

5. January 2022
Brotherly love

1 Jn 3:11-21

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. My dear friends, if our own feelings do not condemn us, we can be fearless before God.

In today's reading, St. John the Apostle insistently exhorts us to brotherly love. He who does not love has no life, that is to say, "*he remains in death*", St. John tells us.

This statement clearly reminds us that God created and redeemed us out of love. Therefore, the keynote of our existence is love, and it is from God that the full acceptance of our life comes!

We all know what it is to feel accepted and loved. In these conditions we flourish. If, on the other hand, we feel a rejection of our existence, we have to fight constantly not to withdraw into ourselves and not to harden our hearts. It is important that we also accept ourselves - God's love will teach us to do so!

Then we see that life unfolds in love. Also the spiritual life will be fruitful only to the extent that it shows itself in deeds, overcoming every form of religious egoism. And in this very love we begin to see the other person. We are called to be "our brother's keeper" (cf. Gen 4:9), insofar as we are not indifferent to what happens to him. If our brother has a material or spiritual need, and we have the possibility to help him, then it will be love that asks us to take the concrete step. In any case, we can always pray for other people, and in this way we will help them in the Lord.

For St. John, love put into practice is the criterion for recognising whether we are of the truth. And indeed it is! *"Our love must be not just words or mere talk, but something active and genuine"*

But the Apostle is not only talking about the concrete acts of love that we can render to others in their needs. It is about us striving to have an attitude of love in our whole being. This is why St. John gives us the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his life for his brothers and sisters. This means that we too are called to put our whole life at the service of God and others.

St. John awakens us from all illusions when he says: *"Do not be surprised, brothers, if the world hates you"*. And we might add to this statement that the reason the world hates us is because its works are often evil. Precisely because brotherly love is constantly offended, charity grows colder and colder (Mt 24:12) and death gains more and more ground. This is shown in a very concrete way in the terrible reality of abortion and in all offences against life. The hatred of the world is also aroused when Christians, by their witness of life, remind it that God's commandments count for all people, and that the coldness often found in it is precisely the consequence of the alienation from God.

Let us not be discouraged when we become aware of our selfishness, which we must overcome with God's strength! Let us not be deterred by the world's incomprehension of true love, even when this incomprehension turns into enmity! Not being intimidated by all this, we must give an authentic Christian witness. In brotherly love, we will bear witness to the Lord outwardly, and thus our conscience will not condemn us, but we will be able to have complete trust in God.