

Sermon about 1.John 4, 16b-21 on 1st Sunday after Trinity 2023 in Brussels (V)

Greeting: The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Bible: 16b God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. 17 By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Prayer: O Lord, my creator, redeemer, and comforter, as I come to worship You in spirit and in truth, I humbly pray that You would open my heart to the preaching of Your Word so that I may repent of my sins, believe in Jesus Christ as my only Saviour, and grow in grace and holiness. Hear me for the sake of His name. Amen.

Sermon: 1. Listening: What is this first Sunday in the Trinity season about? If you read the Epistle alone, the passage from the first letter of John, you may end up on a different path than tradition intends. It is always helpful to read different passages of Holy Scripture together. Today, at the beginning of the Trinity season, which deals with the foundations of the Church and the life of Christians, we will deal with the absolute prerequisite. It is about the prerequisite to be able to believe at all, to have a relationship with God our heavenly Father and thus to have access to life, as we have heard in today's Gospel (Lk 16:19-31). -The basis of all faith from a Christian perspective is

listening to God's Word. It is about taking seriously what is written, which the Church believes and says is the inspired Word of God. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ, willed and made by the heavenly Father. - Again and again, and more and more often, we as Christians (at least that is how I feel) come into discussion with those around us about the interpretation of our time and world, and it is becoming more and more difficult to agree on things concerning our faith, because we no longer share the same basis. Unfortunately, it is no longer the case that all churches assume that the Bible is God's infallible word and guideline. But we should not let ourselves be dissuaded from this. It is not easy, but it can be done and we can trust God to guide us in this endeavour. - So the first thing is to listen properly.

2. *Living*: The epistle now deals on the one hand with the sender of the message, who or what God is, and on the other hand with the consequence of listening to God. God is love. What does that mean? We are used to the fact that when God is spoken of nowadays, He is often referred to as "the dear God". In many sermons it is said that God loves and loves you just as you are and actually everything is good. By not a few theologians and preachers today it is consistently said that God loves the world as it is and saves everything and everyone. Is this what is meant by God's love? Does this interpretation do justice to the Word of God? After all, it is also about "the day of judgement" and at least linguistically the possibility is given to also be outside of God, outside of love. But if God would love everything and everyone in this way, as is often said, then the message of God has lost its power. If it reduces God to a God who loves everyone and everything, then it is not needed. For the talk of a loving God, taken to its logical conclusion, means the same as when people with dogs meet you on the footpath and say: "He's very kind, he doesn't do

anything." God is also very kind. So he does nothing. And if you do nothing, you don't have to deal with him. So it's about the right way to love.

3. *Loving*: Is a love that loves everything and everyone just like that, one that we would like to have? Who wants to be loved in this way, with a love that has no consequences? Just a kind word, without consequences, without a hug, without a touch, without a kiss? But real love is something completely different! What a wonderful thing love is! Love that sees me as I am and accepts me, but that cares about me and therefore wants me to do the right thing and not put myself in danger. Love that always loves *me*, but not always *what I do*. Love that argues with me when it is necessary and does not ignore me when things get difficult between us. Yes, that's God, that's his main character. Yes, God loves this world. God loves you! God is love. But it is love that is serious and not just smiling mildly from afar. "God's love exposes what is contrary to his love." It is real love, not harmless and not without consequences. It is a love that has struggled from heaven down to earth and even to the cross for the Beloved, for you and for me. In the same way, and much more so, as parents love their children and therefore bring them up, with rules, with boundaries, perhaps grasping them hard by the hand on a busy road so that the little ones don't run into the next car, perhaps also meeting them with punishment once in a while if necessary. After all, it's about mastering a good life.

4. *Being free*: You can build on such love. For those who are loved in this way feel that they are carried. Children who have such loving parents go into life confidently and courageously. They are equipped because they know that they can come back when they need help or a safe nest, even if here and there contradiction and argument was and is necessary. They know what is really

important in life. They can face life without much fear. And they have learned to see and respect their fellow human beings as God's fellow creatures, because they themselves are caught up and carried as God's beloved creatures. God loves in this way and much more. Such insight makes one free. This godly love frees us from worldly demands to always be the architect of our own happiness. It frees us from the pressure to always come first and the fear of falling short. It frees us from the fear of the future and from the power of death. Above all, love makes you free to see the truth, to make it public and to accept it, even if it sometimes does not show you in the best light. Yes, love even rejoices in the truth, as the apostle Paul writes in 1 Corinthians (13:6). We are also freed to do this by God's love, because we know not only about guilt, but also about forgiveness. Whoever has recognised this truth rejoices and is free.

5. *Being on a good way:* So today, this Sunday, it is about the foundation of our faith and faith journey through time and the world, through our lives. It all starts with listening to God and his word. The Word tells us about God's love for us. This enables us to live differently and allows us to be free to also love like God and to meet our fellow human beings with love. It is precisely in turning to our fellow human beings that love proves itself and our faith becomes visible. Our faith is shown in our willingness to meet our fellow human beings in true love and helpfulness, to be ready to forgive and to start again and again. Listen, love, live, being free and meet our neighbour in active love. Those who are on their way in this way are well on their way. For whoever is on the way in this way is in God. Godspeed!

Blessing: The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.