

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Eastern. Ben Frie SJ

Love. Our lives depend on it, and yet our handling of it remains clumsy. The texts we read this weekend touch us because they come across as an ode to the love we so long for, but at the same time we feel the lack of complete love. In our rich country, protests are made against the necessary restrictions on our freedom, and then the word love seems to be buried forever. People are aggrieved, and perhaps just plain frightened. But in this weekend we can also point to signs of joyful love: Mother's Day is celebrated by many, and children in particular use the opportunity to give mother a token of appreciation and - if they can - a token of their love.

Here, in our churches, we speak today of the love that is greater than our hearts. We have the awareness that our love is a modest continuation of a love that has its origin in God. Because He wanted to love us, He created our human reality so that love could become an experience for us. 500 years ago, on 8 May, in Nijmegen, a great witness to that love was born: Petrus Canisius, or with his Dutch name Kanis. A son of the mayor, he was intelligent and thus destined to lead a highly educated life. He came in touch with Pierre Favre, who taught him the secrets of Jesuit spirituality. This affects him so much, that he decides to join the still young company of followers of Ignatius. This makes him the first Dutch Jesuit, but he will travel all over Europe because his talents will become important for many people. He advises dignitaries and authorities, is an advisor at the Council of Trent and is always a beacon in the volatile church climate of his time. It is the time of the Reformation and then the struggle for true faith is going on: the truth is at stake. Canisius developed himself as a fighter for the purity of faith and developed methods to convince young and old to be faithful to the church, faithful to the commandments and faithful to a well-fed prayer life. The Catechism is one of his masterpieces.

He loves God. He expresses himself in the manner of his time, in which Geert Grote led the *devotio moderna*. He argued for a faith that comes from the heart, a deeply felt faith, which does not shy away from experiencing God indeed as the source of all love. Perhaps that is a question for us today: do we still dare to approach God, do we still dare to let ourselves be touched by him, is there still room in us for a religious experience that makes him perceptible to us human beings?

Perhaps the word 'love' is the shortest possible summary of the whole of Jesus' actions. His presence among the people marks a phase in human history in which the boundless love of God becomes visible in a person like us. He was not an easy man: he was confronting because he showed our true nature. At the same time, he was disarming, so that people dared to allow the vulnerability of love in them again.

No greater love can be shown than to give one's own life for friend and enemy alike. Our war history and its commemoration remind us that this can be the truth of a human life. Love is then more than romance, it is love in life and death. The fact that people want to donate their human organs in order to save the life of another person is such a gesture. It comes from a deeply felt love.

We may experience the intimacy of the love that God gives: in the inner world. Jesus does not call his followers servants, but friends. He also taught us the confidential relationship with God. However, he links this with the task of bearing lasting fruit by generating, passing on and sharing the love received from him and experienced by us.

With God there is no respect of persons - all people are equal before Him. All are equally entitled to His love. It is this love that creates intense joy because it overcomes our limitations. The most important thing He asks in return is that we love one another as He has done.