

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE



RIMINI 2015

A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



RIMINI 2015

“On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini, His Holiness Pope Francis, in spiritual union with you, sends his cordial greetings, wishing for the numerous participants and those following by satellite link-up abundant fruits of interior rediscovery of the fecundity of the Christian faith, sustained by the certainty of the presence of the risen Christ. The Holy Father invokes the gifts of the Divine Spirit for a generous testimony of the perennial newness of the Gospel, in the footsteps of the esteemed Monsignor Luigi Giussani and, as he asks you to persevere in prayer for his universal ministry, he invokes the heavenly protection of the Holy Virgin and imparts a heartfelt apostolic blessing to you and all those present, willingly extending it to the entire Fraternity and your loved ones.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness
April 15, 2015

Friday, April 24, evening

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony no. 6 in F major, op. 68 “Pastoral”

Riccardo Muti–The Scala Philharmonic

“Spirto Gentil” no. 11, Philips

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

We have no greater need at the beginning of our gesture than to cry out and pray to the Spirit to remove from us all that is idle, all that is unreceptive, all of our distraction, to open all our expectancy, as one of you wrote me: “It’s one of those mornings when you can’t get up without going to search for Him. You go to Mass asking the Lord that on your return home you will find Him there, where the challenge of life begins every day. You don’t know yet how to stay in front of your son, so everything is unjust and leads to anger, everything is prayer of entreaty; you don’t know, and yet in your heart that prayer for love still continues to burn today. In expectation of these three days, the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, so precious and indispensable, everything burns with this prayer, with this lack, a prayer for those faces you continue to seek on the road like you a prayer for an embrace you desire to have forever and that you still seek, for those you love, for the whole world, a thirst to listen, “*memorare*,” to remember, which is never enough. That love for Christ, for His companionship, still burns and you still seek it after fifty years, never sated.”

With this prayerful entreaty, with this expectation that becomes prayer, we invoke the Holy Spirit, that He may bring to fulfillment our fragile attempt to open ourselves up to embrace what the Lord will give us in these days.

Come Holy Spirit

“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini, His Holiness Pope Francis, in spiritual union with you, sends his cordial and well-wishing thought, auguring for the numerous participants and those following by satellite link-up abundant fruits of interior rediscov-

ery of the fecundity of the Christian faith, sustained by the certainty of the presence of the risen Christ. The Holy Father invokes the gifts of the Divine Spirit for a generous testimony of the perennial newness of the Gospel, in the footsteps of the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani and, as he asks you to persevere in prayer for his universal ministry, he invokes the heavenly protection of the Holy Virgin and imparts a heartfelt apostolic blessing to you and all those present, willingly extending it to the entire Fraternity and your loved ones. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

As the Holy Father’s telegram points out, at the beginning of our Spiritual Exercises we are still immersed in the light of the Easter Vigil. The whole night of the Easter Vigil was dominated by the light of the Paschal candle, by the light that the Risen Jesus introduced into history forever. It is in the light of this fact that the Church looks at everything, can look at everything, because only when the light of the Resurrection of Jesus appears definitively can we comprehend what we are unable to understand without it: the ultimate meaning of everything. Therefore, in that night, precisely starting from the present, from that moment in which the light of the Resurrection dominated (that dictates the method for looking at everything), the Church has us look at all of history which, starting from creation, acquires all its luminosity. In this history, we finally see revealed before our eyes the ultimate positivity of reality.

In the light of the Resurrection we can look full in the face the most urgent question for the human person: is it truly worthwhile to have been born? This is the question that assails us when life, even with all its beauty, with all its promise, becomes crushing: what value is there in having been born? A fully meaningful answer to this question about one’s own life is found only in the light of the Easter Vigil, because it would not be worthwhile to have been born if we had no hope for a fulfilled life, forever. As the letter to the Hebrews reminds us, living would be a condemnation, because we would all live in fear of death, with this sword of Damocles hanging over our head. Instead, we can recognize the ultimate positivity of creation, of the life of the human person, of the life of each of us, in the light of the victory of Christ, because there we find the complete answer to the great question of the meaning of our life. In fact, the song of the Easter *Exsultet* says, “Our birth would have been no gain, had we not been redeemed.”¹ Without

¹ Easter *Exsultet*, in the *Roman Missal* (<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm>).

the Resurrection of Christ, what would life be, where would its meaning be?

The light that dominates the Easter Vigil enables us to comprehend the whole history of salvation, from the liberation from slavery in Egypt through the entire history of the prophets, a history whose only purpose is to help us enter into the logic of God's design as it has slowly been revealed over time.

The scriptural readings of the Easter Vigil show us what passion God had for women and men, to take interest in the lot of an insignificant people like the people of Israel, demonstrating to everyone that He is not indifferent to human suffering. God begins to respond in a concrete, particular way to this suffering and never abandons His children. Even if many times they might feel abandoned, like a wife abandoned and grieved in spirit, God pursues them through the prophets, such as Isaiah. "Is a wife married in youth later cast off?" And yet, says the Lord, "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great tenderness I will take you back. [...] For a moment I hid My face from you, but with enduring love I take pity on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer." God reassures His people, "Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken, My love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken, says the Lord, who has mercy on you."²

When do these words truly acquire meaning, if not with that fact, the powerful fact of the Resurrection of Christ? Otherwise, they would remain beautiful words for sentimental consolation, but deep down would not constitute a crucial, decisive turning point, would not introduce something truly new into life. Only the fact of the Resurrection casts on them all the light needed and fills them with meaning. So we can understand why Jesus told His disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it."³ The prophets were part of this history, had lived part of this history, desired to see its fulfillment, but did not see it. Therefore, Jesus tells us, "Blessed are you who have seen it!" He says it to us who have seen, who have seen the fulfillment of His design!

For this reason, on the Easter Vigil, the Church has the light to look at everything, all the darkness, all that we men and women refuse to

² *Is* 54:6-8,10.

³ *Lk* 10:23-24.

look at because we do not have an answer, beginning with our wretchedness, because “this is the night that, with a pillar of fire, banished the darkness of sin. This is the night that even now, throughout the world, sets Christian believers apart from worldly vices and from the gloom of sin This is the night when Christ broke the prison bars of death and rose victorious from the underworld.” In front of this light the people explode into a cry of joy: “Our birth would have been no gain had we not been redeemed.” In the light of this event, the Church and all of us, if the Lord truly gives us the grace of a minute of awareness, can say: “O wonder of Your humble care for us! O love, O charity beyond all telling. To ransom a slave you gave away Your Son!”⁴

With the risen Christ in her gaze, the Church is so able to look at everything that she dares to say a thing about our sin that in the eyes of our reason seems paradoxical: “O happy fault!” It is a new gaze on evil that, suddenly, is perceived as a good: “O happy fault, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!” The *Exsultet* continues, “O truly blessed night, worthy alone to know the time and hour when Christ rose from the underworld!” And this is the mystery of that night: “The sanctifying power of this night dispels wickedness [not simply that we can look at it, but we can even see it vanquished], washes faults away, restores innocence to the fallen, and joy to mourners.”⁵

How can we not be grateful, if we let ourselves be illuminated by the light that the event of the Resurrection introduces forever into life and history? For this reason, there is no circumstance that you can go through, no difficulty or evil that you bear on your shoulders that can be censured, that are so great that they cannot be looked at, challenged, in the light of the victory of the risen Christ. In the light of the Resurrection we can look at everything, friends, because nothing is excluded from this victory. Let us ask the Lord for the simplicity to accept this light, that it may penetrate the innermost depths of our being!

Is what we celebrated on the night of Easter only a fact of the past, a pious remembrance, a ritual gesture that we repeat every year? You cannot answer this question with a reflection or with abstract reasoning. No thought could satisfy the penetrating urgency of this question, no line of reasoning could allay it. What documents the truth, that is, the reality of what we celebrated at Easter? Only a fact: the event of a

⁴ Easter *Exsultet*, in the *Roman Missal*.

⁵ *Ibid.*

people, like the one we recently saw in Saint Peter's Square, a people that confirms and proclaims the reality of the Resurrection.

But to be able to grasp what happened in Saint Peter's Square in all its density, we have to look at another fact, another event of a people 2,000 years ago that testifies to and confirms the Resurrection of Jesus: Pentecost. "When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, 'Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travellers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God.' They were all astounded and bewildered, and said to one another, 'What does this mean?' But others said, scoffing, 'They have had too much new wine.'"⁶

As we see, already at the beginning, from the very first moment, it was not enough to have the fact in front of you, not even such a powerful one. What is needed is the freedom to acknowledge the meaning that the fact itself cries out. To discover it, a person must truly strive to become aware of all the factors of that event, "with that positive intelligence, with that poor intelligence, ready to make the affectionate affirmation of reality, which is the terrain upon which faith is exalted."⁷ Only in this way could one find the answer to the question provoked by that fact: "What does this gathering of people mean?", and verify the reasonableness of the possible interpretations, such as the one asserting that those men were drunk.

⁶ Acts 2:1-13.

⁷ L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo. Meditazioni sull'anno liturgico* [*Familiarity with Christ. Meditations on the Liturgical Year*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 2008, p. 105.

Peter responds to this question, to its urgency, to the question that arises from the stunning fact of Pentecost, with his speech reported in the *Acts of the Apostles*. “You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning [a bit early to be drunk!]. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: *It will come to pass in the last days,*’ God says, *‘that I will pour out a portion of my Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my Spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire, and a cloud of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.* You who are Israelites, hear these words, Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify Him. But God raised Him up, releasing Him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for Him to be held by it. For David says of Him, *I saw the Lord ever before me, with Him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore, my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.* My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would see one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the Resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was He abandoned to the netherworld nor did His flesh see corruption. God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, He received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you see and hear. For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.* Therefore, let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.’ Now when

they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other Apostles, ‘What are we to do, my brothers?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”⁸

Only the Resurrection of Christ can give an adequate reason for this fact. In the face of its power, Peter could not stop at a phenomenological or sociological level of interpretation. Peter was driven forcefully to say His name: only the risen Christ, through the power of His Spirit, can adequately explain the people born of Easter. Peter was entirely dominated by the presence of the risen Christ and could look at reality without remaining at the level of appearances, and this overcame any kind of reductive interpretation. He could only look at things with the presence of the risen Christ in his gaze.

Friends, only a gaze like this can introduce us to the adequate understanding, without reductions, of what happened in Saint Peter’s Square. We are part of the people born of the Easter of Christ. Each of you can compare the consciousness with which you lived the event of a people that happened in Rome on March 7th and the consciousness Peter had in front of the event of the people of Pentecost.

For this reason, friends, the days of Easter are the paradigm of Christian living. Try to imagine how the appearances of the risen Jesus, one day after the other—as the Liturgy reminds us—must have bowled over the Apostles! What was life for them, if not the assertion of His living presence, if not living with His presence in their gaze? They could never erase this from their minds.

“The Mystery is not the unknown; it is the unknown inasmuch as it becomes the content of a perceptible experience. This is a very important concept; this is why one speaks of the mystery of the Incarnation, the mystery of the Ascension, the mystery of the Resurrection. God as Mystery would be an intellectual image if we stopped at the sentence just as it is said: ‘God is Mystery’.”⁹

Fr. Giussani emphasizes forcefully, “The living God is the God who revealed Himself in the Incarnation: in the Death and Resurrection of Christ. The true God is He who came among us, He who was made perceptible, touchable, visible, audible. The Mystery [...] made Himself experienceable, made Himself present in the history of humankind.

⁸ *Acts* 2:14-38.

⁹ L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity with Christ]*, op. cit., p. 69.

[...] The Resurrection is the culmination of the Christian mystery. Everything was done for this, because this is the beginning of the eternal glory of Christ: ‘Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son.’ Everything and everyone has meaning in this event: the risen Christ. The glory of the risen Christ is the light, the color, the energy, the form of our existence, of the existence of all things.”¹⁰

Each of us can see how we have lived the days of Easter. For the disciples, they were the victory of the presence of the risen Christ in their gaze and consciousness. And for us? What has happened in us? In our life we easily flee, forget, set aside, as Fr. Giussani says soon after: “The centrality of the Resurrection of Christ is directly proportional to our flight, as from an unknown.” Very often for us it is as if Christ were missing, as if He were an “unknown.” He is not such a familiar presence that He draws us to Himself and fills us with Himself. “Our forgetfulness, the timidity with which we think of the word and as it were rebound off of it, is directly proportional to the decisiveness of the Resurrection, the fact of Christ, as supreme content of the Christian message; in this content we see realized the salvation, the purification from evil, the rebirth of the human person for which He came.”¹¹

Fr. Giussani continues, “The culmination and the apex of the intensity of our Christian self-awareness is in the mystery of the Resurrection, therefore of my new self-awareness, of the way I look at all people and all things,” beginning with myself! There is no other gaze, friends! There is no other true gaze on us, on reality, on things, on people, on history, after the Resurrection of Christ as a historical event, if not a gaze that has in His presence the light for looking at everything. Because, Fr. Giussani stresses, “the Resurrection is the keystone of the newness of the relationship between me and myself, between me and people, between me and things. But this is the thing we most shy away from. It is the thing we most set apart, if you will, even respectfully, respectfully left in its aridity as a word perceived intellectually, perceived as an idea, precisely because it is the culmination of the Mystery’s challenge to our measure. [...] Christianity is the exaltation of the concrete reality, the affirmation of the carnal, so much so that Romano Guardini says that there is no more materialistic religion [that is, tied to concrete reality, to the flesh] than Christianity; it is the affirmation of concrete and perceptible circumstances, so you feel no longing for greatness when you

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

see yourself limited in what you have to do: what you have to do, even if it is small, is great, because within it vibrates the Resurrection of Christ. “Immersed in the great Mystery.” If we do not feel immersed in this Mystery, in the great Mystery, the Resurrection of Christ, we squander some aspect of Being, dissipate its greatness, the power and lordship of Being; we slowly empty its content and shrink Being, God, Mystery, Origin, and Destiny. *Immersed*, as the ‘I’ is immersed in the ‘You’ pronounced with your whole heart, like the child when she looks at her mother, like the child feels her mother.”¹²

Therefore, “a child’s intelligence [...] must be recovered in us,” in order to look at things in a true way. “We call ‘faith’ the human intelligence that, remaining in the poverty of its original nature [like an empty amphora in the morning] it is entirely filled by something else, because in and of itself it is empty, like open arms that have yet to embrace the person for whom they are waiting. I cannot conceive of myself if not as immersed in Your great Mystery: the stone rejected by the builders of this world, or by each person who imagines and projects her or his life, has made itself the only cornerstone upon which one can build. This Mystery—the risen Christ—is the judge of our life; He, who will judge it all at the end, judges it day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment, uninterruptedly. I want to underline that this ‘seeing Him’ as the Risen One [...] is a judgment: You are risen, O Christ.” “This recognition of what happened to Him, to Him dead, is a judgment [...], [that is] an act of the intellect that bursts through the normal horizon of rationality and grasps and testifies to a Presence that surpasses the horizon of the human gesture, of human existence and of history. [...] It is by grace that we can recognize Him risen and that we can immerse ourselves in his great Mystery; it is by grace that we can recognize that, if Christ has not been raised, everything would be empty, our faith would be vain, as Saint Paul said: vain is our positive, sure, joyful affirmation, vain is our message of happiness and salvation, and ‘you are still in your sins,’ that is, in deceit, in non-being, in not being able to exist.”¹³

Fr. Giussani does not mince words. “Without the Resurrection of Christ there is only one alternative: nothingness. We never think of this. Therefore, we pass our days with that cowardice, that small-mindedness, that thoughtlessness, that obtuse instinctiveness, that repugnant distraction in which the ‘I’ [...] disappears, such that when we say

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72, 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78.

‘I’ we say it to affirm our own thought, our own measure (also called ‘conscience’) or our own instinct, our own desire to possess, our own alleged, illusory possession. Outside the Resurrection of Christ, everything is illusion: it is a game. Illusion is a Latinate word whose ultimate root is ‘play, mock, or jeer.’: we are the objects of mockery, mocked within, fooled. It is easy for us to look at the endless flock of people in our society: it is the great, endless presence of the people who live in our cities, of the people who live near us [...], of the people closest to us at home. And we cannot deny that we experience this small-mindedness, this narrow-mindedness, this thoughtlessness, this distraction, this total disappearance of the ‘I,’ this reduction of the ‘I’ to the fierce and presumptuous affirmation of the thought that comes [...] or of the instinct that claims to grasp and possess a thing that it decides is pleasing, satisfying, useful. [...] The word ask, pray, entreat is never so decisive as it is in front of the mystery of the risen Christ.”¹⁴

Therefore, continues Fr. Giussani, “to immerse ourselves in the great Mystery we must supplicate, prayerfully ask: entreaty, this is the greatest wealth. [...] The most intense and dramatic realism is to pray for it.”¹⁵ As Saint Augustine wrote, “All my desire is before You. [...] Let your desire be before Him [the Mystery], and the Father, who sees in secret, shall reward you. For it is your heart’s desire that is your prayer, and if your desire continues uninterrupted, your prayer continues also. [...] There is another inward kind of prayer without ceasing, which is the desire of the heart... if you do but long for that Sabbath, you do not cease to pray. If you would never cease to pray, never cease to long after it.”¹⁶

What immense and boundless gratitude surges forth when we are told these things, when we realize that once again Christ makes Himself so clearly present! No news is comparable to this: Christ present still has mercy on us. This is how He continues to be the first, how He *primerea* [precedes] us. With this Presence in our gaze we can look at and judge everything; we can have a gaze full of this light on our time, on the emptiness, on the violence, on the tribulation, on the intolerance.

This gaze can also help us understand all the density of what we experienced in Saint Peter’s Square. As many of you have written, there are many signs of the event that Rome was for us. You, like me, know

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79, 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 38:13.

this well. “As we were returning in the car together with some friends,” one of you says succinctly, “there was a different atmosphere: it was patently clear that something had happened to all of us during that day.” There are many signs that March 7th did not leave merely a sentimental repercussion, but that it gave a new gaze on life.

What happened in Saint Peter’s Square? The Pope did not simply talk to us. We lived with him an experience that, to use his words, “decentered” us, brought us once again to the center and enabled us to experience Christ at work. There is no other point of departure than this experience for looking at everything that happened. Pope Francis made happen what he spoke to us about: an encounter, an encounter full of compassion, full of mercy. It is the same method of the Easter Vigil. Therefore, in the light of the experience we had, we can understand what he told us, including his call to conversion in order not to lose the center, Christ, in all that we do.

I noted in some a certain amazement at this call to conversion. But friends, it would be presumptuous to think we have no need of conversion, that there is nothing in us that needs to change. Who of us does not need conversion? Listening to the various reactions, I thought of a passage from the letter to the Hebrews that quotes Proverbs. I think it can help us read the Pope’s speech with the right attitude: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and “perfecter” of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before Him, He endured the Cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how He endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. You have also forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons: *My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reproved by Him; for whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, He scourges every son He acknowledges.* (Prov 3:11-12) Endure your trials as ‘discipline’; God treats you as sons. For what ‘son’ is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. [...] He does so for our benefit, in order that we may share His holiness. At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Heb 12:1-11.

Let's pay attention to the difference between some of our reactions to the Pope's talk and Fr. Giussani's reaction after the recognition of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on February 11, 1982. Each of us should measure ourselves against this.

"The act of the Holy See 'establishes and confirms as a juridical entity for the universal Church the lay association called Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, declaring it to all effects an Association under Pontifical Law and decreeing that it be recognized as such by all.' [But] the text of the decree [of recognition] was accompanied by a letter addressed to Fr. Giussani by Cardinal Rossi, in which he listed some 'recommendations,' including: 'The consistent and enthusiastic affirmation of its charism' must avoid 'the risk of temptations arising within the organization toward an aggressive self-sufficiency.' The recognition of the ecclesiastical nature of the Fraternity implies 'that it must live in complete availability and communion with the Bishops, headed by the Supreme Pastor of the Church; [...] [priests must be] 'at the service of Unity;' [...] 'Communion and Liberation, in the number of its members, represents a great strength for the Church. Precisely in situations like this one, one must ensure that faith maintain all its strength of radiation into life, and that seeking to fulfill the will of God and proclaiming His kingdom remain the Association's principle goal'" and so on. "Giussani later recalled having told Cardinal Rossi, who was reading the letter to him, that he would like to publish it, and he recalled that the Cardinal responded: 'No, don't publish it! Because those of ill will could wrongly interpret the recommendations that are written in it.' On the contrary, for Giussani the letter 'is precisely an example of the maternity with which the Church,' when there are pastors like the Cardinal, 'is able to follow her children.' At that point, the Cardinal gave his permission for it to be published."¹⁸

Why are we so afraid to embrace the Pope's admonitions and acknowledge our mistakes? It is a sign that our substance still lies in what we do, in what we have, that is, that we have shifted away from Christ. Therefore, we never have peace or gladness, because we do not see that our substance lies in what has happened to us, in He who has happened to us.

Why is it that the Pope and Fr. Giussani do not have this fear? Their certainty lies in something different from what they do and have. Listen to what Giussani says. It seems to me a crucial judgment for beginning

¹⁸ A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*The Life of Fr. Giussani*], Bur, Milan 2014, pp. 602-603.

these days of Spiritual Exercises well and for looking at everything in the light of the Resurrection of Christ. “Normally [...] we seek [our] substance [...] in what we do or in what we have, which is the same. Thus, our life never has that sentiment, that experience of full certainty, that the word ‘peace’ indicates, that certainty and that fullness [...], that full certainty, [...] without which there is no peace [...], no joy. At best, we reach smug satisfaction in what we do or in ourselves. And these fragments of satisfaction in what we do or in what we are bring no gladness or joy, no sense of sure fullness, no certainty and no fullness.” This is what we miss! “The certainty is something that occurred in us, happened to us: [...] the substance of our person [...] [is] something that happened to us [...], ‘One who happened to us.’ [...] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”¹⁹

The Pope and Fr. Giussani can look at everything because they are certain of Christ and His mercy. The Pope can even say, “For this reason, you have sometimes heard me say that the privileged place of the encounter with Jesus Christ is my sin.”²⁰ We cannot imagine anything more liberating, to be able to look at ourselves, to be able to look at all that we are, even what we are unable to look at! What experience did the Pope have, to be able to say this in front of the world? “The special place of the encounter is the caress of mercy of Jesus Christ on my sin.”²¹ At the basis of his audacity is the certainty of Christ. It is the same audacity of the Church, who cries out to all the world on the Easter Vigil, “O happy fault, that earned so great, so glorious a Redeemer!” We do not have to censure anything; nothing is excluded from this gaze, from this embrace full of compassion.

So then, the censure of ourselves, the fear, the lack of audacity confirm how far we have shifted from Christ, how distant we are from Him and how centered we are on ourselves: Christ is not the center of our life! In fact, only those who have not distanced themselves from Christ do not fear looking at everything, even their own evil. How much we need to be decentered from ourselves so that He may return to being the center, rendering us able to look at everything, truly everything! “Jesus Christ always precedes us, and when we arrive, He is already there waiting.”²² Who could imagine a greater gift for oneself, for one’s

¹⁹ L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity with Christ]*, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

²⁰ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis’ Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

life, than this? Who could imagine anything more useful for beginning these days?

But it does not end here; it is not just this, because, without the experience of mercy, not only do I fail to find peace, but above all I do not truly know Christ. “Honest people,” says Péguy, “do not have that openness produced by a terrible wound, by an unforgettable wretchedness, by an insuperable regret, by a stitch of suturing eternally badly tied, by a moral unease, by an invisible hidden anxiety, by a secret bitterness, by a perpetually masked fall, by a scar that is forever poorly healed. They do not have that openness to grace that is essentially sin. [...] ‘Honest people’ do not let themselves be bathed by grace.”²³

The Pope told us, “Only those who have been caressed by the tenderness of mercy truly know the Lord.”²⁴ Without the experience of mercy, we do not know Christ! Apart from the self-deception and credulity of considering ourselves sinless, if we do not experience and acknowledge His mercy, we can never—never!—know who Christ is. The lack of experience of His mercy confirms how far we have “shifted,” decentered, distanced ourselves from Christ.

What consolation, then, to re-read the story of the Pharisee and the sinful woman, to begin these days!

“A Pharisee invited Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that He was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind Him at His feet weeping and began to bathe His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, and that she is a sinner.’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Tell me, Teacher,’ he said. ‘Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed 500 days’ wages and the other owed 50. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?’ Simon said in reply, ‘The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.’ He said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’ Then He turned to the woman and

²³ Ch. Péguy, *Nota congiunta su Cartesio e la filosofia cartesiana* [Joint Note on Descartes and Cartesian Philosophy], in Id., *Lui è qui*, Bur, Milan, 1997, pp. 474-475.

²⁴ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis’ Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The others at table said to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ But He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”²⁵

Who knows Jesus more? Who can experience a greater love and live the morality of which the Pope spoke? The one who has been greatly forgiven, greatly loves. How could that woman love so intensely? It was her awareness that she had already been forgiven, because she had met that man. What audacity! The audacity that came to her from being forgiven enabled her to enter that house and make that unprecedented gesture. There was a place where she was welcomed with all her evil; she felt embraced by a gaze full of mercy, and so she was not afraid to look at her own sin. Decentered from herself and her sin, entirely determined by the gaze of Christ, that woman could no longer look at anything without Christ in her own gaze. This is the liberation that Christ brings to our life, no matter what our sins may be.

Let us ask Christ to so dominate these days that we can return home “free.”

