to the children of Israel: "I am" has sent me!* With such statements, our Lord Jesus presented Himself as being God Himself. And He is that. As the Gospel according to Saint John states in the very beginning: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.* This is who our Lord Jesus is.

God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had sent the Son into the world to glorify Him. And this was how the Father would glorify the Son, and the Son the Father, and in this the glory of God would be revealed, and the fullness of His goodness: in the salvation of sinners, that the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, would suffer Himself the judgement of God against all sin, eternal death, that is: the *fullness* of death, His righteous wrath against all wrong, the holy hatred of His goodness against evil.

*Christ suffered once for sins, as He has had His holy Apostle Peter write it, the righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. He who is the Father's Beloved from eternity, and the Holy One of God, who was for ever with God in glory, He had Himself cursed and condemned by the Father for the sin of sinners, cast out from His blessed presence, abandoned by His love, all in order that we might be in His love for ever, in His blessed presence.*

This the Son of God would suffer for us sinners, for love of us who fail His love in so many ways, that we might not perish and suffer for ever in His wrath, but rather live and be with Him for ever in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

This is the Word of which our Lord Jesus speaks, when He says that *if anyone keeps my Word, he will never see death*: His promise, that with His sufferings and death our sin is dealt with and done away with, and we are right with Him and righteous before His judgement, free from all sin and guilt and impurity, and as such we shall live and be with Him for ever in His Kingdom.

*Which one of you convicts me of sin?*, we hear today that He said. But *Him who knew of no sin God made to be sin for us*, He has had His holy Apostle Paul write, *so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God*. And He who is Himself without sin would have Himself made sin for us. *Which one of you convicts me of sin?* So good is God, so great His love for us.

This is the Word we have heard and come to believe and know in faith to be the Truth. And having heard this Word, and come to believe it, and know it, in faith, to be the Truth, what can we do other than submit to the love of God, as His love comes to us in this Word, and love Him, so as to submit to His will in all things, as we know His will from His Word, in Holy Scripture?

It all comes down to how we relate to God, really. As we also hear it today that our Lord Jesus said it: *Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not of God!*

There are none so blind as those who *will not see*. And those who *will not hear* will not hear. But in all who *can be saved*, His Word of His love and what His love has done for us sinners will do its work of love, so that we begin to love Him. What else can we do, confronted with the greatest love of all, which shines upon us in His Word? With all our sins and shortcomings, and all our doubts, what can we do but cling to His Word, and look to His love?

O Christ our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. Amen.