

Ben Frie SJ

It is all about love. Love generates everything, triggers everything. The love people feel for each other brings them into relationships and makes their love take shape in their children. Love determines our decision-making, the way we arrange our lives, what we accept or reject. If love is missing, life cannot get going properly. It is stunted, nullified and given no foundation. Our society is harsh - many decisions about us are not motivated by love but by interests, self-interest, political interest. Then there is no harmony, but rather tension, confrontation and struggle - weapons come out and the race begins. The formation of a government bears all the hallmarks of this.

On this weekend, we remember our dead, those countless people who became victims of the armed conflicts that underline our lack of love. Victims of evil ideology, of untruthful exertion of power, of uncontrollable conflicts. They persist, the struggles and tensions, national, international - love is then no longer an issue. It is a bitter experience that love becomes rare, fragile and brings pain and suffering. Love can die even before it is awakened.

Even the gospel does not escape that reality. Jesus' life itself showed how a life full of love could be attacked. After his death, things didn't happen by chance: the history of the apostles shows a whole series of conflicts, there too tension, confrontation and struggle. Christianity arose with difficulty from Judaism, with the identity question of whether people who wanted to be baptised should also be circumcised. High-flung quarrels arose, because the identity of a religious people with a long history with God was at stake - and this was now in danger of becoming fractured, with all the division and desperation that this entailed. From those confrontations grew a new criterion for faith: did you have the experience, did you really feel the Spirit of God, the love of Christ working in you? Did you feel joy from that experience, liberation, did you know yourself intensely connected to Christ? Was it real love?

Cornelius was one of the first to testify that he had experienced God, even though he was not a Jew. That was a shock. It turned out that God was not limited to resident Judaism. God broke free from the established religion and was able to touch and gain gentiles too. Jesus' words became very real: not you have chosen Me, but I have chosen you. And I do My work in you and go to great lengths to convince you that everything is about love, about giving your life for God, for the people who have been given to you and thereby experiencing intense joy in life. And I want that joy in you to become complete.

That word 'love' is perhaps the shortest summary of all Jesus' actions. And He continues to give His love, even when the world does not understand what He is doing. A dramatic fact: we do seem afraid of love, which is no wonder: love can also be threatening, love is

demanding, all or nothing, does not tolerate half-measures. Yet the fantastic experience remains that love works wonders, creates unbreakable bonds stronger than death. This was the experience of the first Christians: the love of Jesus persists, at least as strong as when He was still in our midst. He continues to open up our inner life by connecting it to God, to our deepest ground where lies the source of the greatest possible joy.

Not you have chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and I then gave you the task of doing what I did: I confided in you, communicated to you all that I myself know from intimacy with the Father. Then act as I suggested to you: no greater love can anyone have than to give his life for his loved ones. This is the three-pronged approach that the Jewish religion has known from time immemorial, three equal poles: love God with all your soul, all your strength, and love in equal measure the human being next to you, the human being with whom you feel connected, and love in equal measure yourself. And make no mistake: Jesus added that it can also be your enemy whom you must love. That you must be capable of forgiveness. Well: do as I have done and live in great all-surpassing joy.