A gesture of these dimensions is not possible without the contribution of each of us. “How?”, asked Fr. Giussani at the 1992 Spiritual Exercises: “With only one thing: silence. At least for a day and a half [...] may we discover and let ourselves sink down into silence! It exalts thought and heart, the perception of what surrounds us and therefore the fraternal, friendly embrace of people and things. In a day and a half out of the whole year, may we allow ourselves the effort and the toil of this silence!” We will miss the best if we do not allow the space to let what happens to us penetrate deep down to the marrow of our bones. “Silence is not merely not talking; silence is our hearts and minds being filled with more important things, those to which we normally never give a thought, even though they are the secret driver for everything we do. Nothing of what we do is sufficient for us, satisfying [...], or pro-

²⁵ *Lk* 7:36-50.

vides an exhaustive reason for doing it [...]. [Instead,] silence [...] coincides with what we call memory,” to let this gaze enter. “This is why we insist that silence be respected in its nature [...], but also in order to save the context in which silence can be useful: not speaking uselessly. We encourage you to observe silence above all during the travel to and from the hall,” because in this way, when we enter the hall, “memory will be enhanced by the music we will hear or by the paintings we will see; in this way we will open ourselves to look, to listen, to feel with the mind and heart what in some way the Lord will propose to us.” He concluded: “We must have great compassion for what is proposed to us and the way it is proposed. The intention is good; it wants your good, it wants the best for you. It would be very melancholy not to be able to do otherwise, but what we do together in this day and a half is nothing other than an aspect of the great loving gesture with which the Lord—however you realize it—moves your life toward the Destiny that is Himself.”²⁶

²⁶ L. Giussani, *Dare la vita per l'opera di un Altro*, Esercizi spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione. Appunti dalle meditazioni, Rimini 1992, suppl. a *CL-Litterae Communio*, no. 6, 1992 [*Giving Your Life For the Work of An Other*, Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Notes from the Meditations], pp. 4-5.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 9:1-20; Psalm 116 (117); Jn 6:52-59

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

You can think you are full of zeal for the Lord, like Saul, and not see anything. You can think you do everything for the Lord, like Saul, and be far from Christ. The more you think you are in the right, the more you act and the more harm you do. Saul is preparing to persecute women, children, families, but something absolutely unexpected happens, and the most striking thing is that the Lord Jesus manifests Himself from within Saul's resistance, his pride, the fury of the persecutor. Jesus grabs him and changes his life. As we have just heard, there is no other way to change than accepting the Lord's identification with our life, with our evil, accepting this total gift that He gives each of us.

We cannot interpret what we heard Jesus say in the synagogue of Capernaum: "Whoever eats Me will live for me." "Whoever eats Me": this self-identification of Christ becomes even food and drink for us sinners, for us poor wretches. This self-identification of Christ with the person He seizes is the method by which He is victorious in history, by which He won over the great persecutor, making him the greatest missionary in the history of the Church. Saul becomes Paul. "Whoever eats Me lives for me."

In Jesus' great question to Saul,—"Why do you persecute *Me*?" "But I'm persecuting Your followers"—lies the whole method. Christ's initiative identifies with the person He chooses and seizes. We are not saved by the one we choose, the one we think will save us. For Paul, the redeeming power of Christ, the forgiveness of Christ, the new intelligence of Christ, the new power of Christ has the face of Ananias, who was initially fearful of receiving this mission.

What is the face of Christ for us? This is the great possible alternative: to resist, as did the learned men of Capernaum—"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"—or to accept the simplicity, the radicalness, the life-giving power of this method. "Those who accept you, accept Me. Those who accept the one I send among you, accepts Me. Those who listen to those I have chosen among you, listens to Me. And those who do not listen, do not listen to Me."

A presence within the gaze is what each of us desires and cries out for. But in order for this to happen, we must simply acknowledge and accept the gaze of that Presence.

Saturday, April 25, morning

During entrance and exit:

Franz Schubert, Sonata for arpeggione (or cello) and piano, D 821

Mstislav Rostropovich, cello–Benjamin Britten, piano

“Spirto Gentil” no. 18, Decca

Fr. Pino: “Jesus Christ always precedes us. He *primerea* us, and when we arrive, He is already there waiting.”¹

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

There Is Only One Center, Jesus Christ

“Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me.’ Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”²

This is the gaze that is given to us every morning and enables us to look at everything differently. How much we lose when we do not embrace, every morning, this ultimate positivity—“I will never abandon you”—as the point of departure for entering into reality! The more you realize this, the more you understand that “if there is one thing that matters / it is to live in Your house,” where this consciousness is given anew every morning. “All the rest is banal.”³ With this gaze we can look at everything.

1. “An odd darkening of the mind”

a) A necessary step in each of our gatherings is to identify the problem, the situation in which we find ourselves, as Fr. Giussani untiringly edu-

¹ Cf. Pope Francis, *Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

² Cf. *Is* 49:14-15.

³ C. Chieffo, “Errore di prospettiva” [“Error of Perspective”], *Canti [Songs]*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2014, p. 225.

cated us to do. In order to be able to walk, it is necessary to realize the context in which we are called to live, the challenges that face us, the reductions we stumble into, because there is no life in the abstract, there is no journey, there are no vocations and testimonies outside history, outside the circumstances and conditionings that affect us, the weaknesses and failings that most characterize us, the dangers we most frequently face.

Thus the first contribution we can give each other is the judgment, the awareness of the facts, of the reality in which the Mystery has us live, because the first and gravest danger we face is not primarily a moral one, but one of understanding, as we are seeing in the School of Community, at the beginning of the third chapter of *Why the Church?*.

One fact—one all of us have seen and in which we have all participated—the meeting with Pope Francis in Rome, helps us to understand the type of difficulty that characterizes the context in which we are living and that, beginning with the statement on Europe last year, we have called the “collapse of evidences.” In fact, not even such an impressive and public gesture, which happened in the presence of all in what was at least apparently an unequivocal way, could stop the multitude of interpretations, even conflicting ones. Why? Here we see the difficulty related to evidences. Rome was just one manifest example of what happens in each thing we live.

“What is evidence?” Fr. Giussani asked. “Evidence is an inexorable presence!” And he added, “Becoming aware of an inexorable presence! I open my eyes to this reality which imposes itself upon me.”⁴ Evidence thus involves two terms: on the one hand, the presence, the imposition of the fact of reality, and on the other, our realization of it, opening our eyes to it. There are always two factors in evidence: the reality and the “I” of each of us.

So then, talking about a “collapse of evidences” does not mean saying that reality has disappeared (it was exceedingly clear to everyone that Saint Peter’s Square was “reality”) or that the human structure has changed, that its ontology has altered: it means saying that our recognition of it, our capacity to see and grasp it in its meaning, its nature, its authentic face has failed. What is in question is the “realization” of what we have in front of us, of what we are. Therefore—this is the point—the objective thing that happens in front of us does not suffice. To recognize it, something else is needed: the subject’s openness, will-

⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 101.

ingness, or “genius,” as Giussani calls it: the sense of things that come to us, of reality that reaches us, is in fact grasped in proportion to the evolution of the religious sense, that is, in proportion to the sense of the “I” that each of us has.

Thus, in front of “Rome,” in front of the “religious life” that is the Church, we must first of all note “a difficulty in understanding. It is a struggle due to the indisposition of the subject in relation to the object to be assessed. This is a problem of understanding caused by the fact that the religious sense has not evolved.” This can happen in front of the Church as she presents herself today and, similarly, in front of the way the Church reaches us through the Movement. It is indicative that those who have trouble with the Church today also have trouble with the Movement. “The absence of education in the natural religious sense makes us feel that those realities, which are really rooted in our own flesh and spirit, are far removed from us.”⁵

Our difficulty in understanding, our difficulty in comprehending, is also due to the influence of the context, the climate we breathe, and our lack of education to the religious sense; therefore it is also due to our complicity, our lack of engagement, our presumptuous superficiality.

b) Because of an “odd darkening of the mind,”⁶ in us and around us, many evidences have collapsed, including among them even the *evidence of the “I,”* also in us, as we are not immune to the insistent stimuli all around. Our sense of our “I” is the criterion required for relating with everything, for understanding a child, the profundity of a poem, or the importance of what a friend or your wife tells you. Without an “I” there is no you, but only aridity in relationships. Who am I? What do I truly desire? Today, precisely this has become darkened. Each of us feels within a drive, a yearning, a desire to be, to realize oneself, to affirm oneself. But what makes up this drive, where is it pushing us to, what can truly satisfy it? Nothing is less evident than this. You know what the others want from you, how you “should” be, how you “should” think, but you do not know who you are; it is no longer evident. The content of the word “I” is often merely a social convention.

Here is how Giorgio Gaber expressed it: “I’m looking for a gesture, a natural gesture / to be sure that this body is mine. / I’m looking for

⁵ L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2001, p. 6.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, Chapter 2.

a gesture, a natural gesture / whole like our ‘I.’ // And instead I don’t know anything I’m in pieces I no longer know who I am / I only understand that I am continually conditioned / you have to be like a man like a saint like a god / for me there are always the hows and I am not there...”⁷ And yet, even if I am in pieces, I cannot—cannot!—rip away the fact that I want to be an entirely whole “I” in every gesture I experience.

Contemporary people (that is, each of us) seem to become strangers to themselves; nothing is less evident than the content of the word “I,” its essential dimensions. We move as if we lack an internal compass. This is the great drama. All the rest is a matter of consequences. This is why Giussani said years ago, “It is as if [...] there were no longer any real evidence except trends.”⁸ The nature of the “I,”—original needs and evidences—which should be the compass for orienting our life, is obscured and substituted by fashion. If we do not realize that the important thing is that this compass, this nature of the “I” once again be able to recognize reality, nothing, no action we imagine, can offer a real contribution to the situation of the person.

What is numb is above all the capacity to grasp the evidence in reference to yourself, and thus the exercise of reason, of the critical sense. Consequently, we become more acquiescent to frameworks and accustomed to submissive compliance, and relinquish our autonomy in forming judgments and taking positions. This is why Fr. Giussani said that it is not a matter of ethical weakness, but of “weakness of awareness,”⁹ of the energy with which we look at our children, our wife or husband, circumstances, reality, the challenges of living. The “collapse of evidences” is not an abstract philosophy, but an existential situation in which we find ourselves, as point of departure, that is rooted in a long journey we have mentioned other times and find documented in the third chapter of *Why the Church?*.

c) Today, more than ever, we can regain the clarity we lack *only* from within experience. The situation will not be resolved by “studying” an anthropology or a moral code. We must learn who we are from experience, understand what measures up to the challenges of life and what does not. Therefore, it is not a matter of substituting one discourse for

⁷ *Cerco un gesto, un gesto naturale* [I’m Looking for a Gesture, a Natural Gesture], words and music by G. Gaber and A. Luporini, 1973.

⁸ L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [The “I” is Reborn in an Encounter] Bur, Milan, 2010, pp. 181-182.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

another, but of supporting each other in attention to our experience, helping each other to look. Observing myself in action in the circumstances of my life, what emerges of myself, of my nature? The journey to truth is an experience. If you want to make a journey that brings you increasing clarity, you have to live in such a way, that is, with such seriousness, that you can gain the clarity you lack from within your experience. Experience is the source of all evidence. “Experience [in fact] is reality making itself evident.”¹⁰

Therefore, it is necessary to rediscover within the experience that makes up life—my life, your life—a desire for happiness that nothing can fulfill or assuage, a thirst for total, exhaustive meaning, without which the person can become lost and lash out in the worst forms of violence. We must discover in ourselves the desire that “alone / Our nature craves and strives for—happiness,” to use the words of Leopardi. We must discover for ourselves this desire “for a state of bliss” that has tormented women and men “ever since creation-day.”¹¹ You must not passively take at face value the things you hear or read; you cannot be tossed about by others’ propositions. You take as a given the desire for happiness just because Leopardi writes about it. It is not above all the poet Leopardi who says that the human person is tormented by the desire for happiness and truth: it is our own life that cries this out! This is why we can read Leopardi (and others) and identify with him, feel that he expresses our own feelings better than we ever could. At the same time, we are not here, now, uncritically, to say that the person is incapable need for meaning. This is said dramatically by the burdensome and pained life of many young people today, their profound malaise, because “nothing can live off of nothingness. Nobody can stand, have a constructive relationship with reality, without something that makes life worth living, without a hypothesis of meaning.”¹²

d) What helps us emerge from this odd darkening of which Benedict XVI spoke, this blurring? What are our allies in the discovery of self, in becoming self-aware? How can the recognition of what we are emerge and become powerful? The awareness of our humanity must be, as Fr.

¹⁰ L. Giussani, *In cammino (1992-1998)* [*On the Journey*], Bur, Milan, 2014, p. 315.

¹¹ G. Leopardi, “To Count Carlo Pepoli,” in *The Poems of Leopardi*, translated by Geoffrey Bickersteth, Cambridge University Press, 1923, p. 236, lines 23-29.

¹² J. Carrón, “The challenge of true dialogue after the attacks of Paris,” February 2015. (http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=440&id_n=20887).

Giussani said, “constantly solicited and given order,”¹³ that is, “educated” in order to be awakened and remain alive. What educates the religious sense?

The great “ally”—said with a succinct word whose richness we need to discover—is reality. (“The call does not even come directly from God [...]. The call that sets into motion the religious sense of the human spirit comes from God through created reality.”¹⁴)

“Reality” means all that exists, all that happens, the pressing stimuli we receive, the circumstances we pass through, the various impacts with life, both those desired and those undesired (think for example of the tragic events of these days and all those that assail the life of each of us): how many times have we realized that precisely those undesired vicissitudes opened us to an incomparable self-awareness that otherwise would not have come about, that these unwanted events introduced us to a previously unknown depth of self-discovery? So then, we understand how right Fr. Giussani was when he said, “The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious, the formula for the journey to the meaning of reality is to live always the real intensely, without preclusion, without negating or forgetting anything. Indeed, it would not be human, that is to say, reasonable, to take our experience at face value, to limit it to just the crest of the wave, without going down to the core of its motion.”¹⁵

A friend writes: “After what people said last night at the dinner with the Solidarity Food Banks, I understood a bit better why I have been doing charitable work with more gladness in the past few months; I had not understood the reason before, given the circumstances. In November, the friend with whom I have been carrying the packages to three families in our area for 10 years learned that his daughter had leukemia. Initially, in addition to the pain I felt for them, I also egotistically thought that it would be hard to do this charitable work without his help, as it had become a bit of a routine and apparently, that was fine with me. After this initial phase of consternation, I seriously asked myself what it meant to do charitable work, what reality was asking of me in this moment, and what it meant to share my need with that of the families I meet monthly, with my students, my family, and my friends.

¹³ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 83.

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l’uomo moderno* [*The Sense of God and Modern Man*], Bur, Milan, 2010, pp. 19-20.

¹⁵ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 108.

Paradoxically, reality has become more interesting. Yes, interesting! Watching how my friend and his wife look at their little girl makes me think that there is a ‘good gaze’ that comes first, and that this is what I desire for myself as well. I leave the house glad, not because things are going well or the way I have in mind, but because I myself am more present, there is more of my humanity, there is the curiosity to see how the good Lord will surprise me and the certainty that He gave me the opportunity to meet precisely those families there and to live this gesture with those friends there, who for me are the good face of Jesus.”

The beautiful thing about the journey we are making is that all this is part of the adventure of the renewed discovery of who we are, of the reawakening of our “I.” As we see, experience is what makes me realize who I really am, not my image of myself, not my reduction of who I am. What a huge mistake we continually make, identifying what we are with what we think we are, as if our thoughts tell us who we are, and not experience! Therefore, in the experience of living, the discovery of reality and my “I” happens.

From within all our attempts to get settle ourselves nicely and neatly, to silence ourselves, there emerges the inexorable “abyss of life”¹⁶ of which Miguel Mañara speaks, the whole profundity of our “I.” Our efforts prove insufficient and appear to us as failures, even when they succeed and everything goes well—not only when an illness or a disaster happens, but also when everything is going for the best—, because, as Leopardi said, “in his breast, alas, stern and severe, / like adamantine column motionless / Eternal ennui sits, against whose might / Avail(s) not vigorous youth... .”¹⁷ We can do everything, but an invincible, grave, stolid boredom like a steel column takes over our heart, and nothing overcomes it, not even our youth. “I eat the bitter herb of the rock of boredom,”¹⁸ Miguel Mañara said after all his adventures.

So, if on the one hand we find ourselves with the enormous task of recovering the lost evidences (we are in the existential situation described by the example Fr. Giussani gives in *Why the Church?*, of mountain climbers who first have to face a long march to the rock face before beginning their ascent), on the other hand, precisely in the experience of boredom and disappointment, sadness or burdensomeness

¹⁶ O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara, Mefiboseth, Saulo di Tarso* [*Miguel Mañara, Mephiboseth, Saul of Tarsus*], Jaca Book, Milan, 2001, p. 28.

¹⁷ G. Leopardi, “To Count Carlo Pepoli,” vv. 72-73, in *The Poems of Giacomo Leopardi*, translated by Frederick Townsend, G.P. Putnam’s Sons, New York and London, 1887, p. 80.

¹⁸ O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara*, op. cit., p. 27.

of life, we begin to make out against the backlight this thirst that is the “I,” the reality of the heart, the ultimate fabric of our being. In fact, in all the disappointment, all the boredom, something announces itself. Even if everything goes to the dogs, something remains. Through that disappointment and boredom, that perception of precariousness and lack of substance, the evidence of my “I” as desire for happiness emerges and elbows its way in. It is impressive to see some examples of this.

I was struck by a song by Vasco Rossi, *Dannate Nuvole* [“*Damned Clouds*”], in which the singer/songwriter recounts his experience of himself and life: “When I walk on these / damned clouds / I see things that slip away / from my mind / Nothing lasts, nothing lasts / and you know this / but you never get used to it [Why? What stubbornly keeps us from getting used to it?] // When I walk in this / valley of tears / I see that you must / abandon everything / Nothing lasts, nothing lasts / and you know this / but / you never get used to it // *Who knows why?* (3x) [this “Who knows why?” comes from the depths of our experience] // When I hear people talk about the ‘truth’ / I am confused / I’m uncertain / when I think / that nothing exists / only smoke / nothing true / nothing is true, nothing is true / and maybe you know it [but if nothing is true...] / But / you will continue [why?] // *Who knows why?* (3x) // When I think / that nothing exists / only smoke / nothing true / nothing lasts, nothing lasts / and you know this / but / you will never give in // *Who knows why?* (9x) // When I think / that nothing exists.”¹⁹ What does a man discover in his own experience, even when he speaks so negatively about living? What resists, notwithstanding his philosophy, his nihilism (“nothing is true,” “nothing lasts”)? But you never give in, “Who knows why?” Everything can go to the dogs, I can think whatever comes to mind, let myself be dragged along by what everyone says, let myself be run over by my nihilism, but there is something in me that defeats the nihilism: that I never give in. “You’ll never give in // *Who knows why?*”

And when you try to avoid coming to this awareness, not even this can negate the evidence of what we are. Guccini describes it well in *Canzone per Piero* [“*Song for Piero*”]: “I always say I don’t want to understand, but it’s like a subtle vice and the more I think / the more I find this immense emptiness in me and the only remedy is to sleep. / And then every day I wake up again and I can’t believe it, I don’t want to get up, / but I’m still living and I’m there waiting....” For what?

¹⁹ *Dannate Nuvole* [“*Damned Clouds*”], words and music by V. Rossi, 2014.

“My questions, my nothingness, my evil....”²⁰ The deeper you get into it, the more you find with surprise what you had not recognized in the beginning: the datum! Notwithstanding all our confusion, something resists, as a datum! I find it there, in front of me. This is how, after a long and tormented journey, the evidences that characterize our “I” present themselves again.

Do what you may to avoid thinking, the pain explodes in your chest, as Amy Winehouse sings in *Wake Up Alone*: “It’s okay in the day, I’m staying busy / Tied up enough so I don’t have to wonder where is he / Got so sick of crying, so just lately / When I catch myself I do a 180 // I stay up, clean the house, at least I’m not drinking / Run around just so I don’t have to think about thinking / That silent sense of content that everyone gets / Just disappears soon when the sun sets // This face in my dreams seizes my guts / He floods me with dread [...] / And I wake up alone // As far as my heart I’d rather be restless / [...] / This ache in my chest, ’cause my day is done now / [...] He floods me with dread.”²¹

Reality, the call that sets into motion our humanity and our self-awareness, the set of events, pressures, and provocations that we call “reality,” entails in an original and essential way also and above all the weft and woof of encounters that characterize our life and allow its development. As Fr. Giussani says, “*The human person develops through relationships, through contact with others.* The other is in an original sense necessary for the human person to exist; equally so, the other is necessary for the human person to be fulfilled, to acquire truth and concreteness, to become ever more herself.”²²

If we look at how the “I,” self-awareness, comes to the surface and asserts itself in us, we have to say that it emerges in proportion to the provocation that reaches it and that the “I” accepts. The “I,” the religious sense, your own humanity, activates in response to the solicitation it receives from reality, above all from the point of reality that is indispensable for the development of the self and all its structures, namely, the other, others, the fundamental relationships, the human context, the encounters that mark and accompany its growth and its being in the world. This is the deep level of the need for and the crucial influence of education.

²⁰ *Canzone per Piero* [“*Song for Piero*”], words and music by F. Guccini, 1974.

²¹ “*Wake Up Alone*,” words and music by A. Winehouse and P. O’Duffy, 2006.

²² L. Giussani, *Introduzione alla realtà totale. Il rischio educativo* [Introduction to the Totality of Reality: The Risk of Education], suppl. to *Tracce-Litterae Communionis*, no. 4, April 2006, p. 5.

As Fr. Giussani underlines, “original human experience,” or, in other words, the religious sense, that complex of evidences and needs that make me human, “does not exist actively, except in the form of a provocation. It does not exist, if it does not act.” He continues, “Our original consciousness does not act, except within the form of a provocation, that is, within a modality in which it is solicited. [...] If the esteem provoked in me is for the worldly mentality, I face the problem of my father, my mother, my woman, my man, my children, everything, through the worldly mentality that provoked me. If, instead, the encounter I have is with Christ, with His Presence, then I face everything with my human experience provoked and catalyzed by this, bearing within the promise, the hope given by this encounter. Our original experience goes out to meet all things through a promise it has within, which was given to it. What I call ‘provocation’ is like a form that makes it act.”²³

The encounters we have are the form of the provocation that “makes us act,” that makes us exist actively, that actuates the original experience that is in us. This is why Fr. Giussani always talked to us about the law that holds for everyone, for any person in any time and culture: “The ‘I’ is reborn in an encounter.”²⁴ The more a person is reached by an adequate provocation and accepts it, the more completely she lives the journey of self-discovery, the journey of becoming aware of herself and what fulfills her.

What “proposes life to our eyes and heart with seriousness?” What enables us to re-appropriate ourselves, to reach true clarity about our destiny and the road that leads us there? As Fr. Giussani says, it is “only an event, only the encounter with Christ.”²⁵ The re-conquest of the evidence of the “I,” of clarity regarding yourself, the depth of your desire, the redemption of the ability itself of the evidence are made possible in the final analysis only by an event, by an encounter.

If we have gained or can gain a fuller awareness of our heart, of the complex of needs and evidences that make it up, it is because of the “provocation” of the encounter with Christ, with His real presence in history (not imagined, but an event now, a living encounter). The more we are aware of this, the more we understand that in the era of the

²³23 L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [From Utopia to Presence], Bur, Milan, 2006, p. 193.

²⁴ Cf. L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [The “I” is Reborn in an Encounter], op. cit., p. 182.

²⁵ L. Giussani, *In cammino (1992-1998)* [On the Road], op. cit., p. 142.

“collapse of evidences,” the truly radical problem is for the adequate provocation to happen that can promote the real redemption of a perception of ourselves. In fact, certain encounters, because of the provocation they represent, set fully into action the original consciousness of ourselves, make our “I” emerge from the ashes of our forgetfulness, our reductions. We have in front of us the facts of Paris, first, the continual unleashing of violence and persecution of these very recent times, as documentation of the urgent need for this testimony, for presences who provoke the reawakening of the human. We have a great example of this in the Christians who experience first-hand the fury of this violence, and we are filled with gratitude to them.

One of you recounts: “This year has been quite hard, but I have realized that, in the end, I floated! [...] The audience in Rome, the assembly of the Solidarity Food Banks, and the School of Community showed me glad people at work with their own lives and made me feel a crazy envy, so much so that it made me say, ‘I want to have that gaze too! I too desire that embrace!’ These gestures have helped me to take my need seriously again and to desire to seek in every moment He who can respond to this need. Jesus has won me over again! It is crazy to realize how the same gestures, the same situations can change when you are desirous, when you are needy... Reality provokes, but if I am not there, anything can happen and I will not realize it! It is not that Jesus wasn’t there first, but that I did not see Him because I wasn’t even seeking Him! I have resumed delivering the food packages, because the challenge is no longer finding the time for this gesture (one more thing to fit into my day!), but to let this gesture help in keeping my own need constantly present. Having this desire to be embraced by Him in every moment, I asked my husband to say the *Angelus* with me even before beginning to prepare everyone’s breakfast and starting off right away with the organization of the day, so that the whole day will be lived in the ‘certainty that He comes to encounter each of us as He sees fit,’ as a friend wrote me.”

Another person writes: “In these days, I’ve frankly been unable to understand why my friends attributed so much importance to the encounter in Rome with the Pope, while gestures like “DonaCibo” [Donate Food] and the assembly of the Solidarity Food Banks flowed by unmarked. Beautiful things, but I judged that my satisfaction was in something else. On Easter Monday, I was out taking a stroll and saw two friends at the playground with their four children, one of whom, not yet three years old, has leukemia. After two years of treatment, the

child's situation has changed dramatically and now there is no hope of recovery for him. When I saw them from a distance, I had a strong desire to change my path to avoid meeting them; I thought that by avoiding them I would leave them in peace, but really I was the one who wanted to be left in peace, who didn't want to stay in front of them. However, I went to them, and their miraculous serenity struck me. While their son and his siblings were having fun on the slide, the mother said to me, 'What beautiful sunshine today!' In the following days, her words continued to echo in my ears: who can make a mother who knows her child is dying say, 'What beautiful sunshine'? She would be within her rights to curse everything. Instead, those two friends were happier than I! The encounter with them opened my eyes to the true value of the encounter with the Pope: I was there with many people to encounter the One today who could enable that mother to say, 'What beautiful sunshine!' I just have to be loyal."

It is not our imagination, but an event now, as we have always said, that causes the consciousness of our humanity to be reborn: "When I met Christ I discovered myself a man!"²⁶

2. "A hand stretched out to us now"

After the encounter, you might think everything would be settled. We have encountered Him... But we all know from experience that this is not so. The difficulty understanding, the inability to grasp the evidences remains even after the encounter. We have seen this in studying the third chapter of *Why the Church?* in which Fr. Giussani helps us become conscious of our difficulty in understanding "the meaning of words directly linked to the Christian experience."²⁷ So then, even at this level, there is a collapse of the evidences, a difficulty understanding even what has happened to us in such an overwhelming, persuasive, powerful, and unique way. For all of us, the encounter with Christ was the greatest evidence of our lives. Nothing compares. And yet, how often we shift away, distance ourselves from Christ, without even realizing it. And we discover in ourselves, after the encounter and in front of it, that darkening of the mind, that tendency to fall into decline, to get lost, to darken

²⁶ Cf. Marius Victorinus, "In Epistola ad Ephesio"["In the Letter to the Ephesians"], *Liber secundus*, in *Marii Victorini Opera exegetica*, cap. 4, v. 14.

²⁷ L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 27.

and become darkened, that we mentioned. We find within a facility for darkening, for getting lost, such that we no longer see the evident things, out of a kind of weakness, obtuseness. And the most surprising thing is that this can happen, and happens, even in our relationship with the Church and the Movement.

Here, too, we see again the link between the fact and the recognition of it, between the inexorable presence and the acknowledgement of it, of its meaning, its importance, in short, between truth and freedom.

The experience of the audience in Rome with the Pope had the pedagogical value of a gesture in which each of us could discover ourselves in action, verifying whether we were in that position of original attunement described in *Why the Church?* that enables us to understand, or whether we found ourselves blocked by an obtuseness, an insuperable difficulty in understanding. We all saw what happened in Saint Peter's Square, but everything did not end with that moment. Even before it ended, the various reactions and interpretations of the event and the Pope's words began. In that precise moment, each of us could see whether the experience we had had was clear and substantial enough to hold up against the various interpretations, within and without. Not even an event of these dimensions, participation in such an impressive and wholly human event, spared—or could ever spare—anyone the effort of taking stock of the experience and, from this, judging which of the interpretations at large gave an adequate account of the fact.

The experience we had in Rome documents that participation in the gesture is not the final word on the question, on what happens. As it was for the man born blind: his healing was not the end, but the starting point, the beginning of a battle to recognize the truth, the reality of what had happened to him. Therefore, leaving Saint Peter's Square, those who expected that an authoritative judgment “of the Movement” would resolve the questions and make everything clear for them, without their own effort, were able to verify that this is not so (in this case, as soon as the gesture ended, there was even an authoritative judgment in the form of our press release, but this was not enough).

Here we see the connection between the first and second point of the journey we are making: just as full clarity on our “I” is possible only through an event, an encounter, in the same way, in order to realize that after the encounter we have lost our way, we need the encounter to happen again, that is, the same event of the beginning, so deep is our need, so boundless is our “mortal weakness,” as the Liturgy says. We do not realize it on our own. We need another, a fully human presence.

How can we recognize this presence? By the fact that it decenters us from our reductions, from our distractions, and brings us back to the center, Christ. How does it decenter us and bring us back to Christ? By happening, simply happening. Christianity is always an event. Without it happening constantly, at the first hairpin bend in the road we already lose our way. This is why it is immensely naive to think we already know, as if “already knowing” could save us from moving off-center, going off track. We can take consolation in the fact that this also happened to Jesus’ Apostles: they, who were the first to have the exceptional encounter with the living presence of Christ, shifted off-center continually, just as we do.

a) The shifting of the disciples

In many episodes of the Gospel, we see how the disciples shifted off-center, and how Jesus continually brought them back.

We have quoted many times in these years the return of the Apostles after Jesus had sent them off to preach and announce the Kingdom. They returned all “pumped up” but already “shifted off-center,” focused on the wrong things. Jesus had to bring them back to the center: “Do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven;”²⁸ that is, because you have been chosen.

And again, “John said to him, ‘Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us.’” As you see, they, too, had some problems with self-referentiality... “Jesus replied, ‘Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us.’”²⁹

The episodes continue: “Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee approached Him with her sons and did Him homage, wishing to ask Him for something. He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She answered Him, ‘Command that these two sons of mine sit, one at Your right and the other at Your left, in Your kingdom.’” The disciples were not much different from us, therefore... “When the ten heard this, they became indignant at the two brothers.” And Jesus corrects them, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant.”³⁰

²⁸ *Lk* 10:20.

²⁹ *Mk* 9:38-40.

³⁰ *Mt* 20,20-21.24-26.

At times, the darkening of those who followed Jesus reached such a point that “when the days for His being taken up were fulfilled, He resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem, and He sent messengers ahead of Him. On the way, they entered a Samaritan village to prepare for His reception there, but they would not welcome Him because the destination of His journey was Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, ‘Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?’ Jesus turned and rebuked them.”³¹ To the very end, they continued to misplace their focus, away from Him.

We could spend the whole morning recounting episodes of this kind reported in the Gospel, up to the last scene. An instant after having confessed to Jesus that he loved Him (“Do you love Me?” “Yes.”) and being told, “Follow Me,” “Peter turned and saw the disciple following whom Jesus loved” and said to the Master, “‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘What if I want him to remain until I come? What concern is it of yours?’”³²

Without realizing it, without sensing it, the Apostles shifted away from the center, moved toward something else, set their hope on something else. What a consolation to see that we are like them and that Jesus is not surprised when they veer off course, but brings them back to the center, every time! “Even if your father and your mother should abandon you, I will never abandon you!”

b) Our shifting

The same thing happens to us. But beware, because the problem is not so much that we shift, but that we deny having shifted; this happens too. Therefore, just like the disciples, we need the encounter with a present presence that decenters us from ourselves and makes us return to the center, to Christ. This is what Giussani did with us. If we go back over our history, as we have just done with that of the disciples, we find ourselves in front of the same facts, the same shifting off-center, and also in the presence of a Man who constantly brings us back to the center.

The corrections we find throughout our history can help us verify to what degree the temptations identified by Fr. Giussani are also ours today, ones that concern us in the present. Let’s go back to a few moments in which Fr. Giussani brought us back to the center.

³¹ *Lk* 9:51-55.

³² *Jn* 21:17.19-22.

At the first Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in 1982, right after the Pontifical recognition, Fr. Giussani started talking and blew everyone away. Everyone was “pumped up,” we could say, because the Church had finally recognized the Movement. But Fr. Giussani confessed, “I am rather embarrassed and confused as I begin, because I keep remembering the names of my first students whom the Lord has brought here.”³³ To introduce the reason for his embarrassment, he quoted a line from John Paul II. “There will be no faithfulness... if in man’s heart there is not found a question for which only God offers the answer or, rather, for which only God is the answer.”³⁴ Then he observed, “From the school benches where we met, to the companionship today, [...] what surprises me this morning is the seriousness of this human entreaty, in all its need, in all its power, in all the precariousness of its consistence that it has in human life.” Here, therefore, is the reason he trembled: “This morning, what makes me tremble is the surprise that I am capable of distancing myself far away from myself, because my person is what it has to become: man is a plan, he is defined by the fulfillment of this plan. This thought this morning makes me recognize how I am normally far from what I, albeit intentionally, so insistently recuperate, re-meditate and throw out again to others for their meditation.” Then he judges the life of many of the Fraternity: “You have grown up, and while you have secured a human ability in your professions, there is the possibility of drifting away from Christ [...], our heart is, as it were, isolated or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart, except in particular circumstances like prayer, commitment, when there is a meeting, or School of Community to be led, etc.” But, as a consequence of this, there is a further distancing, “which reveals itself in an ultimate embarrassment amongst us—I am speaking of husbands and wives, too—in an ultimate mutual embarrassment” that “distances the ultimate aspect of my heart from the ultimate aspect of your heart, except in everyday actions (keeping house, looking after the children, etc.).”³⁵

Fifteen years before, on November 19, 1967, just two days after Catholic University of Milan was occupied by Communists, during the Advent Retreat of the *Memores Domini*, Fr. Giussani judged the university students’ reaction in those circumstances: “We so easily lacked

³³ L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” in *Traces*, February 2007 (<http://archivio.traces-cl.com/2007E/02/familiarity.html>).

³⁴ John Paul II, *Homily, Pastoral Visit to the Dominican Republic, Mexico and Bahamas*, January 26, 1979.

³⁵ L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” in *Traces*, February 2007, op.cit.

the intelligence of the situation and of things to do—that is a different intelligence, more acute, because it is an intelligence dictated by God’s point of view—because we do not await Him [we do not await God] day and night.” In fact, “if we had awaited Him day and night, the attitude of our students in their co-existence at Catholic University would have been different; it was so generous, but how true was it?” And, referring again to those who participated in the occupation, he said, “The truth of the gesture is not born of political cunning,” otherwise, “our discourse will be confused with that of the others and will become an instrument of the discourse of the others. We can do our things and, without realizing it, take on everyone else’s paradigm, the paradigm offered by everyone else. Our discourse and actions must be distinguished by our awaiting Him day and night.”³⁶

The occupation of Catholic University became for Fr. Giussani a precious opportunity for learning something crucial for himself. “Truly we are in the condition of being in the vanguard, the first of that profound change, that profound revolution that will never consist, and I repeat, never, in the outward appearance of a social reality that we demand come about.” In fact, “it will never happen in culture or in the life of society, if it does not happen [...] first in us. [...] If this self-sacrifice does not begin among us... Not an oblation to give, but [...] a revolution of self, in the conception of oneself [...] without preconception, without saving something first.”³⁷

In 1973, five days after the big conference at the Paladido of Milan, Fr. Giussani expressed his disapproval of what had happened, having learned that the most enthusiastic applause was for political motions that overshadowed what should have been a public gesture of Christian testimony. “What is privileged in us is not Christ, not the new fact: kids, we do not believe yet. Ideology has so invaded us that the things that should be secondary to communion—because it is natural that you have an opinion different from mine—become operatively prevalent, in the judgment you give and in the action that follows,” to the point that “communion no longer has weight.”³⁸

What predominated in Fr. Giussani when he corrected us this way? The event of Christ, the passion for Christ, His presence, the memory

³⁶ Advent Retreat of the *Memoires Domini*, Milan, November 19, 1967, in A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 391.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 392.

³⁸ Fourth School of Community, Milan, May 20, 1973, in A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 468.

of Him. He had not shifted from Christ! This is why he could point out every time that “our heart is, as it were, isolated or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart.”³⁹

c) Formalism and the stasis of the newness

There is a symptom—which is also a permanent risk—of this distancing from the reason everything began: formalism. From the earliest years of the Movement, Fr. Giussani was hypersensitive to the ever present danger of losing the freshness of the original experience, of the shifting of attention from the reason everything was born and people joined and became involved. They were attracted not by formulas or association rituals, not by an organization, but by a living event that bowled over their whole life. Therefore, he always perceived formalism as a mortal risk.

As early as 1962, when there was already great richness of expression underway with many initiatives, public conferences, publications, and so on, and GS was becoming stronger and stronger in Milan and other parts of Italy, Giussani, speaking to a group of leaders of the time, warned, “It is as if the original experience that made us enter has fossilized, crystallized.” In fact, he underlined, “You can be very faithful in using a method like a formula and passing it on, accepting it, and yet the method does not continue to inspire development: a method that does not develop a life is a sepulchral method, it is silicification, petrification.” This is the reason “leaders think of their responsibility as something ‘extrinsic’ and not as the ‘method of their life, first of all. For this reason it becomes a stress and a burden.”⁴⁰

What is the effect of “using the method like a formula”? The result is the “stasis of newness,” that is, the stiffening of life. For Giussani, “the capacity to change is the freedom of spirit,” and instead he observes that one is “arid in his capacity to find the ever new correspondence: things do not hold still an instant.” Therefore, he reminded them that “newness is enriched by those who come for the first time, by those who do not have our ideas,” and that precisely their presence “obliges us to newness in the meditation, in what is also in us, to set up things for them. Instead we [...] set up everything as if everyone was with us (that is, with our ideas), forgetting them.” On the contrary, “our method needs authentic people, engaged in our humanity, this is our defect.” Therefore, he has only one invitation: “Put yourselves inside

³⁹ L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” in *Traces*, February 2007, op.cit.

⁴⁰ A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 254.

the experience, with the hypothesis of GS: God became flesh: He had eyes, bones, muscles....”⁴¹

On many occasions, Fr. Giussani returned to the risk of formalism, for example during the Equipe meeting of university students in February 1983. “Formalism [...] normally means adhering to forms, but these forms are not proposals, that is, they do not become what they were originally: a proposal for life. What changes in our life through this action we are engaged in? This gathering of people around the CP for the elections, what does it change in our life?”⁴² This observation, which Giussani made in a talk, is important for him. “What appears as difficulty in making things become experience, is actually formalism in adhering to the community.” In fact, he explains: “You are not all set because you do School of Community. You are not all set because you participate in Holy Mass with your priest. You are not all set because you hand out flyers or hang up posters. This can be the formality with which you pay your dues for belonging to this social reality. But when does all this become experience? When it says something to you and moves something in you (‘movement’) [...]. Therefore, our first danger is formalism, repeating words or repeating gestures, but the words or gestures do not shake you or make you think twice, that is, move something in you, illuminate a bit more your gaze upon yourself, nourish a conviction about a value (for example, that you should throw yourself into working for the elections because it is a need for your humanity, otherwise a measure for your humanity is lacking).”⁴³

Also, our presence in our sphere of life can be formal. “What does ‘formalism of presence’ mean? The presence is born of a framework, therefore it is no longer a presence, it is reduced to gestures ripped from an organism, not belonging to an organism. Our presence is born of a framework: we have to do this, this, this, that is, a bundle of initiatives. Even the way you invite your classmate is formulaic, so much so that you invite him for the three days of Easter and then you abandon him, or rather, already during the three days you abandon him. Instead, a presence that is not formal must gush forth from awareness, from throwing yourself in and risking: the presence in your sphere of life is a problem of your person. You do not adhere to the interest of the

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 254-255.

⁴² L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)* [People without a Homeland], Bur, Milan, 2008, p. 193.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

others; it is the problem of Christ, whether Christ is important at all for your person. The true problem is the formalism of faith. [...] You do not start out from the awareness of Christ as your life, and therefore, as the life of the world, and therefore, of the world as your life.”⁴⁴

But that distancing, that shifting and the formalism in belonging, produce visible consequences:

1) Tiredness, loss of the gusto of the new life

In Campitello on September 6, 1975, Fr. Giussani said: “I’ve seen among you many people of good will, but who are ultimately tired, even ill-at-ease. [...] If we are blocked by weariness, it means that we are still immature in our perception of the reason for our living and all that we do. This week has forced us to recognize that something is missing: what is missing is the foundational question.”⁴⁵

And two months later, during the CLU Beginning Day, he observed, “When we entered into the university [as a CL presence] there was a moment, or moments, when the yearning, the desire or even the passion for a new reality, for something new, animated us. Now we are living in the university without this gusto, the gusto of new life.”⁴⁶

These are permanent risks. A friend writes: “When we learned that we were invited to come to the audience with the Pope, even those of us who live abroad, something that had never happened before in 12 years of life in Nairobi (not even to participate in Fr. Giussani’s funeral), I realized that it was a very important encounter for the Movement and that we were at a ‘historical turning point,’ if all of us were asked to participate. One evening, we were talking about the importance of this gesture. A friend took me aside and confided that she did not intend to participate because of her repulsion for mass gatherings. Then she referred to all the difficulties, such as the cost of the ticket, the long trip, the long wait and the lines to enter Saint Peter’s Square, etc. ‘But in the beginning, when we encountered the Movement, these difficulties didn’t stop us,’ I responded quickly. In the beginning we were dominated by the desire to stay with Him, wherever He went. And so we talked about the many ‘crowded’ gatherings we had participated in, and that had moved us. ‘I don’t want to be so old that I’m worried about sparing myself effort. I desire the affection for His body that moved me in the beginning!’ When I arrived

⁴⁴ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)*[*From Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., pp. 109-110.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

in Saint Peter's Square, meeting all my friends without having planned it, hearing our beautiful songs, seeing Carrón was like finding again 'His' living body and being like a child in his mother's arms. The Pope told us: 'Keep alive the flame of the memory of that first encounter and be free!' Where do I find a greater tenderness for my life than this? The first encounter has happened again, like when I was 15 years old and always ready, with my backpack on my back, to follow Him wherever He went."

Now, what is the newness to which we are called to live and that others can also see? Fr. Giussani says it is essential that "the people around us, in our faculties, in our courses, not just see, as they see now, our membership in Communion and Liberation, that is, our following initiatives, gatherings, instruments to use, but that they see the event of Communion and Liberation in me and among us, see this change in me, see this unity that they can fight furiously, but in the end cannot help but wish for themselves: a rock against which the gates of hell could not prevail, as Christ would say to Peter." For Giussani, if this does not happen, "Communion and Liberation really becomes a political party, and nothing else. It becomes an association, fervid with initiatives, but it wears you down because you find it difficult to love it more than a certain number of months."⁴⁷

2) Confusion about the presence

In 1976, Fr. Giussani concluded the famous Equipe meeting in Riccione, Italy, with these words: "What needs to come is not 'a presence of our community' at the university, but 'a new heart in each of us,' your maturity, brother; the explosion or the dawn of your Christian maturity, of a new faith and passion. The impact on the university and society, the help to the Church are consequences that God will establish as He establishes the times of history. What interests us is this humanity that already lives in some and cannot but pass to all, because each of us would feel badly if one of us did not reach this new stage, where the panorama of the world, of oneself, of daily banalities, of your companion and friend, is entirely different. This is already a fragmentary presentiment in all of us, like when the sun rises: a new day not in the other world, but in this world. And, therefore, it must become a battle that is ever beginning and never finished in us, because the resistance we find in the university is the enormous objectification of the resistance we find within ourselves."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

3) Confusion about the nature of the Movement

In that same month of September 1976, during a gathering of responsables in Collevaleza, Italy, Fr. Giussani set before everyone the discomfiting snapshot of what happens when formalism prevails: “The Movement remains something tremendous: instead of mobilizing life and converting it, it is a mountain of conditionings.” On the contrary, he added, the Movement is “an Event to create, not an organization to think up; [...] you are the one in play.” Here, Fr. Giussani used no half measures: “The essence of the question does not mean that there have to be 50 of us. Two will suffice.”⁴⁹

The consequences mentioned before are a permanent risk and therefore demand *continual conversion*, as Fr. Giussani said to teachers in the Movement gathered in Assisi in 1978: “All the revolutions and all the reforms after a while become formal and formalism dominates, absorbs, entombs the original impetus. *Continual conversion* is needed, and then the revolution remains permanent. It is the utopia of *Lotta continua*, in the literal sense, but the utopia for the followers of that formula, ‘dear comrades,’ for us is Christ in history. We cannot be Christian teachers, a movement of faith, Communion and Liberation, if not in the continuity of an openness to conversion that is the attitude that must determine us every morning. Christian life becomes presence only within a continual consciousness of what one is: and this is the one continual struggle possible.”⁵⁰

Retracing these moments in our history in the light of the Pope’s words on March 7th helps us to recognize our boundless need, makes us feel more the openness to conversion, the desire not to “lose life in living,”⁵¹ not to lose the freshness of the charism—which for us is the freshness of life—with which we went on pilgrimage to the Pope. This is our urgent need. It is all the greater the more we are aware of the greatness of the gift that has been given to us and that we are grateful to have received.

This urgent need facilitates our recognition of Christ. In fact, faith is for the poor in spirit, as we heard again in Saint Peter’s Square: “Andrew, John, and Simon felt themselves looked at deep down, known

⁴⁹ A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*Life of Fr. Giussani*], op. cit., pp. 485-486.

⁵⁰ *Agli educatori. L’adulto e la sua responsabilità* [*To Educators, Adults and Their Responsibility*], Quaderni, 7, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 1990, p. 52.

⁵¹ T.S. Eliot, “Where is the life we have lost in living?” *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1st edition (September 25, 1991), p. 147.

intimately, and this generated in them a surprise, a wonder that immediately bound them to Him.”⁵²

It is very striking in the light of our history to re-read the words the Pope spoke to us in Saint Peter’s Square: “After 60 years, the original charism has not lost its freshness and vitality. However, remember that the center is not the charism. There is only one center: Jesus, Jesus Christ!”⁵³ Fr. Giussani indefatigably called us to this, bringing us back from what we thought was the charism to what it is in its original nature. We learned the charism from the way Giussani decentered us from the reductions we had succumbed to in our history. We began to understand what it was, not from a theological discussion of the nature of the charism, but from a reflection on its realization in history. How many times Fr. Giussani had to decenter us! For this reason, as the Pope told us, “Faithfulness to the charism does not mean ‘fossilizing’ it”—“silicification,” said Giussani—or “writing it on parchment paper and framing it. The reference to the inheritance that Fr. Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of memories, of decisions made, of rules of conduct. It certainly means faithfulness to tradition, but faithfulness to tradition [...] ‘means keeping the flame alive,’” not losing the gusto of living, otherwise what do we care about it? “Keep alive the flame of the memory of that first encounter, and be free!”⁵⁴

In this way, we can re-read not only what Pope Francis told us, but also what all the popes have urged. Think of John Paul II. In 1985, he said to the priests of the Movement: “When a movement is recognized by the Church, it becomes a privileged instrument for a personal and ever new adherence to the mystery of Christ. Never allow the parasite of habit, of routine, of old age to lodge within your participation! Continually renew the discovery of the charism which has fascinated you and it will more powerfully lead you to make yourselves servants of that one power which is Christ the Lord!”⁵⁵ And in his 2004 letter to Fr. Giussani he wrote: “I am pleased to express to you, and to all those belonging to the Movement, the wish that this important jubilee might make each one refer back to the generative experience from which the Movement arose, renewing the enthusiasm of the origins.

⁵² Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis’ Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Message to the Priests Participating in a Course of Spiritual Exercises Promoted by “Communion and Liberation,”* September 12, 1985, Castel Gandolfo, Rome, Italy.

For it is important to remain faithful to the charism of the beginnings so as to respond effectively to the expectations and challenges of the times.”⁵⁶ What is documented in the Apostles’ experience with Jesus and ours with Giussani and the popes? That the initial encounter is not enough, that what we already know is not enough for keeping us on the road. We need a presence in the present that decenters us from ourselves and brings us back to Christ. We need the continual re-happening of the first encounter, as Fr. Giussani always reminded us: “The event is not just something that happened and that started everything; it is what awakens the present, defines the present, gives content to the present, makes possible the present. What you know or what you have becomes experience if what you know or have is something that is given to us now: there is a hand that offers it to us now, there is a face that comes forward now, there is the blood that flows now, there is a resurrection that happens now. Outside of this ‘now’ there is nothing!”, neither what we know, nor what we have. Nothing. Everything is nothingness. “Outside of this ‘now’ there is nothing!” We should all post these words up in our houses. “Outside this ‘now’ there is nothing!” We know this well: there is only aridity, even with everything that we know. But this “knowledge” does not give us even a millimeter, an instant of that heart surge of the beginning, because “our ‘I’ cannot be moved, emotion-swept, that is, changed, unless by something contemporaneous: an event. Christ is something that is happening to me now.”⁵⁷

And, with all his paternity, Fr. Giussani warns us: “Let’s be careful that this *correction*—because this is the definition of the work we are doing—not find us on the defensive. ‘The educative process begins where the space for defensiveness is lost.’ The most beautiful thing in the world is to learn. And the thing that everyone wants to learn from those who lead is his capacity to learn. ‘*Living means that through your experience others live.*’”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Letter to Monsignor Luigi Giussani, Founder of the Movement of “Communion and Liberation,”* February 22, 2004, p. 2.

⁵⁷ Cf. Archivio Storico dell’Associazione Ecclesiale Memores Domini (ASAEMD), documento ciclostilato intitolato «Dedicazione 1992 Rimini, 2-4 Ottobre 1992». [Historical Archive of the Ecclesiastical Association Memores Domini (ASAEMD), mimeographed document entitled “Dedication 1992 Rimini, October 2-4, 1992”] A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Fr. Giussani]*, op. cit., p. 851.

⁵⁸ *Agli educatori. L’adulto e la sua responsabilità [To Educators. Adults and Their Responsibility]*, op. cit., p. 49.

3. The generation of adults

Only in this way, that is, if we allow ourselves to learn, if we let ourselves be decentered, can we respond to the task the Pope has assigned us. What is the task? To be the “arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an ‘outward bound’ Church.” How can we fulfill this mandate? The Pope gave us the answer: only “centered in Christ.”⁵⁹

This is exactly the same for Fr. Giussani: “But when we are wide open to what has happened and happens in the world, i.e., to Christ, [...] then the heart opens wide.”⁶⁰ “To follow Christ, to love Christ in everything: this is what must be acknowledged as the principal characteristic of our journey.”⁶¹ And again, “We center our lives on the Presence [...]: the man Jesus.”⁶² And finally: “*If you take away this Presence, everything turns to ashes.*”⁶³ To indicate our slippage, he also uses another expression: “Our bourgeois nature is obvious to the naked eye. We are not radical in our perception of the relationship with Christ.”⁶⁴

Yesterday as today, there is the need to generate adults in the faith. This is the greatest urgency. Fr. Giussani said clearly: “What we are seeking in all that we do is a more lively faith and a more intense, effective way of proposing it in the world.”⁶⁵ There is nothing more urgent. Perhaps today it has become more obvious, because the facts of Paris and the persecutions of these recent months have set in front of everyone our greatest challenge: the great nothingness and profound void that dominates life, to the point of exploding into violence. This is the challenge for us and for others. What can respond to this void? Not some strategy, a re-hashing of contents or frameworks of behavior. The problem is not primarily ethical, but cognitive, and concerns the incapacity to recognize the evidence that we spoke of at the beginning, that weakening of the sense of the “I,” of the consciousness of self. If we do not understand it,

⁵⁹ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis' Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

⁶⁰ L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, page 132.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁶² L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino [Man and His Destiny]*, Marietti 1820, Genoa, 1999, pp. 81-82.

⁶³ L. Giussani, *È, se opera*, suppl. a *30Giorni [He Is If He Changes, supplement to 30Days]*, no. 2, 1994, p. 80.

⁶⁴ L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)[From Utopia to Presence]*, op. cit., p. 61.

⁶⁵ *Agli educatori. L'adulto e la sua responsabilità [To Educators: Adults and Their Responsibility]*, op. cit., p. 49.

we move mistakenly as well as uselessly. Fr. Giussani helped us on this point, as well. “In a society like this, we cannot revolutionize anything with words, associations, or institutions, but only with *life*, because life is a great fact against which political ideologies will never prevail.”⁶⁶

And a few years later, in the book of interviews with him conducted by Giovanni Testori, he said: “It is as if it were no longer possible to do crusades or movements... Organized crusades, organized movements. A movement is born precisely from the reawakening of the person. [...] Precisely the person [...] is the rallying point. This is how the concept of movement is born, to my mind. The greatest social value now for a counterattack is precisely the ideal of movement, which seems to have neither head nor tail; you don’t know how it happens. In fact, its birth-place is in the most hapless and defenceless particle there can be: the person [...]. The capital problem is to rekindle people’s ownership of themselves.” He was judging the inadequacy of many ideological and political “movements” of the time, but also a certain way of conceiving the experience of our movement, which was slipping into the same frameworks and responding on the same terrain. If the true problem is to reawaken, to regenerate the person, “the place of a renewal of the person cannot be a discourse, a debate.”⁶⁷

How can this renewal happen? “This is the point to face. Exteriorly, the only answer is to encounter a different presence, to run up against a different presence. This presence can act as reagent, as a catalyst for latent energies.”⁶⁸ Therefore, as he said at the 1987 Synod: “It is not so much that verbal or cultural repetition of the annunciation is missing [while we think that it suffices to repeat solid doctrine, in order to avoid ambiguity. If this consoles us!]. Man today expects perhaps unconsciously the experience of the encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a present reality that their life is changed.” This is what is needed. Only this moves people, according to Fr. Giussani. “What will shake today’s man is a human impact, an event that echoes the initial event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry down. I mean to stay at your house today’ (cf. *Lk* 19:5).”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁶⁷ L. Giussani-G. Testori, *Il senso della nascita [The Meaning of Birth]*, Bur, Milan, 2013, p. 112.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

⁶⁹ L. Giussani, *L'avvenimento cristiano. Uomo Chiesa Mondo [The Christian Event. The Human Person Church World]*, Bur, Milan, 2003, pp. 23-24 (in translation at http://english.clone.org/default.asp?id=560&id_n=14536).

A friend writes me: “One evening, some friends invited me to participate in a public conference organized by associations of parents of children affected by rare diseases. They knew that for 33 years I have had at home children with profound handicaps. They added that it would be a roundtable discussion with three other people, among them an atheist writer whose son has grave psychological and physical problems. I decided to accept and asked to have a chance to read a book by this author. I read the book that he wrote about his son. A first reading showed all the helplessness of this father, as if there were nothing to give him a glimmer of hope. I was struck by the detachment with which he spoke of his son. He went so far as to say: ‘I can’t even stand the odor of my son!’ When I finished reading, I was assailed with the doubt that I could face such a desperate situation. Then I thought that the entire book was not just desperation, but behind those pages was a man crying out, needy for everything, and that I had encountered One who could respond to this need. I decided to go because I, too, am that man: an infinite need. The evening of the roundtable arrived, with an audience of about a hundred people I didn’t know. The moderator decided to start with me. I talked about myself, about my handicapped children, the sense of emptiness and betrayal that consumed me in the first years of their lives, the sense of bewilderment that invaded my heart because my desire for happiness would never be fulfilled. I also talked about the evening when I became aware of the glad eyes of my wife, of the adventure that my life became that from that moment on, of the beauty and the gift that these children of mine are for me now. When I finished it was the writer’s turn. He said, ‘I don’t know how to have the hope that I heard from my friend’—we had just met a few moments before and he already called me *friend*—‘but I desire it, starting this evening I desire it. I had prepared a talk’—and he showed the sheets with the text of his talk—‘but I’ve decided not to go ahead with it’—he folded up the sheets and put them away—‘because from this evening on, I desire only one thing: to go live with my new friend, close to him, to learn how he can live this way. This is all I care about.’ He stopped talking, and an emotion-laden silence fell upon the room. Something great had happened. Then he asked me, ‘The thing that hurts me is the fear that my son is not happy.’ From there on, we had a dialogue, as if we had been friends forever. At the end, the writer simply told me: ‘Perhaps for the first time in my life, I have looked at myself and not seen a failure.’ And I wondered, ‘What does this man see, that not even I who spoke

to him see? Jesus has given me a new friend for my journey. We will get together soon for dinner, also with some of the audience members who asked to meet again.”

As we can see, the answer to the situation of difficulty in which we find ourselves is to encounter a different presence. It is not necessary to go into long explanations. Then as now, only the testimony of a changed life can evoke curiosity about Christianity: seeing the attainment of that fullness you desire, but you do not know how to reach. There is a need for new women and men who create places of life where each person can be invited to carry out the verification that the first two on the banks of the Jordan did: “Come and see.”⁷⁰

The Movement is this place, a friendship that is born of the attraction evoked by a human impact, a place in which a new, true, fulfilled personality can arise. “The community is not a cluster of people to carry out initiatives; it is not the attempt to construct a party organization. *The community is the locus of the effective construction of our person*, i.e., of a mature faith.”⁷¹ If it were not for this, what meaning would the Fraternity or your Fraternity group have? How many times Fr. Giussani corrected us on this point, to help us recover the originality of the experience of the Movement!

Here arises the problem: how is it that people are generated who are such “presences” that they shake up the others? Is the Movement lived in such a way as to be “*the locus of the effective construction of our person*, i.e., of a mature faith”? This question has marked our history, and Fr. Giussani has always reminded us of its crucial importance. In the context of a discussion with the responsables of the Movement in 1976, he said: “The grave problem is the difficulty with which the adult emerges. Not in the ecclesiastical or profession competence, but in the faith.”⁷² And he wondered, “What is the cause?” Fr. Giussani’s point of view in posing this question is very telling: “We are interested in how the course of the Movement, precisely as a pedagogical reality, promotes and creates this difficulty, rather than promoting the growth

⁷⁰ *Jn* 1:46.

⁷¹ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [*From Utopia to Presence (1975-1978)*] op. cit., p. 58.

⁷² Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione (FCL), Archivio storico del Movimento di Comunione e Liberazione (AMCL) [Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Historical archive of the Movement of Communion and Liberation], fasc. CL/81, Scuola Responsabili Colleva- lenza 17/19 settembre 1976 [School of Responsibles in Colleva lenza, September 17-19, 1976].

of adults in the faith.”⁷³ Giussani adopted the outlook of questioning the way they conceived of and lived the Movement, that of a profound correction.

To understand the reason for the difficulty in bringing forth adults in the faith, he identified first of all the characteristics of the adult: “Adults are characterized by a capacity to face everything without being automatically alienated by what they face. [...] The second characteristic of adults is that they generate. [...] Therefore, what is missing as a general face is the personality of faith.”⁷⁴

What is the reason for this lack? Fr. Giussani went straight to the heart of the problem. The failure to reach maturation of faith, the failure to generate adults is due to “a very grave deterioration of the method: what is left of the method is a cage of words and formulas: the genius is missing, dried up. [...] This is the fundamental point of the Movement: adults do not grow because of a deterioration of our method, which is that of experience, participation in an event, and not consent to a discourse.”⁷⁵

That among us there are people like the man who wrote that letter I quoted means that this is the place where they can live and grow. The problem is whether we choose to participate in that event that is happening now, because, as we have just said, the “genius of the method” is having put experience at the center, that is, participation in an event that has happened to us and that is happening to us now.

What generates adults in the faith is not consent to a discourse, repetition of formulas or forms: it is the participation in an event, in a living presence that bowls me over now, that engages me now. The Movement is this event or it is not. The word “experience” is a consequence of this: you can speak of experience (as participation in an event) only if Christianity, the Movement is an event of life.

Therefore, the genius of the method is one and the same as the genius of Christianity, Catholicism: it is the genius of the Incarnation. “There is no human value unless it is within an existential fact: Christ, a man, a man who lived in that time and in that space. All the rage and distancing and hostility and extraneousness to Catholicism are against this. It is the problem of the Church. Everybody respects Christ, loves Him, even Gramsci: but that Christ coincides, that the value “Christ”

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

is a reality in space and time, called Church, that is, a reality of people like you and me, this is intolerable. If it is a reality of people, there is a hierarchy, there is diversity, because one is closer and the other is farther off, one is more intelligent and the other less so, one has a role and the other does not. We do not find Christ in our thoughts, in our sentiments: we find Him in this thing, outside ourselves, that is the Church. This is the genius of our Movement: having taken this fundamental law of Christianity and having made it method–method!⁷⁶

“The Movement is a heart, a body, eyes, clothes, hair that are realized in existence. The Movement is lived existence.”⁷⁷ As we have been reiterating in these months in School of Community, the Church is a life that reaches us now.

If, as we have seen, the generation of new people, of people who are “presence” is crucial, the one problem is the maturity of the faith, that is, that the initial accent becomes mature. In fact, faith establishes our identity, our new face in life and the world: “*Our identity is being one with Christ.* [...] All this must become mature; to this we must aspire with all our being and all that we do. But we [...] are still confused.” Why? “Everything has remained still at the beginning.” Here Fr. Giussani was drastic: “The moment has come in which we can no longer bear up if that initial accent does not become mature: we can no longer bear as Christians the enormous mountain of work, responsibility, and toil to which we are called. In fact, people do not draw together around initiatives; what draws them together is the true accent of a presence that is given by the Reality that is among us and that we have ‘within’: Christ and His mystery made visible in our unity.”⁷⁸

In a crucial moment of our history, which Fr. Giussani would later indicate as a new beginning for the whole Movement (the Riccione Equipe, in 1976), he forcefully reaffirmed his fundamental concern. Without that correction, we would have been swept away together with all our attempts to “do something.” (“The need to demonstrate that the Christian fact demonstrated a capacity for cultural revolution,” after 1968, “left the question of the method still in the shadows. While the Christian fact was sensed in its integrity, we felt forced to slide

⁷⁶ L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [From *Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., pp. 367-368.

⁷⁷ L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo* [From *Temperament, a Method*], Bur, Milan, 2002, p. 380.

⁷⁸ L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)*[From *Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., pp. 54, 57-58.

into the cultural, social, and political consequences.”⁷⁹ “The goal of the community is to *generate adults in the faith*” because “the world needs adults in the faith, not good professionals or competent workers, because society is full of these, but it is highly questionable whether they are capable of creating humanity.”⁸⁰ Each of us can test this where we are, where we live and work every day.

What is the test? “The truth of the faith is a different humanity, let’s not forget, such a humanity that if the Movement did not exist, this humanity would create it, because you could not help but act this way. If you have a humanity within, in moving you would move this way, in thinking you would think in this way, your heart would beat this way. [...] The formula is to have such a substance of humanity that if nothing existed, our move where we are (family, courtyard, daily life, school, university, the world of work, the ecclesiastical world), the outcome of our move would be an act of movement; we would create it. The subject is not a structure, the subject is not a discourse, the subject is not an organization. The subject is a different humanity.”⁸¹

To call us to the truth of our experience, the Lord continually sends us people, causes facts of a different humanity to take place before our eyes. “The new people who join our companionship are like a breath of fresh air in a room full of old people, those who have a long history [...] in a room where the air is stale. [...] These new people bring, as it were, what we certainly had—at least as a glimmer, a hint—in the beginning, i.e., the desire for the way, stronger than the attachment to the wonderful things that arise in us along the way.”⁸² And yet many times we do not realize it, and instead of learning from them we continue to expect that some interpretation of ours will enable us to get out of the cage of suffocating circumstances. “We are greatly attached to the many things that the road prompts; we manage these prompts [...]—thoughts to be had, opinions to be built up, things to be done. And in the meantime, Christ remains farther and farther away from our heart; in other words, our person does not change.”⁸³

⁷⁹ FCL, AMCL, fasc. CL/81, Scuola Responsabili Collevaleza 17/19 settembre 1976 [School for Responsibles, Collevaleza, Italy September 17-19, 1976].

⁸⁰ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [From Utopia to Presence], op. cit., p. 58.

⁸¹ FCL, Documentazione audiovisiva [audiovisual documentation], Diaconia diocesana di CL, Milan, 6 ottobre 1976 [Diocesan Diaconia of CL, Milan, Italy, October 6, 1976].

⁸² L. Giussani, *L’opera del movimento. La Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione* [The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation], op. cit., p. 130.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

Thus it can happen that Fr. Giussani's criticism of the reactions to Saint John Paul II's first encyclical, *Redemptor Hominis* (in 1994, on the 15th anniversary of its publication), applies to us too. "Other Catholic associations were more struck by the documents on abortion, artificial insemination, and divorce than by the encyclical on Christ the Redeemer of Man."⁸⁴

In the beginning it was certainly not so. In fact, the birth of GS in 1954 happened when a religion teacher climbed the few steps up to the Berchet High School entrance, as Fr. Giussani recounted about himself, "with his heart full of the thought that Christ is everything for the life of man. He is heart of the life of man."⁸⁵ In later years, something was obscured, and then came the wave of 1968, with all the disorientation that Giussani denounced (we saw this in last year's Spiritual Exercises).

The journey of the Church and thus of the Movement always runs the risk of being obscured, but in certain moments this becomes graver, more consequential. Not all moments are equal, and the genius of Giussani was also to grasp the crucial moments and set a change of course, that is, a return to the origins. The change of course in 1976 was crucial, as we have seen and underlined other times. It concerned, above all, the relationship with the reality of the university students and responded to the long-term repercussions of 1968.

If the capital question is to recover experience as method, what does Fr. Giussani's constant testimony teach us? The method through which the community generates adults in the faith, that is, people with a mature consciousness that Christ is the center of life, "is indicated by the first word that we used in the history of our Movement [note his parenthesis] (that we have forgotten, even when we repeat it, because we do not repeat it seriously): 'following' [*sequela*]."⁸⁶ The first word!

"Jesus turned and saw them following Him and said to them, 'What are you looking for?' They said to Him, 'Rabbi, where are you staying?' He said to them, 'Come, and you will see.'⁸⁷ And again, "As He was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who is called Peter, and his brother Andrew, casting a net into the sea; they were fishermen. He said to them, 'Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.'⁸⁸

⁸⁴ L. Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù* [*The Attraction of Jesus*], Bur, Milan, 1999, p. 79.

⁸⁵ A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [*Life of Fr. Giussani*], op. cit., p. 162.

⁸⁶ L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [*From Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., p. 58.

⁸⁷ *Jn* 1:38-39.

⁸⁸ *Mt* 4:18-19.

Pope Francis reminded us of this on March 7th: “None of the men there, including Matthew, avid for money, could believe the message of that finger pointing at him, the message of those eyes looking at him with mercy and choosing him to be His follower.”⁸⁹

Following has a precise meaning for Fr. Giussani. For him, the encounters of Jesus in the Gospel are the model of a kind of following that generates: “*To follow* means to become one with persons who live the faith more maturely, *to become involved in a living experience*, that ‘passes’ [...] its dynamism and its gusto into us.” There is nothing mechanical or intellectual about it. In fact, “this dynamism and this gusto pass into us not through our reasoning, not at the conclusion of a logical process [how often we demand “explanations” from others so we can be certain in front of circumstances, or ask for “press releases” that make our discourse “pass” on this or that!], but, as it were, by osmosis: it is a new heart that communicates itself to ours; it is the heart of another that begins to move inside our own life.”⁹⁰

This is the point at which the figure and the urgent need of the “master” (the *maestro*) emerges. Without magisteriality there is no possibility of following, and you would only follow your thoughts (and consequent projects) or the ideas of a leader, but without the security of being on the road marked by the Mystery: “Following means identifying with the criteria of the ‘*maestro*,’ with his values, with what he communicates to us, not binding ourselves to the person who in and of himself is ephemeral. In this *sequela*, the *sequela* of Christ is hidden and lives. Not the attachment to the person, but the *sequela* of Christ is the reason for the *sequela* among us. The friendship among us must tend toward this nature of being a *maestro*, because a true friend is one who, with discretion and respect, helps the other toward her or his destiny.”⁹¹

For that matter, this is the method Christ chose to continue His presence in the world: the Church, a guided companionship. “You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church.”⁹² Authority has the value of something that establishes, that founds, one of genesis: without authority there is no community, there is no people. As in the example of Fr. Giussani, there is no Christian journey without a rela-

⁸⁹ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis’ Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

⁹⁰ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978) [From Utopia to Presence]*, op. cit., p. 59.

⁹¹ Cf Julián Carrón, “Self Awareness: The Reawakening Point,” in *Traces*, no. 4, 2012 p. III (http://www.clonline.org/articoli/eng/Traces0412_pageOne.pdf).

⁹² *Mt* 16:13-19.

tionship with authority: “The people who are truly authoritative for us are those who involve us with their heart, with their dynamism and their gusto born of faith” and not with their own capacity or power. In fact, “you recognize right away those who are authoritative and responsible; they are people who you prefer because you sense they are closer to your search for Christian maturity, your passion to live the community, and your journey. The criterion of preference is not, as usually happens, individualistic or instinctive; it is not triggered by a passing gusto or a fervid programmatic interest, but because of the ideal that you perceive they live or at least desire more intensely.”⁹³

Each of you must decide what you prefer for yourself: to love the truth more than yourself, and therefore follow, or to remain bound to your own opinions and lose yourself on the way. “The journey toward truth and destiny is not at the mercy of what you or others think, or what the society you live in thinks. It is objective: it is not a matter of imagining or inventing, but of following. [...] Notwithstanding all our fragility, incoherence, and weakness, the journey to the truth can be full of peace if it is the following of someone as an affective decision toward a destiny that makes you truly human.”⁹⁴

Living this way is simple, within our reach. In fact, “if you desire the truth, you do not let yourself be stopped by the defects of the person to follow, who is like the coffer, but the gold inside, the truth, is another thing”. Instead, if you do not desire the truth, you stop at appearances and then the form, that is the coffer, becomes a casket. “Authority,” Fr. Giussani underlined, “is an experience that lives. It is not warm words or close relationships. The truth has an absolute objectivity. This is why there is no affection among us. There is no affection among us because there is no following, and the fulcrum is authority. There is no affection if not in the recognition of a truth that is given to us. The rest is sentimentalism and intimism. Human affection, the one that is constructive, adherence to Being, is derived from the judgment of value.”⁹⁵

But adherence to what you have recognized as true is never automatic. It is not like adding up a sum, because “it has a criterion, an

⁹³ L. Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [*From Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., pp. 59-60.

⁹⁴ L. Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno* [*The Sense of God and Modern Man*], op. cit., p. 127.

⁹⁵ FCL, AMCL, fasc. CL/81, Scuola Responsabili Collovalenza 17/19 settembre 1976 [School for Responsibles, Collovalenza, September 17-19, 1976].

air cushion down inside: freedom.”⁹⁶ The Pope called us to this in his speech in Rome: “Fr. Giussani would never forgive you if you lost your freedom.”⁹⁷ Each of us is always called to engage with all our freedom. Fr. Giussani never spared us the use of freedom, as he said to university students in 1976: “Do you want the definite little instruments, the things to do? This was acceptable for high school, and even then only up to a certain point.”⁹⁸ Growing up, “the substance is no longer in the mass of people walking together, the initiatives to undertake, but it is you, or it is nothing [terrible!]. It is a matter of an identity and a method: a method for facing life and for expressing this identity. This is the adult. Adults are creators inasmuch as their substance is their identity, and not the things they do or say.”⁹⁹

Magisteriality and following; contemporaneousness and following; event and freedom: these are the poles that summarize the journey. The freshness and vitality of Fr. Giussani’s charism lie in this capacity to constantly reawaken the personal conscience to the point of moving the person’s freedom. Here we have the verification of its importance for the life of the Church and the world. “The capital problem is that of rekindling people’s ownership of themselves. [...] It cannot be a discourse, a debate. The true problem is the rebirth of the person. This is a Sisyphean undertaking, because even if everyone desires this rebirth, before being free from the mechanism that crushes everything and dissolves everything—because it desecrates everything—, before being free of this mechanism, [...] they must first have found themselves. In this sense it is a word that must run, that must communicate itself, that allows no sleep, that must catalyze hope. It is an undertaking whose original point is capillary, in the ultimate meaning of the word, because it is in the individual. Abandoned people, people torn from the sacredness of their origin, of their development, are bewildered because they are manipulated. How can they be torn away from the terrible force of gravity, from the terrible force of catalysis of the instruments of that mechanism?”¹⁰⁰ This is a judgment on the human condition that today has become more dramatically true, a question about the possibility of redemption that has become even more urgent.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis’ Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

⁹⁸ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [*From Utopia to Presence*], op. cit., p. 76.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁰ L. Giussani, -G. Testori, *Il senso della nascita* [*The Meaning of Birth*], op. cit., pp. 112-113.

Christ claims to be the answer to this original and capillary point that is the individual human person. Aware of the unbounded need of our heart, let us cry out, pray to the One who can restore our person. “Omnipotent God, look upon humanity, exhausted by its mortal weakness, and grant that we may live again through the passion of Your only Son,”¹⁰¹ we prayed in this time of Easter. If we were distracted when we heard these words, now that we have listened to them again, let us be more conscious of their value for us.

Thus, made aware again of our need, let us ask God to continue to have mercy on us and to give us new life. To call us to the truth of our experience, the Lord continually gives us new friends, like the writer encountered at the conference, a way of telling us that it is still possible for you. Imagine what life would have been like for the Pharisees who thought they already knew everything if they had followed the new ones, John and Andrew. What a revolution! The same can happen among us.

¹⁰¹ Opening prayer of the Easter Monday Mass according to the Roman Rite.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: 1 Pt 5:5b-14; Psalm 88 (89); Mk 16:15-20

**HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL GERHARD LUDWIG MÜLLER
PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH**

Dearest friends:

First of all, let me express my joy at being able to be here with you! Or rather, I should say, my gladness at being here with you, as your founder, Fr. Giussani, might specify, because full joy is only in the definitive victory in Heaven, while here on earth we are given a fore-taste of that joy in gladness, the gladness that the Lord always grants to the heart of those who follow Him. The gladness to be here with you, dear friends of Communion and Liberation, who want to be—who are!—authentic friends of Jesus.

Following Jesus... Here is our program: “a presence within the gaze,” as in the title of your Spiritual Exercises. His person, present in our midst, alive, so alive as to draw our gaze with the signs of His action, so amiable as to reach like no other our heart, our poor heart, so needy, so constantly in search of something, of Someone who takes it entirely, because our heart wants everything, demands everything, cannot help but ask for everything. It is the nature of the heart, which is made for the totality: it is made for God! Our heart always seeks One who takes it, who seizes it totally. This is how we are made!

We follow God, follow Jesus, because only He can take our whole heart, as no other. Only He—at times with discretion, at times with force—knows how to draw our heart to Him. Nobody like You, Jesus, knows how to take my heart! Nobody looks at me and loves me like You, Jesus!

This is what Saint Peter wants to tell us in his first letter, which we have just listened to, when he writes that “God bestows favor on the humble. God gives the treasures of His heart to those who wait to be taken totally. God gives all Himself to those who hunger and thirst for Someone who can seize their whole heart. God grants Himself only to those who are open to letting themselves be taken entirely. Being willing to let ourselves be taken entirely: this is the first humility. This is the humility that God seeks in every person. This is the heart that God seeks, when He looks at us. This heart He wants to renew in us, in each of us.

“He cares for you,” continues Saint Peter in his letter. All the care God lavishes on our life is directed at generating a heart like this. God seeks hearts that wait to be taken totally. He works to generate in us a heart that is more and more this way. The generation of a heart that waits to be entirely taken is never finished. A heart like this is a permanent construction site, and God Himself loves to work in a construction site like this. The heart itself of God lives in a permanent construction site, as it were, in which each Divine Person gives Himself, is taken and receives totally from the Other. The heart itself of Jesus is generated by such a love: a love that gives, that waits, that is open to receiving without end. The heart of Jesus works to generate hearts like this. The Heart of Jesus gives, waits, and hopes for this from each of us.

“Peter, do you love Me?” We know well this question Jesus addresses to Peter, piercing his heart. Each of us desires to have our heart pierced by questions like this. And nobody knows how to pierce our heart like Jesus, because while His lips pronounce those words, His gaze reveals to us how great is His love for us, a love so great that it can take all that abyss that is our heart!

We can imagine Peter’s life, Peter who writes to the first Christians, who leads the first communities, first in Jerusalem, then in Antioch, and finally in Rome. “Peter, do you love Me?” We can imagine how, day after day, Peter let himself be more and more propelled by the fire of this question and that gaze, the gaze of Jesus, now present forever in his life, present more than ever, ineradicable from his life story. All that Peter lived, he lived propelled by the Person of Jesus, present and living as before, and more than before.

Thus Peter becomes ever more an Apostle, ever more the Lord’s messenger, ever more propelled by the gaze and words of Jesus: “Peter, do you love Me?” Thus Peter discovers that mission is an event that is renewed every day, following Jesus daily. Thus Peter discovers that his entire mission is born of the merciful gaze of Jesus. Peter, who sees Jesus rise to Heaven under his eyes, and then finds Him present along the steps of his journey. Peter, who, as a young man, went where he wanted and now, as an old man, has learned what it means to stretch out his arm and be taken along roads he had not thought of or wanted to tread. Pete, who, once in Rome, has by now understood how the road he must travel every day—so that his heart may be entirely taken—is one he had not imagined. Peter, upon whose gaze is indelibly impressed the presence of Jesus, and in whose heart resides the ineradicable desire to let himself be taken totally by Him.

This letting your heart be totally taken is what makes the heart capable of authentic adoration, what shatters every corrupt form of power, what renews our capacity for affection, what counters the temptation to haggle over everything that is given to us in our lives, what causes the flow of waves of gratitude in us, what gives us again a whole gusto for all that is beautiful, true, just, and good.

Jesus is the one who makes people finally free; makes free people because their hearts have been liberated, hearts entirely taken by Him, who is love and truth without end!

Dear friends, today the Church invites us to celebrate the Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist. According to tradition, Mark wrote his Gospel in Rome, dictated by Peter, whom he served as a trusted secretary. Reading the Gospel of Mark, the essentiality and concreteness of the character of Peter shine through. This Gospel is a Gospel of facts, one that sets us in front of the facts of life. Life flows in a series of events and, through those events, the Lord of history writes His story. He weaves, with His freedom, a story with each of us, with the freedom of each of us. Therefore, nothing that happens is trivial. Everything bears the writing of the mysterious Design upon it, with which God conducts history. Every little fact, event, and circumstance participates in a mysterious greatness, a greatness that Jesus, risen and ascended into Heaven, become Lord of history, confers on it, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem. Thanks to the Easter of Jesus, every detail of human life and of the world bears within it His presence, at once discreet and powerful.

In the mystery of Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, all this is put into effect and revealed. The Gospel we have just read speaks of how Jesus "took His seat at the right hand of God," and alludes to how Jesus takes His seat in the heart of every circumstance, in the heart of creation, which "is groaning in labor pains, even unto now," labor to bring forth a renewed world. You know well how clearly Fr. Giussani knew this and had all this at heart.

In this way, Jesus, whom the Father made the Lord of history precisely through the events of life, becomes the great interlocutor of our freedom. This means that our freedom, to be actuated, to be renewed and brought to the good, can never leave out the events and situations we find ourselves living. This means that the road that our heart must travel, to find itself again, to be entirely taken, is that of obedience to the concreteness of life, to the harshness of the facts, which often do not correspond to what we might have wanted or imagined. This is the

way of the Cross, a way already traced in front of us, within daily situations. It is the way of daily obedience to a road that God crafts through facts, a way that we are asked to walk, facing what happens, no matter how adverse or favorable it may seem to us, because, to get to the point of being entirely taken by Jesus, the heart must allow itself to be entirely taken precisely through what life asks of us.

This is also the road of holiness, a holiness finally found again in its essential adherence to life, thanks to the capacity of faith to make us passionate about life and to insert us, deeply and solidly, inside all that happens, to have us take our seat, almost like Jesus, in the heart of reality. This is also the most beautiful and fascinating feature of authentic Christian life, a feature that nobody today testifies to the way Pope Francis does. He is like a lamp of love and hope set in front of everyone.

Precisely this tenacious attachment to reality gives the lie to the caricatures with which the power of this world always tries to distort it. This attachment makes it ultimately desirable, attractive, a truly fortunate life full of gifts. This is the experience many of your friends and travel companions have already had. This is the experience I am certain that many of you are having, maybe some of you hidden to most.

Therefore, the Church is grateful to you. Jesus Himself is grateful. We are grateful, grateful for the daily *yes*, for your daily assent of heart to Jesus, hidden or evident as it may be. Do not be concerned about harvesting soon. Be concerned instead about sowing well, because in His time the Lord will harvest and show to all the good you have stored up in your heart. Be concerned with sowing well, together with He who continually sows truth well in the hearts of women and men and who, according to the times of His design, knows when to harvest and bring in the fruit!

For this reason, He prunes us, purifies and corrects us, according to the measure of His mercy. For this reason, He changes us and invites us to allow ourselves to be changed, according to the ever greater measure to which He invites us, to which He invites our heart, that it may be taken, more and more. The heart desires to be ever more seized, ever more embraced, according to an endless measure, one that has never stopped being realized in us.

I know that Fr. Giussani defined the mercy of God as a “justice that recreates” the human person. It is so! The Lord takes us just as we are, but does not leave us as He finds us, He changes us, according to the demanding measure of His love. His grace does not justify us

from above, leaving us as we are, but is a gift that enters into us and transforms us according to the ever greater dimensions to which His Spirit leads us.

This is my wish for you, as well, the wish and the prayer that your heart and your humanity grow and open more and more, according to the endless measure that our own nature itself desires, according to the great horizons that the Church throws wide open for us, according to the good and mysterious designs that Jesus Himself is achieving for us.

Work for this, pray for this, be open to offering yourselves for this. You will have God as your prize.

Amen!

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Julián Carrón. Dearest Eminence, it is a pleasure to have you here today. I know Cardinal Müller from way back when, because he often came to the Faculty of Madrid to teach theology courses, many years ago. It is a joy to welcome you and thank you for your willingness to preside at this Holy Mass of our Spiritual Exercises.

I also thank you for your precious service in the inestimable care of the richness of the faith of the Christian people through your ministry, which you carry out in the service of the faith and the Holy Father.

I would like to thank you in a particular way because your presence here today renews the joy of the bond with the paternity of Pope Francis, which he had the opportunity to manifest in a moving way in the recent audience of March 7th in Rome. We desire to follow and serve him with all of our being, affectively and effectively, as Fr. Giussani always testified to us in his bond with Peter.

Thank you, dearest Eminence.

Cardinal Müller. Allow me a few words of gratitude. My first grateful thought goes to Fr. Giussani. From the *yes* of his heart to Jesus, this numerous people has come to be. It is impressive to think what miracles can be worked by the heart of a person who says, with totality, *yes* to Jesus.

My second “thank you” goes to all of you, because without your *yes*, without the *yes* of each of you to Jesus, this people would not exist. None of you is hidden to the eyes of Jesus: all of you, one by one, are important for Him! Thank you for your faith and for your testimony to all the world today.

Let Jesus reach the periphery of your heart and you will be able to bring Him everywhere, to the extreme peripheries of the world, as Pope Francis asks of us, to the extreme limits of the earth, to the limits of human existence, as Jesus asks of us.

My last thank you, *last but not least*, goes to Fr. Julián Carrón, for his friendship *desde Madrid* (ever since the times in Madrid, therefore I say it in Spanish), and for having invited me to pray with you. I also thank him for the humble and sure guidance with which he leads your communities. His humility and faith are surely well known to all of you and all of us: they give a great and good example of living Christianity, of personal testimony to Jesus Christ.

Thank you also in the name of the Church for all that you are and live! Please pray for me! These are familiar words from the Holy Father Francis, who always asks for the prayers of the people of God, of whom he is the supreme shepherd, established by Jesus Christ Himself, by our Saviour.

Yesterday, I was in audience with the Holy Father and I talked to him about this encounter, this Mass today, on the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises. He asked me to bring all of you his warm wishes and blessing!

Saturday, April 25, afternoon

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig Van Beethoven, Concerto for violin and orchestra in D Major, op. 61

David Oistrakh, violin

André Cluytens Orchestre National de la Radiodiffusion Française

“Spirto Gentil” no. 6, EMI

Julián Carrón. This morning, we saw clearly our continual need to be decentered from ourselves and the urgent need for Christ, for a hand that He reaches out to us now. Who better than Fr. Giussani has testified to us what it means to live with this Presence in your gaze? And what better way to hear about the nature of the charism than from him, to have him bring us back once again to the center,—as he always did—that is, to Christ?

For this reason, we thought that the best way to remember him 10 years after his death was to watch together the video of Fr. Giussani’s talk at the Spiritual Exercises of the university students of the Movement in 1994, which was published with the title *Recognizing Christ*.

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Luigi Giussani

*Recognizing Christ**

This morning’s meditation ended with Kafka’s strikingly effective image, “There is a point of arrival, but no way to get there.”¹ It is undeniable: there is an unknown (the geographers of ancient times indicated an analogy of this unknown with the famous “terra incognita”—unknown land—at the outer limits of their great map). At the margins of the reality that the eye embraces, the heart feels, the mind imagines, there is an unknown. Everyone feels it. Everyone has always felt it. Throughout the ages men have felt it so much, that they have imagined it, too. Throughout the ages men, through their ponderings or their fantasies, have tried to imagine, to define the face of this unknown. In his *Germania*, Tacitus described the religious sense which character-

* Meditation given during the Spiritual Exercises of university students of Communion and Liberation (Rimini, December 10, 1994), now published in the volume L. Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio. Dio e l’uomo* [Time and the Temple. God and Man], Bur, Milan, 2014, pp. 37-74.

¹ F. Kafka, *The Blue Octavo Notebooks, 1917-19*, edited by Max Brod, Exact Change, Boston, 2004.

ized the ancient Teutonics as follows: “*secretum illud quod sola reverentia vident, hoc deum appellant*”² (“that mysterious thing they sensed in fear and trepidation, they called it God, they call it God”). All men of all times, whatever image they conjured up, “*hoc deum appellant*,” “call this unknown God,” before whom the indifferent gazes of most, but also the impassioned of many pass by. Without a doubt, among the impassioned ones, we can list those 300 people who, with Cardinal Martini, walked in procession from the Church of St. Charles to the Duomo in Milan. Three hundred representatives of different religions! What can we call, as a common denominator, that which they meant to express and honor by taking part in the grand initiative of the Cardinal of Milan? A *secretum illud*, “something mysterious,” terra incognita, something that cannot be known, unknowable!

I would like to recall now a comparison found in Volume II of *School of Community*³ (those who have read it know about it). Imagine the human world, human history, as an immense plain. In this immense plain is an immense crowd of construction companies, of contractors specialized in building roads and bridges. From the spot they occupy, their small corner, they all try to throw a bridge from the point they are at, from the ephemeral moment of their existence and the starry sky; they try to build a bridge that may connect the two ends—like the image found in Victor Hugo’s beautiful poem “Le pont” (“The Bridge”), from *Les Contemplations*.⁴ The author imagines a man, an individual who, sitting on the shore at night, on a starry night, is watching, staring at the largest star, the one that seems to be nearest, and thinks of the thousands and thousands of arches that would be needed in order to build this bridge, a bridge that can never be totally defined, never really feasible. Imagine, then, this immense plain, crowded

² Tacitus, *Germania*, IX, 2.

³ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill’s-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 32.

⁴ “J’avais devant les yeux les ténèbres. L’abîme / Qui n’a pas de rivage et qui n’a pas de cime, / Était là, morne, immense; et rien n’y remuait. / Je me sentais perdu dans l’infini muet. / Au fond, à travers l’ombre impénétrable voile, / On apercevait Dieu comme une sombre étoile. / Je m’écriai:— Mon âme, ô mon âme! il faudrait, / Pour traverser ce gouffre où nul bord n’apparaît, / Et pour qu’en cette nuit jusqu’à ton Dieu tu marches, / Bâtir un pont géant sur des millions d’arches. / Qui le pourra jamais? Personne! ô deuil! effroi! / Pleure!—Un fantôme blanc se dressa devant moi / Pendant que je jetais sur l’ombre un œil d’alarme, / Et ce fantôme avait la forme d’une larme; / C’était un front de vierge avec des mains d’enfant; / Il ressemblait au lys que sa blancheur défend, / Ses mains en se joignant faisaient de la lumière. / Il me montra l’abîme où va tonte poussière, / Si profond que jamais un écho n’y répond; / Et me dit:—Si tu veux je bâtirai le pont. / Vers ce pâle inconnu je levai ma paupière. /—Quel est ton nom? lui dis-je. / Il me dit:—La prière.” (V. Hugo, “Le pont”, in *Les Contemplations*, Garnier Frères, Paris 1969, p. 335)

with attempts by large and small companies, or even by lonely workers, as in Victor Hugo's image, each carrying out the plan he has imagined and fantasized about. Suddenly a powerful voice resounds in the vast plain, saying: "Stop! Stop it, all of you!" Then all the workers, the engineers, and the architects suspend their work and turn toward the direction the voice is coming from: it is a man, who, raising his arm, goes on to say, "You are great, you are noble in your effort, but this attempt of yours, albeit great and noble, remains sad. This is why so many give up and no longer think of it, becoming indifferent. It is great but sad because it never attains its end, it never reaches the heart of the matter. You are incapable of it because you are helpless in the face of this goal. There is a disproportion that cannot be filled between you and the ultimate star in the sky, between you and God. You cannot imagine the Mystery. Now, leave your work, so tiring and unrewarding. Come after me: I will build this bridge for you, in fact, *I am* this bridge! For *I am the way*, the truth, and the life!"⁵

These things are not understood in their rigorous intellectual value unless we identify with them, unless we try to become one with them with the heart. Then, imagine yourselves on the sand dunes by the sea, seeing a cluster of people from the nearby village, who are listening to one speaking; He is there, among them, speaking. You are passing by, heading for the beach. You pass by, and while you pass by you look on with curiosity, and you hear the individual among them say: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. I am the way, the truth..." The way that cannot be known, which Kafka spoke about: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Try to imagine, strain your imagination, your creativity: what would you do, what would you say? Skeptical as you may be, you cannot fail to perceive that your ear is drawn that way, and the least you can do is to watch with extreme curiosity that individual who is either mad or true—*tertium non datur* ("there is no third possibility")—He is either mad or He is true. In fact, there has been only one man, one, who has said this sentence. One in the whole history of the world—of the world!—so true He is! A man, amid a small cluster of people, many times among a cluster of people, and at times even amidst a large crowd.

Well then, in the great plain everyone suspends his work, and pays attention to this voice, and He keeps repeating the same words. Who were the first to get annoyed at the situation? The engineers, the architects, the owners of the various construction companies, who almost immediately said, "Come on, come on boys, back to work! To work,

⁵ Cf. *Jn* 14,6.

men; He's just a show-off!" He was a radical, blunt alternative to their plan, to their creativity, to their personal profit, to their power, to their good name, to themselves. He was the alternative to themselves. After the engineers, the architects, and the bosses, even the workers, laughing a bit, reluctantly dragged their eyes away from that individual, chatting for a while about him, cracking jokes about Him or saying: "Who is that man? Maybe He is a lunatic." But some did not do that. Some heard a hint they had never heard before, and they did not answer the engineer, the architect, or their boss who said to them: "Come on, hurry up, what are you doing here, why are you still staring at Him?" They did not answer; they kept staring at that man. He was coming forward. Rather, they moved closer to Him. Out of 120 million people, they were 12. But it happened. This is a *historical fact*.

What Kafka says ("no way to get there") is historically not true. Paradoxically, one could say that it is true theoretically, but historically it is not true. The mystery cannot be known! This is theoretically true. But if the mystery knocks on your door... "If someone opens to me, I will enter his house and dine with him"⁶; these are words you read in the Bible, God's words in the Bible. But it is a fact that has happened.

The first chapter of St. John, which is the first page in literature that speaks of this, beyond the general announcement—"The Word was made flesh," that of which the whole of reality is made became a man—contains the memory of those who followed Him at once, those who resisted the pressure from the engineers, architects, and bosses. On a piece of paper, someone among them jotted down the first impressions, and the features of the first moment in which the fact happened. The first chapter of St. John, in fact, contains a series of notes, which are taken precisely from memories. One of the two, grown old, reads in his own memory the notes that lingered there. For memory has its own law. Memory does not have as a law a continuity without spaces, as is the case for instance in a creation of fantasy; memory literally "jots down notes," as we are doing now: a note, a line, a point, and this point covers a lot of things, so that the second sentence takes off from the many things implied in that first point. Things are more implied than said; some are said merely as reference points. Therefore, I, from my 70 years of age, re-read it for the thousandth time, and without any hint of tiredness. I challenge you to imagine something in itself graver,

⁶ Rev 3:20.

heavier—in the sense of *pondus*—greater, more laden with challenge for man’s existence in its apparent fragility, something more pregnant with consequences, in history, than this fact that has happened.

“That day John was still there with two disciples. Staring at Jesus who was passing, he said...” Imagine the scene. After waiting for 150 years, finally the Jewish people, who, for their entire history, for 2,000 years, had always had prophets, someone recognized as a prophet by all, after 150 years, they finally had a prophet again: his name was John the Baptist. Many documents of the time speak of it; it is, therefore, historically documented. Everyone—rich and poor, publicans and Pharisees, friends and foes—went to listen to him, to see the way he lived, beyond the Jordan, in a desert land, eating only locusts and wild herbs. He always had a cluster of people around. Among them, that day, were two newcomers, coming, we could say, from the countryside; they actually came from the lake, which was quite far away and outside the life of developed cities. They were there like two peasants in town for the first time, bewildered, looking agape at everything around them, especially at him. They were there open-mouthed, looking at him wide-eyed, listening to him very attentively. Suddenly, one of the group, a young man, walks away, taking the path by the river, heading north. John the Baptist, suddenly, staring at him, cries out: “Behold the Lamb of God, He who takes away the sins of the world!” But the people there did not move; they were accustomed to hear the prophet from time to time express himself with awkward statements, incomprehensible, disconnected, out of context; this is why most of the people present there took no notice. The two newcomers, who were hanging on his every word, watching the prophet’s eyes and following his gaze everywhere he looked, noticed he was staring at the individual who was walking away, and they went after Him. They followed Him from a distance, out of fear and shyness, but they were strangely, profoundly, obscurely, and evocatively aroused to curiosity. “Those two disciples, hearing him say that, followed Jesus. Jesus turned around, saw they were following Him, and said: ‘What are you looking for?’ They answered: ‘Rabbi, where do you live?’ He said to them, ‘Come and see.’” This is the formula, *the* Christian formula. This is the Christian method: “Come and see.” “And they went, and they saw where He lived, and they stayed there the whole day. It was about 4 in the afternoon.” He does not specify when they left, when they followed Him: the whole passage, even the next one, is made up of notes, as I said before. Sentences stop at a point which takes for granted many other well-known things. For instance:

“It was about 4 in the afternoon,”, but was it when they went away, or when they got there, who knows? It was, however, 4 in the afternoon. One of the two, who had heard John the Baptist’s words and had followed that man, was called Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. The first person he met was precisely his brother Simon, returning from the shore, either from fishing, or from mending the nets he needed to fish, and he said to him: “We have found the Messiah.” He narrates nothing, he quotes nothing, he documents nothing; it is something well known, it is clear, these are notes about something everybody knows! Few pages can be read that are so realistically truthful, so simply true, where no word is added to pure memory.

How could he say: “We have found the Messiah?” Jesus must have used this word talking to them, a word which was in their vocabulary, because to jump to the conclusion that He was the Messiah so quickly, with such certainty, would have been impossible. Evidently, having been there for hours and hours listening to that man, looking at Him, watching Him speak—who spoke like that? Who had ever spoken like that? Who had ever said those things never heard before? They had never met the like of Him!—slowly, this expression took shape in their souls: “If I don’t believe this man I’ll no longer believe anybody, not even my own eyes.” Not that they said it out loud, not that they formulated the thought; they didn’t think it, they felt it. Perhaps that man, among other things, said that He was the one who was to come, the Messiah who was to come. But He must have been so obvious in His exceptional announcement, that they carried that statement away with them as if it were something simple—it was something simple!—as if it were something easily understood.

“And Andrew took him to Jesus. Jesus stared at him and said: ‘You are Simon, son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means rock.’” The Jews used to change someone’s name to indicate either one’s character or because of some fact which happened. So, imagine Simon who goes with his brother, full of curiosity and a bit of apprehension, and looks straight at the man to whom his brother leads him. The man is watching him from afar. Think of the way He stared at him, understanding his character thoroughly, down to the marrow of his bones: “You’ll be called Rock.” Imagine someone who feels looked at like that by someone new, a total stranger, and feels himself grasped in his innermost being. “The day after Jesus had decided to go away to Galilee...” You’ll read the rest on your own. It’s half a page written like that, of brief observations and notes, which take for granted everything else that happened, as if everybody knew it all, as if it was evident to all.

“There is a point of arrival, but no way to get there.” No! A man who said: “I am the way” is *a historical fact that happened*, which was described for the first time in this half-page that I have started reading out. Each of us knows it has happened. Nothing ever happened in the world so unthinkable and exceptional as that man of whom we are talking about: Jesus of Nazareth.

But those two, the first two, John and Andrew—Andrew was most probably married with children—how did they manage to be so immediately conquered and to recognize Him (there’s no word to describe it, other than *recognize Him*)? I’ll say that if this fact happened, to recognize that man, who that man was, not who He was in the smallest detail, but to recognize that that man was something exceptional, uncommon—He was absolutely out of the ordinary—irreducible to any analysis, to recognize this must have been easy. If God were to become man, to come among us, to come now, to sneak into our crowd, to be here among us, to recognize Him, *a priori* I say, should be *easy*; it should be easy to recognize Him in His divine value. Why is it easy to recognize Him? Because of an *exceptionality*, an exceptionality beyond compare. I have before me an exceptionality, an exceptional man, beyond compare. What does exceptional mean? What can it mean? Why does the exceptional strike you? Why do you feel something exceptional as “exceptional”? Because it *corresponds* to the expectations of your heart, confused and nebulous that they may be. It suddenly corresponds—suddenly!—to the needs of your soul, of your heart, to the irresistible and undeniable needs of your heart, in a way you could never have imagined, foreseen, because there is no one like that man. Therefore, the exceptional is, paradoxically, the appearing of that which is most natural to us. What is natural to me? That what I desire may happen. More natural than this! That what I most desire happens more and more: this is natural. To bump into something absolutely and deeply natural, because it corresponds to the needs of the heart that nature gave us, is something absolutely exceptional. It is like a strange contradiction: what happens is never exceptional, truly exceptional, for it cannot adequately respond to the needs of the heart. We hint at exceptionality when something makes our heart beat for a correspondence we believe to have a certain value and which the following day will prove to be false, or which next year will be disproved.

It is the exceptionality with which the figure of Christ appears that makes it easy to recognize Him. One has to imagine, as I’ve said, one has to become one with these events. If we claim to judge them, if we wish to judge them, I don’t say to understand them, but to judge them

substantially, whether true or false, it is the sincerity of your becoming one with them that makes the truth true (and not false), that makes your heart not doubtful of what is true. It is easy to recognize Him as ontologically divine because He is exceptional: He corresponds to the heart, and one *decides to stay* and would never go away—which is the sign of the correspondence with the heart. One would never go away, and would follow Him for the rest of one's life. And in fact they followed Him for the remaining three years of His life.

But imagine those two who stay there listening to Him for hours, and then have to go home. He gives them leave and they go back home in total silence. In silence because they are overwhelmed with the impression they had of the mystery they felt, they felt a presentiment about, they sensed. Then they part, each one going home. They don't say good-bye to each other, not because they don't wish to say good-bye; they say good-bye to each other in a different way, without a word, because they are overflowing with the same thing; they are so overflowing with the same thing, that the two of them are one thing. Andrew enters his house and takes off his cloak, and his wife says: "But Andrew, what's wrong with you? You are different, what happened to you?" Imagine him bursting into tears as he embraces her, while she, shocked by this, keeps asking: "What's wrong?" And he embraces his wife, who has never felt held that way before in her entire life: he was another. He was another! It was him, and yet he was another man. Were someone to ask him: "Who are you?" he would have answered: "I understand I am different... after listening to that individual, that man, I've become someone else." Folks, without getting bogged down in details, this is what has happened.

Not only is it easy to recognize Him, was it easy to recognize Him in His exceptionality—because, "unless I believe this man I can no longer believe my own eyes"—⁷ but it was also easy to understand what type of morality, i.e., what type of relationship was born of Him; because morality is the relationship with reality in as much as reality is created by the mystery that made it. It is the correct, the well-ordered relationship with reality. It was easy. It was easy for them to understand how easy it was to be in relationship with Him, to follow Him, to be coherent with Him, to be coherent in his Presence—coherent with his Presence.

There is another page of St. John that says these things in a spectacular way: it is in the last chapter of his Gospel, the twenty-first. That morning the boat was coming ashore and they had caught no fish. While still a

⁷ Cf. L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit., pp. 58, 71.

few hundred meters from the shore they realized a man was there, standing upright—He had prepared a small fire that could be spotted a hundred meters away—and He spoke to them in a way I’m not going to detail here. John was the first one to say: “It is the Lord!” St. Peter at once threw himself into the lake and in no time reached the shore: and it was the Lord. In the meantime the others arrived too, and they kept quiet. They gathered around, and nobody said a word, everybody was silent, because they all knew He was the risen Lord: He had died, and had already shown Himself to them after rising. He had prepared some roasted fish for them. They all sat down to eat. In the almost total silence that hovered over the shore, Jesus, reclining, looked at the one next to him, Simon Peter. He stared at him, and Peter felt—imagine how he felt the weight of that gaze, for he remembered his betrayal of a few weeks earlier, and all he had done; he had even been called Satan by Christ: “Get behind me, Satan, you are a scandal for me, for the destiny of my life,”⁸—he could recall all his shortcomings, because once you make a serious mistake, everything else will come to your mind, even the less serious things. Peter felt crushed under the weight of his incapacity, his incapacity to be a man. And that man close to him opened His mouth and said: “Simon [imagine how Simon must have been trembling], do you love Me?” If you try to identify with this situation, you’ll tremble now as you think of it, only by thinking of it, of this scene, so dramatic, so descriptive of what is human, so much does it expose what is human, exalt what is human, for drama is that which exalts the factors of what is human; only tragedy annihilates them. Nihilism leads to tragedy; the encounter with Christ brings drama into life, for drama is the lived relationship between an “I” and a “You.” Then, as a breath, as a single breath Peter replied. His answer was just hinted, like a breath. He did not dare, but...: “I don’t know how, yes, Lord; I don’t know how, but I do” (as the video some of us saw a few weeks ago said).⁹ “Yes, Lord. I don’t know how, I cannot tell you how, but...”

In other words, it was very easy to maintain, to live the relationship with that man; it was enough to adhere to the sympathy He drew forth, a *profound sympathy*, similar to the vertiginous and carnal one between mother and child, which is a sympathy in the intense sense of the word. It was enough to adhere to the sympathy He drew forth. Because, after

⁸ Cf. Mk 8:33.

⁹ The images and the text of the video were published in Italian as “‘Simone, mi ami tu?’. Immagini su Gesù e Pietro con brani da commenti di Luigi Giussani” [“‘Simon, do you love Me?’: Images on Jesus and Peter with passages from comments by Luigi Giussani”], *30Giorni*, February 1995, pp. 41-56.

all he had done, and his betrayal, he heard Him say: “Simon, do you love me?” Three times over. And the third time he wondered whether, perhaps, there was doubt in that question, and he answered more extensively: “Lord, you know everything, you know I love you. My human sympathy is for You; my human sympathy is for You, Jesus of Nazareth.”

Learning from an exceptionality happens within a sympathy: this is the logic of knowledge and of morality which life together with that individual rendered necessary; only this. To learn is an ultimate sympathy. As for the child with his mother: he can make a thousand mistakes a day, a hundred thousand, but just try to take him away from his mother! If he could understand the question: “Do you love this woman?” imagine what a “yes” he would shout. The more the mistakes, the louder he would shout “yes” to affirm it. I’m talking like a man to men, who, being young, have fewer preconceptions; or rather they are full of preconceptions, but those are preconceptions of the adults.

After all, then, what does the morality of the sympathy towards Him demand that you do, that you realize? *To observe Him*, or that active watching which is called following. *Follow Him*. As a matter of fact they went back to Him the next day, and He returned to them the third day, for He lived in the nearby village. He began to go fishing with them, and in the afternoon He would visit them on the shore when they were mending their nets. And as He began, from time to time, to go to the inland villages, He would pass by them and ask: “Would you come with Me?” Some of them would go and some would not, but then they all ended up going. They ended up going for a few hours, then more hours, then a whole day, then He began to stay out the whole night, and they followed Him, forgetting their homes... They did not forget their homes! There was something greater than their homes, something from which their homes were born, from which their love for their women was born, something that could save the love with which they looked at their children and with which they worried as they saw them grow up; there was something that saved of all this more than their feeble strength and tiny imagination could. What could they do, faced with the sad years of famine, or the dangers their children would meet? They followed Him! Every day they listened to what He said: all the people were there open-mouthed, and they were even more open-mouthed. One could never get tired of listening to Him.

And also, He was good. “He took a child, embraced him, and said: ‘Woe to he who harms one hair of the smallest of these children!’”¹⁰ and

¹⁰ *Mt* 18:2-6 and *Mk* 9:36-42.

He wasn't talking of physically harming the child, which up to a point people refrain from—though nowadays that is no longer true, and it is not the last sad sign of the times—He was talking about scandalizing the child, which—and nobody thinks of it this way—hurts him. He was good. When He saw that funeral procession, He immediately wanted to know: “Who is it?” “It’s a teenager, whose father died not long ago.” And the boy’s mother was weeping, and wailing, and sobbing behind the coffin, not according to custom, but according to the custom of a mother’s heart that expresses itself freely. He took a step toward her and said: “Woman, do not weep!”¹¹ Is there anything more unjust than saying to a woman whose son has just died, and who’s left alone: “Woman, don’t cry”? And it was, instead, the sign of compassion, of affection, of a boundless sharing in that grief. He ordered the young man: “Get up!” and He gave the boy back to his mother. But He could not give her son back to her without a word: He would have remained in His solemn role as a prophet, a healer, a miracle worker. “Woman, don’t cry,” He said. And He gave her back her son. But first He said: “Woman, don’t cry.”

Imagine, for one year, for two, to perceive Him every day like this, to feel He was so good, to feel He had such power over nature that it seemed nature was at His service. That evening He went out on the boat with them, and they stayed out all night. Suddenly, an impetuous wind arose, a violent storm was unleashed on the lake of Genesareth, and they were being swamped by waves. The boat was full of water. He was asleep; He was so tired that He did not even notice the storm, and He was asleep astern. One of them says: “Master, wake up, wake up, we are sinking!” And He lifted His head, stretched out a hand, and “rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was great calm.” Those men—concludes the Gospel—those men, scared as they were, said to each other: “Who is this man?”¹²

This question starts the problem of Christ in the history of the world, till the end of the world; this very question, that can be found in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of Luke. They were people who knew Him very well, they knew His family, they knew Him like their own pockets, they followed Him, they had left their homes! But the way that man acted was so much out of proportion, so inconceivable, so sovereign, that it became spontaneous for His friends to say: “Who is this man?” That is to say: “What is behind this?” There is nothing man desires more than this “incomprehensibility.” There is nothing man desires more ardently, even if fearfully, with-

¹¹ *Lk* 7:11-13.

¹² Cf. *Mt* 8:23-27 and *Lk* 8:22-25.

out knowing, than this inexplicable presence. For this is what God is. This is the sign and the connection to the mystery. In fact, it is the same question His enemies asked Him at the end, before killing Him. A few weeks before killing Him, as they were arguing with Him, they said: “How long are you going to keep us in suspense?” literally, “State where you come from and who you are.”¹³ They had a record of His birth; His birth had been registered there, 33 years earlier. Of no man on earth can we say: “Who on earth is this man who does these things?,” compelled by wonder and by the disproportion between our image of what is possible and the reality we have before ourselves. Like that time He fed 5,000 men, not counting women and children—He fed them mysteriously—and then disappeared, since they wanted to make Him king. They said, their economic interests at stake: “This truly is the Prophet, the One who is to come into the world!”¹⁴ suddenly going back to the common mentality they had always had, that everybody had—as their leaders taught them, that the Messiah should have been a powerful man, who would give Israel, their people, supremacy over the world. He slipped away, and many among them guessed He had gone to Capernaum. Then they went around the lake to go track Him down, on Saturday evening. They went to the synagogue, because it was the most likely place where they might find Him. In fact, when He spoke, He always took His cue from the biblical passage proposed to the people for that day, from the scroll the attendant would select. And, sure enough, there He was, speaking in the synagogue, saying that their fathers had eaten manna, but He would give them a food which was much greater, His own word: His word was truth. Truth He gave them to eat, truth He gave them to drink, the truth concerning life and the world. The door at the back opened, and the group of those who had been looking for Him, who, let us say, were after Him, came in. They were looking for Him. They were looking for Him for the wrong reason, for they wanted to make Him a king, not because they were struck by the sign He was, by the mystery of His person, which the power of His actions persuaded them of, but because they had an interest, they sought Him because of a material interest in Him. The reason was wrong, yet they were searching for Him. They were looking for Him. He had been born so that the whole world might seek Him. He was moved, and all of a sudden—for, being a man like us, ideas came at times from circumstances—a fantastic idea dawned on Him. He changed the sense of what He was saying and exclaimed: “It is not my word I will

¹³ *Jn* 10:24.

¹⁴ *Jn* 6:14-15.

give you, but My own body to eat, My own blood to drink!”¹⁵ The cue! At last, the politicians, the journalists, and the TV columnists of the time had their cue. “He is out of His mind! Who can give people his own flesh to eat?” Whenever He said something He considered important, but people did not understand and were shocked by it, He would not explain it; He would repeat it instead, He repeated it: “Truly I say to you, He who does not eat my flesh cannot enter into the understanding of reality, cannot enter into the kingdom of being, to understand reality, cannot enter the depths of reality, for this is the truth.” They all walked away. “He is mad, mad,” they said. *Durus est hic sermo*. “He has a weird way of speaking.”¹⁶ Until, at twilight, He found Himself alone with His usual 12 friends. They too were quiet, looking at the ground. Imagine the scene, in the not-so-large synagogue of Capernaum—it was like one of our classrooms of 30 or 40 seats. “Do you too wish to go away? I will not take back what I said. Do you too wish to go away?” And Simon Peter, stubborn Peter, said: “Master, we don’t understand what you say either, but if we go away from you, where shall we go? You alone have words that give meaning to life.”¹⁷ Kafka: “There is a point of arrival, but no way to get there.” That man was the way. “If we go away from You, where shall we go? Which will be the way, which possibly could be the way? You are the way.”

* * *

Those two, John and Andrew, and then those 12, Simon and the others, told their wives, and some of those wives went with them; at a certain point many joined them and followed Him: they left their homes and followed Him. But they also told other friends, who did not necessarily abandon their homes, and yet participated in their sympathy, in their positive attitude of wonder and faith in that man. Their friends told other friends, and these in turn told other friends, and others again. Thus the 1st century passed, and these friends invaded the 2nd century with their faith, at the same time they were invading the geographic world. They reached Spain at the end of the 1st century, and went all the way to India during the 2nd century. Then, those of the 2nd century told others who lived after them, and these told others after them, like a great flow that grew wider and wider, like a river that grew fuller and fuller, and they ended up telling my mother—my mother. And my mother told me when I was small, and I say: “Master, I don’t understand what you say either, but if we go away

¹⁵ *Jn* 6:48-54.

¹⁶ *Jn* 6:60.

¹⁷ Cf. *Jn* 6:67-68.

from You, where shall we go? You alone have words that correspond to the heart.” This is the law of reason: the law of reason is the comparison with the heart. The criteria of reason are the needs of my nature, of the heart. I’ve been told of a friend of ours who, reading one of our texts, (she is not Catholic) observed: “Here I found the word heart used not as I understand it, because by heart I mean the point of reference of feelings—I have a feeling, he has another—whereas here it’s not like that; it is the same for everybody, the heart of which *The Religious Sense*¹⁸ speaks is the same for everybody, it is the same for me and for you.” If heart is the seat of the need for what is true, beautiful, good, just, of the thirst for happiness, who among us can evade these needs, who? They constitute our nature, mine and yours; because of this we are more united than “absent,” stranger to one another, as we normally are. And the last Korean man, the farthest man from Vladivostok, the last man of the farthest and most remote region on earth is united to me precisely because of this.

From that evening a great human flow was born which has reached *up to me, now*. As my mother belonged to this flow, so do I, and by telling many friends about it, I make them part of this flow too.

Even if you already know about it, it’s worth reading again because it’s not a waste of time, a letter written to me, and discovered unfortunately too late, by a young man suffering from AIDS, who died two days after writing it: “Dear Fr. Giussani: I’m writing to you calling you ‘dear’ even though I do not know you, I have never seen you or heard you speak, but, to tell the truth, I can say I know you because—if I have understood anything of *The Religious Sense* and of what Ziba tells me—I know you by faith, and I add, now thanks to faith. I’m writing just to thank you. Thank you for giving a meaning to this arid life of mine. I was a high school classmate of Ziba, with whom I have always maintained a friendship because, even though I did not share his position, I was always struck by his humanity, his unselfish availability. [Which is the only way we can say, can shout to another person and to the whole world: ‘Christ is true.’] I think I have reached the end of the line of this troubled life of mine, carried by that train called AIDS, which allows no one respite. I am not afraid to say this anymore. Ziba has always said to me that what matters in life is to have a true interest and to follow it. I have pursued this interest many times, but it was never the true one. Now I have seen the true one, I see it, I’ve encountered it and I begin to know it, and to call it by name: it is called Christ. I don’t even know what it means and how I can say these things, but when I see the face

¹⁸ Cf. L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill’s-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 1997, pp. 7–9.

of my friend, or I read *The Religious Sense* that is accompanying me, and I think of you, or of the things about you Ziba tells me, everything seems clearer, everything, even my evil and my pain. My life, now flat and made sterile, made like a smooth stone over which everything flows away like water, has suddenly an outburst of meaning and sense that sweeps away the bad thoughts and pains; rather, it embraces them and makes them true, transforming my worm-eaten and putrid body into a sign of His presence. Thank you, Father Giussani, because you have communicated this faith to me, or, as you call it, this Event. Now I feel at peace, free and at peace. When Ziba used to recite the *Angelus* in front of me and I blasphemed to his face, I hated him and told him he was a coward, because the only thing he was able to do was to utter those stupid prayers before me. Now when, stammering, I try to say it along with him, I understand that I was the coward, because I could not even see the truth I had in front of me when it was only one inch from my nose. Thank you, Father Giussani, is the only thing a man like me can tell you. Thank you, because through my tears, I can say that to die like this, now, has a meaning. Not because it is more beautiful—I am very afraid of dying—but because now I know there is someone who loves me and that perhaps I, too, can be saved, and I, too, can pray that my fellow patients may encounter and see as I have encountered and seen. Thus I feel useful, think of it, merely by using my voice I feel useful; with the only thing that I still manage to use well, I can be useful. I, who have thrown away my life, can do good simply by saying the *Angelus*. It is impressive, but even if it were an illusion this thing is too human and reasonable, as you say in *The Religious Sense*, not to be true. Ziba has stuck over my bed St. Thomas' quote: 'Man's life consists in the affection that mainly sustains it, and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.' I think that my greatest satisfaction is to have known you [I have never met him!] by writing you this letter, but the even greater satisfaction is that in God's mercy, if He will, I will meet you where everything will be new, good, and true. New, good, and true like the friendship that you have brought into the life of many people and of which I can say: 'I was there too.' I too, in this wretched life, have seen and participated in this new, good, and true event. Pray for me; I will continue to feel useful for the time I have left by praying for you and for the Movement. I embrace you. Andrea."¹⁹

2,000 years are burnt away by this letter. He wasn't yesterday, He is today. He is not today for me, but He is today *for you*, whatever

¹⁹ Cf. Andrea (Milan), "Il volto buono del Mistero" ["The Good Face of the Mystery"], *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, December 1994, p. 4.

your position: change it, if it needs to be changed! I too, every morning, understand that I must change it, for I am responsible for many things He has given me. I only say that this event or this Presence is today—today! That human flow we have talked about, I bring into your life today. There is nothing but God, God alone, yesterday, today, and forever. A great event, said Kierkegaard, can only be *present*, because it is not the past, a dead person, which can change us. But if something changes us, it is present: “He is, if He changes,” says a text of ours.

But this is not the only very beautiful letter. You read, either in the papers or in *Traces*, the prayer written by our friends of Turin who lost all their relatives in the Piedmont disaster:²⁰ “In this terrible and great hour we wish to thank the Lord, our God and our Father, for having given us Francesco, Cecilia, Lucia, and Cecilia in Christ. Through them You, O Christ, have begun to make Yourself known to us with Baptism, education, the adherence of Lucia to the Movement, and the birth of Cecilia, welcomed as a miracle. Grant, O Christ, that now that they are in You as You make all reality, they may help us to recognize You more and more, in every instant of life.”²¹ After 2,000 years He is now: for Alberto and for Mario, He is now. Cry out to Him, who is now, that He may win over your coldness, your ignorance, your distance! When I was a boy and I was sick with a temperature, I saw people far, far away; I saw the furniture very far away, and I was afraid, finding myself in a very large, very long room. When my mother entered the room, I saw her tiny, almost non-existent. What makes us see Him far away is a pathological condition, because He is God, the present. He “is” *because He is present*. That which is not in our present experience, or would in no way be found in our present experience, would not in any way be in our present experience, does not exist, it would not exist.

There is a third testimony that I want to quote. Seven of our friends, four *Memores Domini* women and three priests, two from Rome, from the seminary of Msgr. Massimo Camisasca, all from the Movement, are in vast Siberia, in Novosibirsk. It is the largest diocese, the largest parish in the whole world, spreading from Novosibirsk to Vladivostok, 5,000 km.

²⁰ This refers to a terrible flood that struck primarily the Piedmont region of Italy in the autumn of 1994.

²¹ “O Cristo o niente” [“Either Christ or Nothing”], *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, December 1994, p. 11.

They cover this area 400 km at a time each week. The first Catholic Synod of Siberia was held in Vladivostok, which is that city close to Japan, at the eastern end of Siberia. The bishops invited our friends too. They've been there three years and they have a small group of friends who have asked to be baptized; some of them live the life of CL. One of them recounted what happened in his life. He is a young boy of 17.

"I met the Movement immediately after my encounter with the Catholic Church. At the time I knew practically nothing about Christian life, and I understood even less. I encountered a company of fairly young people, made up mostly of students, and some Italians who spoke little or no Russian. I heard them speak of life and work; they spoke about their Christian experience, about their first encounter with Christ; they sang too, and they had fun. Then we would go to Mass together, at times to Vespers. I had the impression they were good friends, yet there was something strange about it all for me: why had these foreigners come from so far away, why? Why this far, where it is so cold, and life is not half as comfortable as in their country? And then, such young people, different from one another and yet such close friends to one another and then again, why together? Probably precisely in this, and also in this, lies the grace of the first encounter, when you intuitively sense precisely what you need in life, feel something corresponding, something good that awakens in you curiosity and desire, so that every time you re-live the first encounter without thoroughly recognizing why that is. In fact, only later did I start to realize and understand that Someone is present in this company, to whom everybody bows, and Who binds together people who, to judge by appearances, would never stay together. I think that this was for me a kind of 'extraordinary moment,' when I recognized the Presence of Christ, when I discovered Him within that companionship. I realized I was loved [like Andrea], very dearly loved by Jesus, precisely through these people whom He Himself has placed at my side and who accompany me. I have been in the Movement of CL for three years and this helps me. I can say that now I experience a zest for life, and this seems to me truly very important [the opposite of what dominates today: the loss of the zest for life as a symptom of what is macabre in today's culture]. In fact, life is made up of various aspects: work, rest, study, holidays, and to see meaning in all of life's aspects, to recognize that God has become an event in our live: Christianity is precisely this. Nothing happens by chance, nothing just happens, and each moment in history can witness to the presence of Christ here and now. I have many friends, I meet many people, and I always feel a great sorrow because they haven't experienced yet the grace of the first

encounter, which enables us to grasp His Presence and compels us to follow it. I'd like to communicate to all those who I meet the desire to experience the *gusto* of this life [*'gusto:* *gusto* is such a natural term, so carnal and so divine; it is the anticipation of the eternal happiness, eternal *gusto*, that is the aim of living]. Sure, my experience is still small, but I ask that in all aspects of life I may witness to Christ, present *here and now*. Josif."²²

And in fact, as for Josif, the greatest surprise for me as a Christian is to experience now, to find the correspondence to my heart that He is, now. When a journalist approached one of Mother Theresa of Calcutta's sisters in India, and asked her a few questions, among other things she said—she was a very young sister, not yet 20 years old—"I recall picking up a man off the street and bringing him into our house." "And what did the man say?" "He did not mutter, he did not swear, he only said: 'I lived on the streets like an animal and I am about to die like an angel, loved and cared for. [...] Sister, I am about to go back home,' and he died. I have never seen a smile like the one on that man's face."²³ The journalist retorted: "Why is it that even the greatest sacrifices seem to be no effort for you, no toil?" Then Mother Theresa cut in: "Jesus is the one to whom we do everything. We love and recognize Jesus, today."²⁴ Today: yesterday is no more. What was yesterday is either here today, or is no more.

I'm sorry I cannot read it all, because it is too long, but I want to quote at least a passage of a letter from our friend Gloria,²⁵ a young teacher who went to Kampala in Africa with Rose, and who writes: "Nothing here is immediate for me [nothing corresponds to me, nothing is easy for me]. And in some moments I have found it almost impossible for me to stand in front of people who are sick, dirty, without the minimum sanitary conditions. [But why should she even do this? In remembrance of something of 2,000 years ago? No! Something now. A presence that is now.] One morning as I was saying good-bye to Rose she told me: 'Pray to Mary so that today you may not be scared as you see how Christ will present Himself to you.' With these words in my heart I went with Claudia to the juvenile hall. Everything disgusted me: the smell, the filth,

²² Josif, "Dio è diventato avvenimento nella nostra vita" ["God Has Become an Event in our Life"], *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, November 1994, p. 19.

²³ Cf. *Il Sabato*, no. 5, 1 February 1986, p. 8.

²⁴ Cf. *Il Sabato*, no. 22, 30 May 1987, p. 4.

²⁵ The complete letter was published in Italian in *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, November 1994, pp. II-III.

the scabies, the lice. At that moment I realized that my entreaty coincided with the position of my person.” Bending over a sick person, or over a child prisoner, bent down like that, in that position: her entreaty, her asking for being, which is the plea of man’s heart (because even if one does not think about it, one cries out for this), the asking for being, the asking for happiness, the asking for what’s true, the asking for what’s good, just, beautiful, this asking coincided with the very position she assumed.

But the most impressive piece of recent news, perhaps the greatest of all of our history, is what happened in Brasilia. Please go and read the article in *Traces* about the killing of Edimàr, one of the worst juvenile delinquents of Brasilia, several times a killer, because his gang is a gang of killers. At the beginning of the year, a *Memores Domini* teacher, a Lebanese girl living in Brazil at the moment, entered his class. She spoke our language. Edimàr was shocked; he too wanted to have eyes full of blue like hers, not dark, dark, black, dirty eyes like his own. He resolved he’d change. The leader of the gang understood there was something wrong, and at once put him to the test by ordering him to go and murder a person. Edimàr said: “I won’t kill any more.” And the boss said: “In that case I will kill you,” and he killed him. He is the second martyr of our history.²⁶

* * *

What is the concise formula of the whole figure of Christ in Himself, of Christ as a man, registered at the administration of Bethlehem, and present now to urge on and demand the life and the heart of each of us, so that through us the whole world may recognize Him, so that the world may be happier, so that everyone in the world may be happier, may know “why,” may die like Andrea? The formula that sums up and describes the whole dynamic of Jesus is that He was “sent” by the Father.

Why did Jesus, being God, the Word of God, the expression of God, and therefore the origin of the world, become man? Why did he enter the womb of a 15-year-old girl? Why was He generated in that womb, born a baby, why did He grow into a youth, an adolescent, a man, a 30-year-old, speak in the way we heard Him speak, and touch Andrea, our friends in Villa Turro (the AIDS patients whom our friends look after), and Edimàr? Why did He become a man and acts in history like this? Why does He become present in history this way? In order to carry out the plan of Another. He Himself uses the extreme word to indicate the ori-

²⁶ Cf. D. Rondoni, “Edimàr, occhi e sangue” [“Edimar, Eyes and Blood”], *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, September 1994, pp. 28-30.

gin of everything, from which, therefore, life is born: the Father. His life is defined as *called by the Father* to carry out a mission: life is *vocation*.

This is the Christian definition of life: *life is vocation*. And vocation is to fulfill a mission, to carry out an assignment that God establishes for each person through the banal, everyday circumstances, instant by instant, that He allows us to pass through. This is why Christ is the ideal of our life, in as much as it is an attempt to answer, a desire to respond to God's call; vocation, God's calling, the plan the Mystery has for me. Because in this instant, if I am sincere, thoughtful, I understand that there is nothing more evident, not even you who are only two meters away from me, nothing is more evident than the fact that in this instant I am not making myself. I don't give myself hair, I don't give myself eyes, nose, teeth, I don't give myself my heart, my soul, my thoughts, feelings. Everything is given to me, so that I may fulfill His plan, a plan that is not mine, through all things, through writing and talking, through the *Angelus* as Andrea said, through everything, everything. "Whether eating or drinking,"²⁷ St. Paul says, making the most banal comparison one could think of: "Whether you are awake or asleep,"²⁸ "Whether you live or die,"²⁹—he says elsewhere—everything is for the glory of Christ, that is, God's plan.

Christ is the ideal of life. He whom John and Andrew heard speak was the ideal of life. This is why their heart leapt, this is why they went home in silence, this is why that evening Andrew hugged his wife as he had never done before, without being able to say anything. They had met the ideal of life. They were unable to express it at once, poor men. They said it a few years later. After that they went into the whole world to say it: Christ is the ideal of life.

What does it mean to say that Christ is the ideal of life? He is the ideal for the way we treat the whole of nature; He is the ideal for the way we live affection, the way in which we conceive of, look at, feel, treat, and live the relationship with our woman or man, with our parents and our children. He is the ideal with which we relate to others and live our relationship with them, i.e., with society as a whole and as a companionship of men. What is the characteristic that this ideal infuses into our way of dealing with each other, with everything, from nature—by nature I mean everything that exists, because I can mistreat, treat unjustly, even this

²⁷ 1 Cor 10:31.

²⁸ 1 Thes 5:10.

²⁹ Rom 14:8.

microphone as I did earlier without realizing—to our father and mother? The characteristic is in two words that have the same root, but one is at the beginning and the other at the end of the trajectory of every action: the first is called *gratitude*. Why? Because of what I said before, that nothing is more evident in this moment, for me and for you, than the fact that you don't make yourself, that everything is given. There is Another in you who is more you than yourself; you come from a spring that is not you: this spring is the mystery of being. Thus, by analogy, you understand that everything is made by Another. You, as a man, are the consciousness of nature: the "I" is that level of nature in which nature becomes aware of itself. As I become aware that I do not make myself, so the whole of nature does not make itself, therefore it is given: given, a gift. Therefore grateful: gratitude as the foundation and premise of every action, of every attitude.

What does this gratitude instill into all actions? It instills an aspect, a nuance, an aura of *gratuitousness*, pure gratuitousness, that gratuitousness of which Ada Negri, as we have often recalled, spoke of in one of her incomparable poems,³⁰ which expresses this in a way that I cannot say better: "You love, and don't think you are loved; for every / Flower that blooms or fruit that reddens / Or baby that is born, to the God of fields / And families you give heartfelt thanks." You love, you like the flower, not because you smell it but because it is; you look at the ripening fruit not because you bite into it but because it is. You look at the child not because he is yours, but because he is. This is absolute *purity*. Please make an effort to put yourself in this attitude of absolute purity. A nuance of this purity, of this gratuitousness enters into us even without our realizing it; it almost naturally enters our every action. So much so that if any attitude of mine towards you does not have this gratuitousness within,

³⁰ "I have not lost you. You are still there, at the bottom / Of my being. Yourself you are, and yet another: / Without frond or flower, without the shining / Laughter you had in the time that never returns, / Without that song. You are another, more beautiful. / You love, and don't think you are loved; for every / Flower that blooms or fruit that reddens / Or baby that is born, to the God of fields / And families you give heartfelt thanks. / Year by year, inside yourself, you changed / Appearance and substance. Every grief / Made you firmer; to every trace of the passage / Of days, you raised the barrier / Of your green and hidden sap. Now look at the Lamp / That does not deceive; you see in Its mirror / Life that is lasting. And you have stayed / Like an age that is nameless: human / Among the human miseries, and yet living / of God alone and only in Him content. / O timeless youth, o ever / Renewed hope, I entrust you / To those who come after: so that spring / May return to bloom on the earth, and in heaven / The stars may rise when the sun has gone out." (A. Negri, "Mia Giovinezza" ["My Youth"] in *Mia giovinezza*, Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 78.)

a hint of this gratuitousness, then it is ugly, it is a fallen relationship. Short-lived and fallen... It is a relationship that's begun to collapse, to rot. It is only this purity of gratuitousness that keeps things from falling apart, that keeps everything that was in the past, born in the past, and maintains it in the present; so that my person is enriched, in the present, with all that it has done yesterday and before, and nothing is useless, as our friend Andrea said two days before dying.

Because of this, the *outcome* of following Jesus as the ideal of life, of life as vocation, the outcome, as the Gospel says, is the *hundredfold*:³¹ things become more powerful, my relationship with you becomes more powerful, as if we were born together. I didn't know you, until a few years ago I didn't know you, and I have no particular interest in the sense of gain, of personal profit, not at all, it is not for gain that we are together. With you, too, I get on very well, despite what you think, but that's not why I am a friend to you. Therefore, there is a more powerful richness in all relationships, in the way of looking at the flower, in the way of looking at the stars, in the way of looking at the trees and the leaves, in the way of putting up with myself—I who impudently expect you to stay here another five minutes—in the way I think about the sins I committed yesterday, or the day before: “Lord, forgive me, a sinner,” but saying this does not disappoint me, or depress me; it makes me truer. If I were not to say this I would be less true, because I am a sinner.

From this richness comes a capacity for *fruitfulness* that no one else has; of fruitfulness, i.e., the capacity of communicating your own nature, your own richness, your own intelligence, your own will, your own heart, your own time, and your own life. It is to say: “I would give my life for each one of you;” every one of us would say this for any of the others, and says it. If he does not say it, it is because he has never thought of it, if he has never thought of it, it is because he has never thought of it while becoming aware of Christ's presence. If one starts off from this, then he will say, “I would even give my life”—but be sure to help me, Jesus! It is a fruitfulness in one's work, a passion for work that is not for gain, or out of one's liking, or so that one's presence in society may have a particular result; it is love for one's work as a perfection of action, however successful it may or may not be. It is a fruitfulness that is love for giving what I am, for giving myself to you, that is, giving yourself to your children. It is love for all that enters and will enter into relationship with your children, love for others who are children, they are children too, love for all men: for the people. It is a fruit-

³¹ Cf. *Mk* 10:29-30.

fulness in work, a fruitfulness in front of your children, a fruitfulness in the life of the people. In a nutshell, life's ideal becomes the good of others, the good for others: the good for others, your own good, my own good. This is the purpose for which God made the world: for the good of everything, the good. The opposite of Bobbio's essay;³² an essay on evil, serious and moving—I believe it is moving from some pages I have read; but the Father's plan is the good of His son. Good becomes the ideal of life.

* * *

Now I ask you to pay attention for these last five minutes, because what I'm going to say is the most incisive thing of all we have said today, is the most incisive consequence of today's topic. There is a form of vocation that decides for an unforeseen and unforeseeable road, a road unexpected and unthinkable in the mind of anyone, which is called, forgive me for saying it at once, *virginity*. It is a form of vocation that pierces through, as light pierces through a glass (the verb "pierce" is somewhat irreplaceable), it is a form of vocation that pierces through the most natural urges, as they present themselves in everybody's experience. Those who take this road have the natural urges everybody else has; this form of vocation pierces through the most natural urges as they present themselves in experience, paradoxically fulfilling them according to a new empowerment.

In them, with this life, with this form of vocation, *work* becomes *obedience*. We all go to work for many reasons, among which there is also that nuance that is called gratuitousness; but here work becomes wholly gratuitous, it tends to become totally gratuitous. Why do you go to your law firm, to your class as a teacher? Pay day, or career, or the fact that one must do some work after all, truly, in the long run become less important; what remains is only the desire for the good of others: that God's will be done. That is to say, work becomes obedience. What is obedience? Obedience is to perform an action to affirm Another. What is action? Action is the phenomenon by which the "I" affirms itself, realizes itself. In order to realize myself, the action I do I don't do for my own fulfillment, but to affirm Another: this is obedience. The law of action is Another, to affirm Another; it is love for the Word, love for Christ. Work is love for Christ.

If work becomes obedience, love for a woman or a man is exalted. A man who is exalted, in the physical sense of the word, is a man who stands

³² N. Bobbio, "Gli dei che hanno fallito. Alcune domande sul problema del male," in *Elogio della mitezza e altri scritti morali*, ["The Gods Who Have Failed. Some Questions on the Problem of Evil," in *In Praise of Humility and Other Moral Writings*], Linea d'Ombra, Milan, 1994.

upright, in the whole height of his person. Love for a woman is exalted as a *sign* of perfection, of the attraction for which man is made. It is what Leopardi sensed. At a certain point in his life, from which he later fell, he sensed that the face of woman was a sign; he had loved many women, but in that moment he sensed that it wasn't this face or that, but another face, with a capital "F," it was a woman with the capital "W" that he sought, and to whom he wrote a beautiful hymn that he sought. The love for a woman is exalted as a sign of the perfection and of the attractiveness of what's good, beautiful, true, and right, which is Christ, because perfection, the source of attraction, the source of what is good, beautiful, true, and just is the Word of God. That which shines through, as Leopardi said in his hymn *To His Woman*,³³ in a landscape, or in the beauty of a dream, or in the beauty of a face, is the divine that lies at the spring of everything: in the face of the other—of the other *par excellence* which for man is a woman, and vice-versa—it shines through; it shines through in an ineffable way, that cannot be uttered. The one who best managed to say it, in my opinion, was Leopardi, who did not say it, but was on the verge of saying it. Allow me, so that these things may not seem abstract to you, to read a letter sent to one of our friends by her ex-fiancé. They had been together for three years. After three years, she sensed that her vocation was virginity, and told him she was going to take some time to verify that.

³³ "Beloved beauty who inspires / love from afar, your face concealed / except when your celestial image / stirs my heart in sleep, or in the fields / where light and nature's laughter / shine more lovely; / was it maybe you who blessed the innocent / age they call golden, / and do you now, blithe spirit, / soar among men? Or does the miser fate, / who hides you from us keep you for the future? // No hope of seeing you alive / remains for me now, / except when, naked and alone / my soul will go down a new street / to an unfamiliar home. Already, at the dawn / of my dark, uncertain day, / I imagined you a fellow traveler / on this parched ground. But no thing on earth / is equal to you; and if there were someone / who had a face like yours, though she resembled / you in word and deed, she'd be less lovely. // In spite of all the suffering / fate assigned to human life, / if there was anyone on earth / who truly loved you as my thought portrays you, / this life for him would be a joy. / And I see clearly how your love / would still inspire me to seek praise and virtue, / the way I used to in my early years. / Though heaven gave no comfort for our suffering, / still mortal life with you would be / like what in heaven becomes divinity. // In the valleys, where you hear / the weary farmer singing / and I sit and mourn / my youth's illusions fleeing; / and on the hills where I turn back / and lament my lost desires, / my life's lost hope, I think of you / and start to shake. In this sad age / and unhealthy atmosphere, I try / to keep your noble look in mind; / without the real thing, I enjoy the image. // Whether you are the one and only / eternal idea that eternal wisdom / disdains to see arrayed in sensible form, / to know the pains of mortal life / in transitory dress; / or if in the supernal spheres another earth / from among unnumbered worlds receives you, / and a near star lovelier than the Sun / warms you and you breathe benigner ether, / from here, where years are both ill-starred and brief, / accept this hymn from your unnoticed lover." (G. Leopardi, "Alla sua donna" ["To His Lady"], in *Canti*, translated by J. Galassi, Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 2010, pp. 143-147.)

The ex-fiancé writes to her: “Dearest, I wish to imprison only a few words, for everything is already enclosed in our hearts forever [forever! Nothing is eliminated]. I am moved, that is, moved to awe at what is being accomplished in your life, or better, at He who is accomplishing it. It is a joy that in time will bring to me the destiny of goodness that has taken you with itself. Even the sorrow that assails me, some times stronger than other times, for what I did to you in some moments of our encounter, is breathed through by a mercy that makes it truer. It remains a mystery, which is, nevertheless, already revealing itself. The whole fullness of the relationship between us, of that piece of history we have walked together, is better explained this way. I like to believe that every instant you spent with me, even in front of my incapacity, is not lost [forever!], and it has served, that is, it was used by Christ to lead you to Himself. I ask you for forgiveness, that is, to give me your begging, in the certainty that you’ve given me a greater love by belonging to the *Memores Domini*, that is, that you have loved me more by doing this than by marrying me. I thank you for your waiting, and I pray to Mary that there always be around you faces full of hope, as you have now, to protect and love you at every step you take. I have given you an icon of Christ, a sign of His Incarnation [a concept that Orthodoxy is very clear about], so that His Presence may always comfort you, and that you remember to pray for me, for the task now entrusted to me of loving Elisabetta, for my relatives and our friends, but above all so that I may never leave that embrace of the Holy Spirit which is the Movement and its mysterious sentry.”

He has understood. Did you see that he has understood? Work becomes obedience, the love for a woman becomes a supreme sign of the perfection of the attraction she exercises on us, of the happiness that awaits us. And the people, rather than the subject of a human history full of quarrels and wars, becomes the history of men and women, of a flow, of a river of consciences which slowly become enlightened, yielding, at least in death, to the glory of Christ.

It is called charity; these changes are called *charity*. Work that becomes obedience is called charity. Love for a woman that becomes a sign of the final perfection, of the final beauty, is called charity. And a people which becomes history of Christ, kingdom of Christ, glory of Christ, is charity. For charity means looking at the presence, every presence, with our souls seized by passion for Christ, by tenderness for Christ. There are a gladness and a joy which are possible only on these conditions. Otherwise, gladness and joy are two words that should be erased from the human dictionary; there is no other possibility for gladness and joy. Contentedness, satisfaction, whatever you like, might exist, but gladness does not exist, for gladness

demands the absolute gratuitousness which is possible only in the presence of the divine, with the anticipation of happiness, and joy is its momentary explosion, when God wants, in order to sustain the heart of a person or of a people in moments that are educationally significant. However, listen to me, that work should become obedience, and that love for a woman should become a sign, as Leopardi sensed, that the people be not a bunch of faces, but the kingdom of Christ which advances. This charity is *the law for everybody*, not for virgins alone. It is the law for everybody; yes, indeed, it is the law for everyone. Virginity is the visible form of life which recalls everybody to the same ideal—for everybody—which is Christ, for whom alone it is worth living or dying, working, loving a woman, educating your children, sustaining and helping a people. It is for all, but some are called to the sacrifice of virginity precisely so they may be present in the midst of all people, to remind everybody of this ideal, which is for everybody. You should have studied the concept of miracle in Volume III of *School of Community*,³⁴ if you have already gotten that far. A miracle, as it is defined there, is an event that inexorably points you towards God, a phenomenon that forces you to think of God. The miracle of miracles, more than all the miracles of Lourdes, more than all the miracles in any shrine in the world, the miracle of miracles, that is, the phenomenon which inexorably forces you to think of Jesus, is a beautiful 20-year-old girl who embraces virginity.

The Church is the locus of this road, and of all the operative, fruitful, and thriving influences on the people who walk together, in the company that God creates, in which all the roads exist together. The Church is the place where all these people are enriched, give themselves and are enriched by the gift of others. The Church is really a moving place of humanity, it is the place of humanity, where humanity grows, improves by continually expelling all that is spurious as it enters it, for we are men; but the Church is human, therefore men are being human when they expel the spurious and love what's pure. The Church is truly a moving thing.

The fight with nihilism, against nihilism is to live this “being moved.”

* * *

Julián Carrón: This is one of those moments when you truly understand, with no need of explanations, where the source of this silence is: not from simply refraining from speaking, but from being full of something other that leaves us speechless. Let's try not to lose it on our return to the hotels.

Regina Coeli

³⁴ Now L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill's-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2001, pp. 222-223.

Sunday, April 26, morning

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony n. 9 in D Minor, op. 125

Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker

“Spirto Gentil” no. 27, Deutsche Grammophon

Fr. Pino: It was not 2,000 years ago, nor was it 21 years ago; it was not yesterday. It is now.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Proseri: Many of the questions that have arrived have a common denominator: regardless of whether people understood a lot or a little, what dominates is gratitude for what has been given to us in these days. This gratitude indicates that something has happened. It is a grace. As we heard yesterday, gratitude is the beginning of a new life. For those who are chosen, the journey of life is a continual beginning, because it is the re-happening with the Presence that gives us life. We did nothing, absolutely nothing to deserve it. Without this, life would be the search for a goal without the way.

We may have arrived here with any kind of concern, with our problems or our thoughts about the Movement, but if we are sincere, we must acknowledge that we have received much more than some answers to our problems. We have received a shake-up. Our life is bowled over now, again, by a Presence that is “troublesome,” totalizing. The heart of the charism has been testified to and spoken about anew. And this gratitude fills life with a prayer of entreaty. For this reason, the questions we have chosen are just a beginning, to start a work. We will have time later to mull over everything.

The first question is this: “Could you explain better what it means to say that the Resurrection is the keystone of the relationship between me and myself?”

Julián Carrón: We have just listened to the song “Barco Negro,”¹ which describes our daily awakening: “In the morning, how I feared that you could find me ugly / I woke up trembling.” How many times we wake up this way and all the rest seems like nothing in comparison with the impression that burdens us. What would a morning be like if we, like our children when they cry, were not to find a presence that embraced us, no matter what worries we had woken up with, no matter what suspicions about life had crept into our hearts? “But immediately your eyes told me the opposite / And the sun entered into my heart.” Who would not desire this every morning? What condition is necessary for it to happen? That the Presence that filled our life, kindling a promise, through the tender way He gazed on us, should remain, stay over time, happen again now. No other gift would be sufficient if Christ, who left Heaven out of compassion for us, had not remained alive in our midst forever. This is the fact: Christ is risen. A fact, not a thought. But often we also are tempted to think like the old women in the song: “You will not come back.” Only the certainty of the encounter with Him enables us to answer anyone who says you will not come back, “*São loucas! São loucas!*”. “They are crazy! They are crazy!” “Everything around me tells me that you are always with me.” He is here, present, even before I wake, so that I can find Him again every morning and can look at myself with tenderness, as must have happened with Mary Magdalene. Let’s go back to her encounter with Jesus and to the episode in the Pharisee’s house, as Fr. Giussani told it: “Mary Magdalene is there on the side of the road, curious [...] watching the crowd following that Jesus who claims He is the Messiah (they would kill Him a few months later), and Jesus, passing there an instant, without even stopping, looks at her: from then on, she would never look at herself, never look at herself and the men, people, her home, Jerusalem, the world, the rain and the sun, would never be able to look at all these things except within the gaze of those eyes. When she looked in the

¹ “Barco Negro” [“Black Boat”], text and music by Caco Velho, Piratini and D. Mourão-Ferreira, translation by Amalia Rodrigues. “In the morning, how I feared that you could find me ugly / I woke up trembling, laid on the beach’s sand / But immediately your eyes told me the opposite / And the sun entered into my heart / Then I saw a cross stuck on a rock / And your black sailboat dancing under the light / I saw your hand waving goodbye among the ready, loose sails / Old women of the beach tell me that you will not come back // They are crazy... They are crazy... // I know, my love, that you, in fact, did not leave / because, everything around me tells me that you are always with me / You are in the wind, which spreads sand on the glass (of the windows) / You are in the water, that sings into the dying fire / You are in the warmth of the rest from empty seabeds / You are forever with me, into my heart.”

mirror, her physiognomy was dominated, determined by those eyes,” no matter the appearance, the impression she had of herself. She could not help but look at herself in this way: “Those eyes were there within, understand? Her face was molded by them. [...] Mary Magdalene looked at her whole life, in its details and all together, within that gaze that was not even followed by one word, until a few days later when He, who called Himself a prophet, was invited to eat with the heads of the Pharisees, who wanted to catch Him in an error. She entered the dining room without asking permission from anyone, straightaway, and threw herself at His feet, washing them with her tears and drying them with her hair, scandalizing everyone (‘If He were a prophet He would know what kind of woman was doing this!’). But she could not look at her whole life, in its details and all together, without looking at it, feeling it, living it within that gaze.”² Imagine how she sobbed when she saw Him die, and what moved emotion when she heard Him say to her at the tomb, “Mary!”

The Resurrection is not a fact of the past. This gaze has entered into the life of each of us forever, determining our way of looking at all of reality, and the first relationship with reality is that with ourselves. The Resurrection indicates a presence, a present presence, which remains present no matter what situation I may go through, what impression I have of myself, how disgusting I may be to myself! Christ tells us: “You are Mine, and all your objections count for nothing! Nothing!” The question is whether I trust Christ risen, who happens again, who is present, but does not enter into my life if I do not allow Him to enter every morning, if I do not throw myself wide open to receive Him. Life becomes truly burdensome if we do not look at ourselves with this Presence in our gaze. What greater gift could we imagine?

Prosperi: “I would like to understand better what it means that the greatest ally against the clouding of reason is reality itself.”

Carrón: I am always amazed by the Parable of the Prodigal Son. He had everything in front of him—a father, a home, wealth, everything—but he did not recognize it! Because it is not enough to have everything; it is not enough even to have had the encounter. It is not enough! In fact, many times we see no better than the prodigal son, and think there is another road, different from the encounter, a short-cut, the easier to

² L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo* [From *Temperament, A Method*], op. cit., pp. 5-6.

reach the goal, the happiness everyone desires (also the prodigal son left home for this). But reality is stubborn: you can leave, do everything you want to be happy, until reality shows you who you are and then, maybe you begin to realize what you had received. Some time ago, I was told about a fellow who had left the Fraternity like a prodigal son and after 17 years called a friend in the Fraternity to ask him, “Do you still see each other? Do you still get together?” “Certainly!” “Can I come, too? I can’t get over this nostalgia!” What enabled him to understand, what overcame his clouding, if not reality? All of reality made him understand what had happened to him and that everything he had in his head was nothing compared to that! It would be nice not to fall off into decline, but we are poor wretches and unfortunately we do so. So then, reality makes us return to ourselves and, when all our illusions and fantasies have turned to dust, it enables us to see clearly all the toil in living and how much time we need to recognize what has happened to us. The sooner we acknowledge it, the less time we waste and the more we enjoy the life of His presence.

Prosperi: “We were very struck by how we lapse from being centered on Christ, without even realizing it, thus inevitably and without being able to prevent it. The Apostles had Jesus right in front of them, and it was not enough! So then, what does it mean that we must change position—as Fr. Giussani says, ‘If it’s to be changed, change it!’—if unknowingly we decenter ourselves from Christ? How can we not lapse even here into an obligation to ‘do’ something? What does it mean existentially to ‘decide’ to participate in an event? In what does such a decision consist?”

Carrón: The Apostles had Him in front of them in flesh and blood. There was nothing missing from the testimony of Christ. And yet they fell away. This does not mean that we can justify ourselves, saying, “Our friends in the Fraternity are not good enough witnesses.” No! We do not fall off into decline because of the others, but because we are poor wretches. One of the lines quoted by Fr. Giussani that I often repeat to myself is this: “It is no wonder that weakness should be weak” (Saint Francis de Sales). What mystery is it that weakness is weak? That we fall away is normal, friends. But in front of our falling off into decline, let’s look at ourselves with a moment of tenderness! As we have seen, not even all the power of the testimony of Christ in person was enough for the Apostles. I’ll never forget Fr. Giussani’s testimony in Saint Peter’s Square, when he said: “Infidelity always arises

in our hearts even before the most beautiful and true things, in which [...] man can fall short, out of weakness and worldly preconception.”³ How well Fr. Giussani knew the human stuff of which we are made! “Without me you can do nothing,”⁴ Jesus told us. Not even the most powerful witness suffices, because our freedom is involved. Deep down, we dream of a relationship with reality, with evidence, that does not involve our freedom. But this is impossible. We are free and therefore we can fall off into decline at any moment.

So then, what does it mean to decide to participate in an event, in an event like our Fraternity in the Church? It means deciding to “soak” in a place where, even if I mess up—and I mess up, it is inevitable!—I am nonetheless embraced and put back on track, a place where everything is given back to me.

One of you wrote to me about a period of difficulty she was going through. One evening, she went to her Fraternity group anyway and returned happy, changed. The next evening, her 15-old daughter said to her: “I was leaving you a note, in case I didn’t see you come back in, to tell you that you should go more often to that place you went last night!” This can happen to those inside, like us, and those outside. A CLU student said recently, “Friday I had lunch with a friend who studies law who is a year older than me and is not part of the Movement, or rather, had begun to participate just a few weeks before. We talked about a variety of things—elections, studies—and at a certain point he said, ‘Please, let’s get together again, and continue to see each other, maybe to study together at the university, let’s see each other more often, let’s lunch together more often.’ It came spontaneously to ask him: ‘Excuse me, why are you asking to get together more often?’. And he said, ‘I want to spend more time with you and with your friends’”—here, this is the decision!—“with your friends of the Movement, because I see there is something different in you, so much so that I can no longer not be with you.’ I asked him, ‘What’s this difference?’ He answered, ‘I desire the relationship with you not because you are nice—I have friends who are a lot nicer; not because you are studious—I have lots of friends who are more studious, but because you are truer, deeper. You are different and I can no longer not be with you. I began reading *The Religious Sense* and to come to School of Community. I share an apart-

³ L. Giussani, “*In the Simplicity of My Heart I Have Gladly Given You Everything*,” Rome, May 30, 1998. Published in L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, page xi.

⁴ *Jn* 15:5.

ment with a guy who is studying finance and I am certain that sooner or later he will want to come to School of Community too, because at dinner we always talk about this, the religious sense.’ This really struck me deeply, to the point that I wondered: what is this difference that he sees in us that leads him to say, ‘You’re not the nicest, you’re not the most studious, but I can no longer not be with you?’ ”

“The Church,” Fr. Giussani said, “is really a moving place of humanity; it is the place of humanity, where humanity grows, improves by continually expelling all that is spurious as it enters it, for we are men, but the Church is human,” and he underlined, “Therefore men are being human when they expel the spurious and love what’s pure.” They do not justify the spurious, but they expel it because they love what is pure. “The Church is truly a moving thing.”⁵ Recognizing this place does not mean having to do something. It is simple, because you cannot resist it, like that student who could not help but remain with the CL university students he encountered.

Prosperi: “Accustomed to spending time daily with CL friends during my university years, I often thought that my following was facilitated by this ‘living with.’ Now that I have embarked upon adult life, the opportunities for this ‘living with’ have diminished. Today you spoke about following as becoming one with the experience of an other. Can you help me understand better what it means? Above all, how can following not be reduced to a moralistic effort?”

Carrón: The opportunities have not diminished. Stop thinking this! They have just changed. Nobody keeps us from living in relationship with people whose companionship helps our lives. It depends on what we decide to do with our life and our time. There is no use continuing to raise objections that do not subsist. For the things that interest us, we find all the time necessary. We should not live adult life thinking we can remain the way we were during our university years! Everything depends on us, on how much we want to engage ourselves with people, because, as we heard Fr. Giussani say, “there are always *people, or moments of people*”⁶ through whom we can see what is needed for living, and with whose experience we can become one. But seeing the ideal lived in them is no substitute for

⁵ See here, p. 88.

⁶ L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [An Event of Life, That Is, a History], Il Sabato, Milan, 1993, p. 459.

the verification each of us must do in our own life, because the verification is what makes the adherence and the journey ever more certain, what makes us reach that certainty of Christ to which we are provoked by this year's School of Community. To acquire this certainty, merely spending time together is not enough. "Faith," says Fr. Giussani, "cannot cheat, cannot tell you: 'It is this way,' and obtain your plain assent gratuitously." Such assent does not enable you to make faith yours. "No! Faith cannot cheat because it is in some way bound to your experience: deep down, the Church must, as it were, appear before the tribunal where you judge through your experience."⁷ Only if it appears before the tribunal where I am the judge through my experience can the gaze of Christ reach the marrow of my bones, penetrate my innermost being, in such a way that I can no longer conceive of myself outside this relationship. "Yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me."⁸ Nobody else can make this journey for me. If the reason for our being together is not for each of us to verify this "no longer I, but Christ..." so that it becomes more and more ours, then our companionship will remain something external to us, will not penetrate our innermost being, the perception I have of myself, the way I say "I," and it will not change the consciousness I have of myself. Without this personal verification, faith will not become mine.

Therefore, if faith cannot cheat, "you can't cheat, either," continues Fr. Giussani, "because in order to judge it, you must use it. In order to see whether faith transforms your life, you must live it seriously, and not a faith the way you interpret it, but faith as it has been handed on to you, authentic faith. For this reason, our concept of faith has an immediate nexus with the hour of the day, with the ordinary practical aspects of our life [...]. If, falling in love with a girl, or having had several experiences of falling in love, you have never perceived how faith changes that relationship, if you have never discovered yourself saying, 'Look how faith illuminates my attempt at a relationship, how it changes it, changes it for the better!'; if you have never been able to say such a thing [...], if you have never been able to say, 'Look how faith makes my life more human,' if you have never been able to say this, then faith will never become conviction and will never become constructive, will never generate anything, because it has not touched the depths of your being."⁹

⁷ L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The "I" Is Reborn in an Encounter*], op. cit., p. 300.

⁸ *Gal 2:20*.

⁹ L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [*The "I" Is Reborn in an Encounter*], op. cit., pp. 300-301.

Prosperi: The next question asks, in the light of these Exercises, for clarification about what the Pope told us in Saint Peter's Square. "What does the emphasis on self-referentiality mean?"

Carrón: The Pope told us: "'Going out' also means rejecting self-referentiality in all its forms; it means knowing how to listen to those who are not like us, learning from everyone, with sincere humility."¹⁰ Preparing for these Spiritual Exercises and re-reading some texts from our history, I happened upon a dialogue between Fr. Giussani and some teachers in the Movement in 1978, during which he read what one of them had written to him. I'll quote it just to show that this is an age-old problem among us: "As a general reputation," that person wrote, "the average CL members are incapable of staying with others because they judge everything that is different as inferior or superfluous or hostile. So they limit their company to members of the community because they are uncomfortable with others; they don't feel understood." So whether or not this is our situation—that's not what interests me right now—it is a fact that we should in any case consider. In fact, Fr. Giussani commented, "And yet [in the beginning it was not this way] in the beginning the gatherings were done in such a way as to learn from everyone. Jews, Protestants, and atheists came; it was specifically done to open the heart of Christians to understand that faith can valorize, comprehend, the truth contained in any experience."¹¹

This is the gaze that Fr. Giussani always taught us. It is the Catholic gaze, which he defined with the word "ecumenism," which means "that the Christian view reverberates with a momentum that makes you able to exalt all the good that is present in all that you meet, a momentum that makes you acknowledge your participation in that plan that will be perfectly realized in eternity and that has been revealed in Christ." Nothing is excluded from this embrace. "It is the Event of Christ that creates the new culture and gives rise to true criticism" because "valuing the good in all things, however little or however much, commits us to create a new civilization, to love a new construction [...] a new culture."¹² We will always remember the example of the decomposing dog: "Along these lines, an episode in an apocryphal writing speaks of Jesus walking through the

¹⁰ Pope Francis, *Holy Father Francis' Speech to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

¹¹ *Agli educatori. L'adulto e la sua responsabilità*, [To Educators. Adults and Their Responsibility], op. cit., p. 57.

¹² L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 116.

fields and seeing the rotting carcass of a dead dog. St Peter, who was in front, says, ‘Master step around it,’ but Jesus went ahead and stopped before the carcass and said, ‘What beautiful white teeth!’ It was the only good thing in that rotten carcass. Limitations are notable and strike us all very easily [we all know where to see limits!], whereas the true value of things is discovered only by those who have the perception of being and of goodness, those who are able to bring out being and make it loved, without obliterating, cutting off, or denying, because to be critical is not to be hostile to things, but to love them. So we cannot be truly critical if we are not at peace through a love that possesses us and that we possess. Only if we are totally possessed by a love, only if we acknowledge that we belong to the love of Christ ‘brimming over with peace,’ are we like children who walk without fear in a dark forest.” Fr. Giussani continues, “The world was won over to Christianity ultimately by this word that sums up everything: ‘mercy.’” Mercy! Before, long before Pope Francis spoke about it! Nobody can say it is ambiguous to talk about it in these terms! In fact, mercy is at the beginning of Christianity. “The capacity for mercy is expressed as sensitivity to the good, as the certainty that with the power of Christ the good wins over.” Therefore, this openness, in the certainty of Christ, enables us to recognize the good in everyone, even those furthest away. “This openness has us find ourselves at home with anyone who preserves a scrap of truth, and feel at ease everywhere.”¹³ In this last sentence, each of us has the criterion for judging whether his or her way of living the Movement is self-referential or not: if we find ourselves “at ease everywhere.”

Prosperi: “What is the value of the past if only the present counts? If the event happens now, what is the value of the history that precedes it?”

Carrón: The history that preceded us is fundamental because, as Fr. Giussani says in *The Religious Sense*, without experience and without the richness of the past there is no chance of communication: everything is arid. “The more charged I am with experience, so too the more I am able to speak and communicate with you.” But in order for everything that happens to us to become truly ours, that is, a richness we start with in the relationship with others and everything, we must be engaged in life as experience. This does not happen automatically. “Human dialogue and communication are rooted in experience. Indeed,

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

where does the aridity [...] of shared living, of the shared life in the community, come from if not from the fact that too few individuals are able to say that they are committed to experience, to life as experience? It is this retreat from life as experience which causes us to chat rather than speak. The absence of true dialogue, this terrible dryness in communication, this incapacity to communicate makes our conversations comparable only to gossip.” Giussani gives us two examples to help us understand the dynamism that generates participation and communication. “Experience is preserved by memory. Memory is to guard the experience. I cannot have a dialogue with you unless my experience is well guarded, sheltered like a baby in its mother’s womb, and growing within me little by little, as time passes.” The second observation, and here is the point, is that “Experience must be just that, experience. It must be judged by our intelligence. Otherwise, our communication becomes just blabbing out words and vomiting complaints. And how can intelligence judge our experience? It must take the expressive content of our experience and compare it against the constitutive needs of our humanity, our ‘elementary experience,’ which is the essence of intelligence in action.”¹⁴

What is the problem, then? The problem is that you can fail to experience, fail to understand what the past has taught us. For the Jews, who saw that God had continually given them everything, what did it mean to learn from the past? Being constantly open to the new gift that will be offered to them. If, instead, we have not learned from the past how to be open to receiving, when a new gift arrives from God we will not be open to accept it, and we will reject it. Therefore, instead of learning the simple attitude that constantly welcomes the way the Mystery renews His gift now, at a certain moment we can think we have understood, that we possess what we have to learn continually, from the first instant of Christian experience, and then we are in trouble. This is why Giussani tells us, “What you know or what you have becomes experience if what you know or have is something that is given to us now: there is a hand that holds it out to us now.” Otherwise, I lose all I know and have. And he adds that tremendous line, “Outside this ‘now’ there is nothing!”¹⁵ In order to understand the truth of these words, just look at your relation-

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 84.

¹⁵ Cf. ASAEMD, mimeographed document entitled “Dedicazione 1992 Rimini, 2-4 Ottobre 1992” [Dedication 1992 Rimini, October 2-4, 1992]. A. Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani* [Life of Fr. Giussani], op. cit., p. 851.

ships: without this ‘now’ all the experience you have lived with your wife or husband becomes arid and you no longer are aware of the beginning; your wife or husband no longer surprises you the way she or he did in the beginning. But what is the use of all your experience, if not to prepare you more and more to be amazed that she or he is still there, and still loves you? “Outside this ‘now’ there is nothing!” In experience, we understand this well, because everything is given to us. When, instead, we are no longer amazed “now,” in the present, even with all the past experience, we say, “Yes, okay, it was like that in the past but now it’s gone, everything is old hat!” And so we succumb to the conviction that marriage is the tomb of love and that Christianity is the tomb of desire. We say it, but this does not mean it is true! We end up thinking it because we are no longer open, no longer available. For this reason, as I said yesterday, the new friends we meet give us back the gaze that Christ introduced into the world. What are you missing, if you do not see what the new ones see? Instead, we often call them naïve, as the Pharisees did with John and Andrew. Questioning one who had met Jesus, the Pharisees harshly countered, “Have any of the authorities [...] believed in Him?”¹⁶ when he said, amazed, “Never before has anyone spoken like this one.”¹⁷ The day we discover this closed attitude in ourselves, we can all go home! Instead, the man born blind, the last to come, could not help but recognize what was happening to him in that moment.

We must ask Our Lady to keep us in that original attitude of openness. This is what the Pope urged the Movements to do: “The newness of your experiences does not consist in methods or forms, or the newness itself, all of which are important, but rather in your willingness to respond with renewed enthusiasm to the Lord’s call.”¹⁸ As if to say, you can have done many things, but if you have lost your original openness then all the fire of the beginning turns to ashes. There is no other way. We can ratchet up the chatter, protest, get angry, but if we have lost that openness, there is no use complaining. However, things do not necessarily have to go this way! We have to make a decision. If we are no longer able to do so, then we must begin to ask the Lord to help us. Fast! Before the desert advances in us.

¹⁶ *Jn* 7:48.

¹⁷ *Jn* 7:46.

¹⁸ Pope Francis, *Address to Participants in the Third World Congress of Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*, November 22, 2014.

Prosperi: Thus, accepting that the event happens now depends on acknowledging that He who entered into our life, He who seized us in the encounter, continues to lead our life.

Carrón: This reminds me of the episode of the manna. In the desert, the people were hungry. God responded by giving them manna every morning. But since they did not trust the Lord to remain present (“They say You will not return”), the Israelites began to accumulate the manna instead of growing in trust and awareness, with the attitude of a child, in abandonment to the Presence that had demonstrated such clear interest in them. I understand the temptation, because this abandonment makes us depend more and more on an Other, puts us more and more at the mercy of an Other, the design of an Other, and we do not like this because it means that we are not the masters of our own life. But the problem is having true affection for ourselves, that is, such a great love for ourselves that we are willing to move constantly to recognize Him at the center, because only He fulfills us. Thank goodness Christ always *primerea* us!

Prosperi: “The position on work that becomes gratuitousness for the good of others is particularly desirable to us. However, the normal work experience is one of ambition, individual plans, even pettiness. How does the present encounter with Christ change our attitude to work? How can our work be grounded on obedience rather than focused on money, power, and career?”

Carrón: What are we looking for in our work? What are you looking for in your work pursuing money, power, and career? Fulfillment. But try, let’s try to verify whether this is enough to fulfill you, to fulfill us. Because the problem of life, as I have always told you, begins when everything is going well, when you have everything you are looking for in your work, and yet you discover that it is not enough. It is not enough for the reason Pavese told us: “What a man seeks in pleasures is the infinite, and no one would ever renounce the hope of attaining this infinity.”¹⁹ If we do not recognize that life is fulfilled by the relationship with the Mystery, then we cannot expect something new to be introduced into our relationship with work. We lose the awareness of the nature of our “I,” and consequently our way of living our work becomes confused. We lose the consciousness of the boundless disprop-

¹⁹ C. Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere* [*This Business of Living*], Einaudi, Turin, 1973, p. 190.

portion between the things I have in front of me and the vastness of my desire, so that even if I manage to obtain what I want, it is miniscule compared to the capacity of my soul and, even if things go well, I will not be satisfied. This is not a problem of ethics; it is not a matter of saying, “I have to be content with a bit less,” also because we are not able to be content with a bit less. We will be able to “be content”—that is, be free—only if we have everything, because any other thing—money, power, career—that is not everything is too little. So then, the question is whether we begin to understand that our life is not fulfilled by what we do, but by a relationship with His presence now.

For this reason, Fr. Giussani said that only out of gratitude can gratuitousness arise—let’s hope to work on this—that is, a new and different relationship with work, that “subversive and surprising” way of living the usual things that enter into history with Christianity.²⁰ as we have seen this in the images of Millet’s artworks shown in the hall: daily life, the usual things changed by the presence of Christ, by a gaze within our gaze. We can change only if our work is suffused with the memory of Christ. The problem is memory; otherwise, we live like everyone else, just like everyone else.

In his recent book, the French writer Emmanuel Carrère speaks of the beginning of Christianity in these terms: “I am convinced that the force of persuasion of the Christian sect [perhaps he uses this expression because for a certain period of his life he was Christian, but now he is no longer so] is based above all on the capacity to inspire gestures that leave people slack jawed, gestures—and not just words—that contradicted the normal behavior of people. People are this way, there is no way around it: the best among them [...] love their friends, and everyone hates their enemies; they prefer to be strong rather than weak, rich rather than poor, big rather than small, to command rather than obey. It is normal, it is this way, nobody ever said it was bad. Greek wisdom did not say so, nor even the Jewish religion. Now these people jump forth who not only say, but do exactly the opposite. In the beginning nobody grasped the reason, nobody understood how that absurd inversion of values could be beneficial. Then some began to see it clearly. They began to see the benefits, that is, how much joy, how much strength, how much intensity life gained from that apparently senseless conduct. And so they had only one desire [as we heard yesterday]: to do as they do.”²¹

²⁰ See here, p. 83.

²¹ E. Carrère, *Il Regno [The Kingdom]*, Adelphi, Milan, 2015, p. 148.

Prosperi: “Fr. Giussani told us that virginity as the root of the relationship with things is the road for everyone. We can say that it is the secret of life. What does it mean that virginity is the truest way to live, even within marriage?”

Carrón: Whether it is a matter of work or affection, we always return to the same point: the consciousness of the nature of the “I.” The problem of the relationship with the other is in the “I,” in the perception I have of myself and thus of the other. This seems like individualism to us. No, no! The problem is how you perceive yourself, and if you are not clear about this, then you dump on the other (him or her) the responsibility for “solving” your own desire for fulfillment. But the other person does not, cannot, resolve it, and because of this the relationship often becomes violent. *The Religious Sense* speaks in these terms of “life as need”: “A passage from Romeo and Juliet synthetically expresses the analogical openness of love’s dynamism in the human person. ‘Show me a mistress that is passing fair; what doth her beauty serve but as a note where I may read who pass’d that passing fair?’ The attraction of beauty follows a paradoxical trajectory: the more something is beautiful, the more it refers to something else. The greater the art (let us think of music), the more it flings wide open, does not confine desire. It is a sign of something else. [...] Human existence, as need, points to something beyond itself as its meaning, its goal. Human needs constitute a reference, an implicit affirmation of an ultimate answer which lies beyond the experiential aspects of existence.”²²

Experience tells us that an “I” and a “you” awaken in each other an infinite desire—for fullness, for fulfillment—disproportionate to their capacity to respond to it. Therefore, “only on the horizon of a greater love can people avoid being consumed with pretension, laden with violence, that the other, who is limited, answer the infinite desire he awakens, making impossible his own fulfillment and that of the person he loves.”²³

Your heart, as a person called to marriage, and my heart, as a man called to virginity as a form of vocation, both share the same need: Christ, the only one able to respond to the thirst for happiness that the other constantly awakens in me. In this sense, virginity, as we heard Fr. Giussani say yesterday, “is the visible form of life which recalls every-

²² L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 115.

²³ Cf. J. Carrón, “Lady, Your Beauty Seemed to Me Like a Divine Light in My Mind (G. Leopardi)” in *Traces*, October 2006 (<http://archivio.traces-cl.com/2006E/10/ladyyourbeauty.html>).

body to the same ideal, for everybody, which is Christ, for whom alone it is worth living or dying, working, loving a woman, educating your children, sustaining and helping a people.” This is why it is for everyone. It is in our best interests. Only if Christ determines my relationship with the other, with my wife or husband, only if Christ is really present and accepted in my life, can that relationship not become violent, can it be freely given. In fact, virginity as a dimension that all are called to live indicates the relationship with others as pure affirmation of their being (“you love the other because he is”), that has that “nuance of gratuitousness,” of “absolute purity” we heard spoken of yesterday and that only Christ makes possible. My gratitude at being loved by Christ, my moved emotion in response to Christ’s charity for me, cause the flowering of gratuitousness in my life. This moved emotion enables me to love and look at the others gratuitously, without demanding that they fill what their limits prevent them from filling—my heart, which is infinite need. I was amazed by the end of Fr. Giussani’s talk: “The fight with nihilism, against nihilism is to live this ‘being moved.’”²⁴

Prosperi: “What is the difference between contentedness and gladness? Giussani said that gladness is greater than contentedness. How can one be glad?”

Carrón: Only by living the way we are saying. Listen carefully to what Giussani said in the video yesterday: “Gladness demands the absolute gratuitousness which is possible only in the presence of the divine.”²⁵ Only if Christ fills our life can we be glad, otherwise we will depend on totally different things and no contentedness is comparable to this gladness. This is why Jesus says that the gladness evoked by His presence can never be taken away by anyone.

Prosperi: “How can we support and spread the unity among us in following today those who guide us?”

Carrón: Many years ago, at a CLU Equipe, they asked Fr. Giussani how to deepen this unity. One spoke to him of the need and desire to deepen their communion (we often think that deepening our communion is something we can do ourselves). Listen to Fr. Giussani’s answer:

²⁴ See here, p. 88.

²⁵ See here, p. 87.

“Saying, ‘There is this dearth of communion, so there is a desire to deepen the communion among us,’ leads to something artificial, as such would lead to something artificial. Instead, the desire to deepen my own faith [...], the deepening of my own faith, is what unites me with you in communion. There is a present and widespread danger in the Movement, of thinking that redemption comes through deepening my own belonging to the objectivity of communion. But the objectivity of communion comes from the deepening of my personal faith, because faith is the relationship with Christ and God.”

John and Andrew did not deepen the communion between them by agreeing or trying to “warm up” a bit by talking about communion. No! As we heard Fr. Giussani say yesterday, those two were full of the same thing. The more one is full of the same thing that fills the other, the more there is communion between them. Otherwise, we give in to the temptation of thinking that communion is something we can achieve ourselves. In fact, continues Fr. Giussani, “What unites me to you, even if you resist, is how much I deepen the faith we share. When you marry some day, the more a man deepens his sense of his relationship with Christ [as you see, he always returns to the same point]” within the function that is given to him, the more he will love his wife, even if she should cheat on him. The deepening of a person’s faith is what, as a corollary, as a consequence, causes the communion to mature. It is not by wanting to deepen the communion among us that our communion matures [we mistake the origin, the wellspring of communion with the other: we identify it with our will to build]; in fact, this approach produces and promotes the psychological, sentimental, and ideological aspects.” Fr. Giussani dwelt on the topic at length to underline that “the problem is the person, that everything derives from the person.”²⁶ Everything, also the presence: “The presence will be a consequence of this, a consequence, also from the dynamic point of view [...]: the happening of the presence corresponds to the depth of my consciousness of the faith. This is why I emphasized certain terms,” says Giussani. “The presence ‘fills,’ brings ‘gusto,’ gives ‘peace,’ because these are all personal symptoms. What does this emphasis on the idea of presence, brought forth especially this year, oppose? It opposes the idea of a presence as ‘community,’ as a collective, as group. I’m not saying that there shouldn’t be community, but it is the consequence,” because the more you live what I have been talking about as a personal experience, the more it is also expressed in the group.

²⁶ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978)* [From Utopia to Presence], op. cit., pp. 250-252.

“Otherwise, it becomes ideological [as happens very often], it is squandered sooner rather than later, you tire of it all.”²⁷

Therefore, the problem is the person, everything derives from the faith of the person. Consequently, “what unites us here? [...] The problem of my own life, of my life, of the meaning of my life, of the truth of my life, of the truth of my relationship with the world and therefore of the truth of my relationship with time, with destiny! This is the problem: faith.” It seems to me that after what we saw happen in front of our eyes yesterday for two hours, this is clear to everyone: the problem is faith, that is, “what it truly means to say that Christ is the meaning of my life. The rest is all corollary, emerges, comes to the surface with its instruments of mediation, but this is the point.”²⁸

So then, the problem is to follow. What has happened to us becomes increasingly ours through following. “Today I happened to talk to someone whose description of his problem ended with the question, ‘What should I do?’ And the answer was, ‘Follow! Follow [...] authority. Follow: if you follow, you will understand. If you do not follow, you will not understand.’ This is the error of those who have not followed the development of the history of the Movement: for example, they have remained with the first years and now, precisely in front of the vastness of the Movement, they are nostalgic for the early years and want to judge what the Movement says now with their heads, with their ways of feeling and thinking. [Some even say that I am changing the genetic structure of the Movement!] Instead, they should return to following, as it was in the beginning. In the beginning they understood because they followed. Now instead they have grown up and say: ‘No, we want to understand by ourselves; we want to follow what is right to our own minds.’ And in this way they err, also in politics.”²⁹

Friends, life is serious.

Let’s help each other to live it with seriousness!

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 251-252.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁹ L. Giussani, *Affezione e dimora*, [*Affection and Dwelling Place*] Bur, Milan, 2001, p. 71.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Prayer for the persecuted Christians

Pope Francis has launched a heartfelt appeal for the persecuted Christians: “Sadly, today too we hear the muffled and forgotten cry of so many of our defenceless brothers and sisters who, on account of their faith in Christ or their ethnic origin, are publicly and ruthlessly put to death—decapitated, crucified, burned alive—or forced to leave their homeland” (April 12, 2015). We and the entire Movement cannot remain indifferent to this grave situation. The Italian Episcopal Conference is thinking of an initiative of prayer to involve the whole Church. As soon as the details and the form of the gesture have been decided, we will give you the information.

Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples 2015

As you already know, this year the Meeting will be held from Thursday, August 20th (opening at 12 noon) to Wednesday, August 24th (closing at 12 midnight). The organizers have chosen these different dates in order to encourage the participation of more people, since the Meeting is built by participating personally in the event at least one day, as Fr. Giussani told us. The Meeting is the most expressive gesture of a story; being aware of it is the first way to support it. Over the years, many people, visiting it for the first time, have been struck by the encounters and exhibits, but above all by the people who put it together, who participate in it, who listen, who are interested, who are open to being provoked and who ask questions, who work for free and are happy. Many people find in the Meeting a space for dialogue, co-existence and encounter, and this makes them curious to know who is behind it, to learn about the origin of this experience. Therefore, participating personally in the Meeting is an opportunity for everyone to rediscover the experience from which it is born and what it bears.

The title this year is drawn from a poem by Mario Luzi: “What is this lack a lack of, / o heart, / of which all of a sudden you are full?” We can all understand the cultural importance of a title like this, because as we have seen in these days, the origin of all the current confusion—the reason there is no longer any evidence—is a darkening of awareness about the nature of the “I.” Thus, it will be interesting to face this question in search of an answer, because otherwise the impoverishment of the person and the reduction of desire will be increasingly inevitable.

Life of the Fraternity

I would like to talk about some aspects of the life of the Fraternity in response to some questions we have received asking for clarification.

Visitors for the Fraternity groups. Back at the gathering of the priors of Fraternity groups of the diocese of Milan on December 14, 2013—which you have been able to read—I had the opportunity to remind them what I myself always heard Fr. Giussani say, as I imagine you have too, regarding the function of the “visitor” in the Fraternity groups. He said, “You, visitor, go there where I cannot go; since I cannot get all the way there, you go.” The visitors do not belong directly to the structure of the Fraternity as such. A visitor is simply a figure whose purpose is to offer friendship, a relationship; it is a way of extending the gaze of the leader, the embrace of the person who has the responsibility for guiding, [the embrace] that the leader is unable to bring directly. The function of the visitor is nothing less than that of bringing with their presence my own presence where it is impossible for me to reach (I would like to be able to go everywhere but it is not possible, since there are so many of us and in so many places of the world). In this sense, the visitors are chosen or at least verified by the leader. Thus, a Fraternity group that desires the help of a visitor for its journey should identify the person and then ask the diocesan or regional responsible if this is opportune or if the person is appropriate, precisely because of her or his value in connection to the central leadership of the Fraternity.

Election of diocesan responsables. I think that it is useful to explain well how we have faced and how we have tried to respond to this aspect of the life of the Fraternity. From the beginning of the formation of the Fraternity, Fr. Giussani thought of a structure for its operation, that of the central Diaconia, with members who are the regional responsables of the Fraternity who are elected—where the Fraternity is recognized by the bishop of the diocese—by the diocesan responsables who, in turn, are elected by the Fraternity members who are residents in the diocese. A specific procedure has been developed for the designation of the diocesan responsible (article 30 of the Statute), so that everyone can be informed of the times and modalities of this election. Some dioceses have already started using this procedure, but others have sent us questions that show difficulty in comprehending the nature of this gesture. The important point to clarify regarding the authority of the Fraternity is what it means to say that the Fraternity chooses its leadership. Fr. Giussani describes how you identify authority: authority, or “the point of reference, is not the sum of the participants in a gath-

ering.” So then, where does authority reside? “All of Judeo-Christian history marks it in an authority established by God, according to a varied range, following which and obeying we are assured we are on the right road.” We belong to this history. Why did we follow Fr. Giussani’s authority? Did we choose him? He was given to us by God and we recognized that. This is the way, as God has always done in the history of the Jewish people. So then, how is the authority chosen? In the abstract you can say that there are three forms in which people can choose the authority. Fr. Giussani says: one, through democratic voting; another because one person imposes him or herself as head; and still another, recognizing that this person is given by God. Fr. Giussani says, “This authority is not the fruit of democratic election, and much less can it be the domineering drive of someone who says, ‘I’m the boss.’ There remains only one solution: that it is a grace offered by God.” And since it is a grace, you can accept or reject it, but it remains a grace. “The authority is a person in whom God has given us the grace to establish the point of our insertion into history.” This is exactly what we recognized in Fr. Giussani. Once the authority is set by God, what is its task? The authority has the duty of indicating who she or he deems most useful for helping the Fraternity make a journey. This is why Fr. Giussani said, “The highest concern and task of this authority is to identify the one among those who unite together who best translates what the authority has brought. That is, the indication of the new authority passes through the authority by which God has called us.” You have seen how this happened with me. I am not here because I chose it, or because you chose me. He chose me, calling me from Spain. He indicated the authority. This did not mean skipping all the procedures established for the central Diaconia’s confirmation of what Fr. Giussani had indicated. And the central Diaconia of the Fraternity, following Fr. Giussani’s indication, elected me. His first concern was to indicate the authority. “Otherwise, the alternative is that the continuity be the democratic method or the domineering imposition of one person.” But in doing so, we would return to one of the methods Fr. Giussani rejected for identifying the leader of the Fraternity, because “the continuation is [always] an obedience, and also the continuation is an obedience: affirming the work of an Other. [...] The indication that the authority gives us of a new authority that continues, this indication is not necessarily the indication of the greatest or the holiest.” What a relief! “Therefore, the word obedience enters into the field of freedom and purifies freedom, and makes it what be what it should be, that is,

wonder, recognition, and adhesion to what God offers us, through the authority that He has established. This authority establishes another authority and we follow this other authority,” Fr. Giussani says. “What we say about our Movement is analogous to the Church of God. This is why humility is the characteristic of the authority: humility, not imposition. Because it is obedience that saves the unity of history” (FCL, *Audiovisual documentation*, Diaconia of CL Spain, Milan, June 4, 1993).

All that I have said also holds for identifying the responsible in your own dioceses and the responsible of the pastoral region in which the Fraternity is organized. In fact, the proposal of designation comes from those who lead the Fraternity and is submitted to the free expression of the participants of the assembly.

HOLY MASS

Readings of the Holy Mass: Acts 4:8-12; Psalm 117 (118); 1 Jn 3:1-2; Jn 10:11-18

HOMILY BY FR. FRANCESCO BRASCHI

“This is why the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again. [...] I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again” (*Jn 10:17-18*). These words of Christ could slip away, pass unobserved among the many words heard in these days. Or they could leave in us a brief sentimental echo, maybe even the presentiment that they are important words, but in the final analysis concern more Christ’s relationship with the Father than the needs of our concrete life here and now.

Instead, these words were not simply read, but announced, or better, they were said by Christ Himself, who is speaking and is the subject of the Liturgy of the Church. Therefore, we can no longer think that they represent something different or separate from His happening again, from His being a present Presence here, now, for each of us.

But what is the meaning of “*This is why the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life in order to take it up again.*”? Does it mean “*So that I can take it up again?*”? What does it mean that the reason for the Father’s love for Christ is not simply the fact that He gives His life, but that He gives it “for the purpose” of taking it up again, “*in order*” to take it up again? We all think we know what it means to “lay down your life”: it means offer yourself, sacrifice yourself, and we are more than willing, at least at the end of these Spiritual Exercises, to acknowledge Christ’s greatness in giving His life for us.

But there is a risk in this “knowing.” If the Easter of Christ does not become the *method* of staying in reality, there is the risk that His giving His life for us remain a gesture far-off in space and time, remain a devout remembrance to reflect upon now and then.

There is the risk that we look at the Cross of Christ, at His giving His life, as a “mission accomplished,” that we commemorated at the Sanctuary of Caravaggio (or elsewhere) on Good Friday, but that now we look at mainly as something that remains on our shoulders, that becomes *our* Cross, and that even nourishes the bitter suspicion—God forbid!—that Christ, having accomplished His work, left us; or at least that He remains only if my judgment allows Him to.

Instead, there is something much different for us! That Christ takes up His life again after having given it, changes the entire perspective,

changes the whole judgment! The Father loves the Son because, taking up His own life after having given it, Christ makes of His life a permanent offering, a continual gift, a fecundity from which no instant of history and no place in Creation is excluded.

The Father and the Son know each other perfectly, as today's Gospel affirms (cf. *Jn* 10:15), because they share in total communion with the Holy Spirit, who is the manifestation and reality of that impetus of love that makes them turn outwards, and that constitutes the one "power" (cf. *Jn* 10:18) that Christ has to lay down and take up His life. Here is the meaning of Christ as the "cornerstone," that stone that supports all the rest without ever failing.

Christ's giving His own life, His offering of Himself are His loving obedience to the love and the command of the Father. That obedience that transforms history into the place of the continual fecundity of Easter, into the continual generation of the new person, of the *subject made new*, who recognizes this regeneration through of "a hope that does not disappoint" (cf. 1 *Pt* 1:3-4). This is the new fact that erupts into history with the Easter of Christ, and that defines *us*, defines every human existence indelibly and unavoidably.

But who is this new person generated by Easter? What are the characteristics?

The new person knows she is known by Christ, and she knows Him as the shepherd who is not a hired man, who *never* abandons his sheep (cf. *Jn* 10:11-13); she never thinks that "He is not here."

The new person knows he is truly a son of God (cf. 1 *Jn* 3:1), generated to an existence *already certain* of the fact that his substance comes from the Father, and at the same time is pervaded with hopeful expectation, heart-thawing yearning for what has yet to be revealed.

She is the one who, in the awareness of her poverty, knows she is called to live the same life of Christ, and because of this has no fear of going out, because Christ Himself *is already out*, in search of the sheep who are outside the safe fold, beyond the safe fold (cf., *Jn* 10:16).

Permanently, objectively present among us, Christ risen is the only stone upon which you can build, the stone that supports all of reality. He is the one who builds us as a *saved people*: saved first of all from the claim to determine, by our measure, the face of reality.

Reality is Christ, and Christ knows well how and when He happens again for each of us. We experienced this in Rome. We experienced it yesterday afternoon. We experienced it this morning. We are grateful that Christ never leaves us without witnesses and masters certain of

His happening again. We have encountered them once again. We have listened to them. We have met their gaze alight with the recognition of Christ present: Pope Francis, Fr. