

5. January 2021

“The decisive encounter”

*1 Jn 3:11-20*

*This is the message which you heard from the beginning, that we must love one another, not to be like Cain, who was from the Evil One and murdered his brother. And why did he murder his brother? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's upright. Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you. We are well aware that we have passed over from death to life because we love our brothers. Whoever does not love, remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you are well aware that no murderer has eternal life remaining in him. This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us, and we too ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone is well-off in worldly possessions and sees his brother in need but closes his heart to him, how can the love of God be remaining in him? Children, our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine. This will be the proof that we belong to the truth, and it will convince us in his presence, even if our own feelings condemn us, that God is greater than our feelings and knows all things.*

Jesus draws our attention to the fact that consistent discipleship can result in the hatred of the world!

Actually, this is incomprehensible, because if we follow the ways of the Lord completely, if we really become like Him, then the world should actually notice: here is love, here is truth, here is orientation, here is sincerity, gentleness, goodness, etc. But we see in the Lord Himself that this hostility came against Him and therefore it can happen to those who follow Him.

Of course, we have to distinguish whether enmity arises because we in some way objectively give cause for it, or whether enmity against Christ actually manifests itself! This would be enmity against the truth, enmity against true love!

Today's text shows us what true love is: “*This is the proof of love, that he laid down his life for us*”. It is a love that gives us the whole, that withholds nothing from us!

But we are only able to recognise this quality of God's love properly when our eyes are opened, when we recognise in its light who God is and also how God is, otherwise it remains largely closed to us.

Even if one is a truly loving person, it can unfortunately happen that evil gossip arises, that one does not understand the intentions correctly or even misjudges them, there can be a spirit of darkness and confusion at work that twists everything into the opposite!

We know through the Gospel how much good Jesus did. Jesus raised the dead, let us think for example of the raising of Lazarus (*Jn 11:17-44*). Instead of being grateful for this great miracle, there was a group of Pharisees and other people who, after the raising of Lazarus from the dead, decided to kill Jesus (*cf. Jn 11:47-53*). In this case it was even the case that they also wanted to kill Lazarus, who virtually became a witness for the authority of Jesus (*cf. Jn 12:10-11*). It was precisely the raising of Lazarus that presented the Pharisees with great problems, for they were confronted with the decision: Do they believe in Jesus or do they reject him! Since their hearts were hardened, they rejected him and the terrible consequence then followed!

So there is a reason why the hatred of the world can persecute the disciples of Jesus, because the encounter with the Gospel, that is, the encounter with Jesus, leads to the decision: Do we accept the Gospel or not, do we align our lives with it or not. Standing in between cannot last in the long run.

If we accept the Gospel, this has consequences, because we are called to learn to truly love God and our neighbour. Can we learn to see our neighbour in the light of God, to truly affirm him as God affirms him?

For this we must learn to educate our hearts. Perhaps when we are challenged to love our neighbour, we discover an inner resistance, we might perceive competition, envy, jealousy and other things in ourselves! The Spirit of God wants to overcome all this in us, so that we can truly love as “new men”!

So there is enmity in this world against God and this enmity can also be experienced by the disciples when they suffer persecution and rejection for the Lord's sake (*cf. Mt 5:11-12*).

Our task remains, as the text tells us today, to go over to life, for where there is love, there is true life, for love is affirmation. Just as we are loved by God, just as

Jesus gave his life to lead us from darkness into light, we too are to speak the Yes: Yes to God's love for us and for our neighbour!

In this YES to us, we learn to affirm the other person as a brother, to see his need, to open our heart to him. On this path, this Yes of God to us becomes a concrete Yes for the brother!

The Gospel becomes concrete here, because God's love for us is also concrete! The truth of the love received wants to prove itself in the service of our brother, otherwise love does not live.

Love is life and is destined to pass on this life, it wants to give itself and not remain with itself, it wants to become concrete and not be abstract. Just as God also became man for us and shows us his love concretely!

So we are not to love with word and tongue alone, but in deed and truth.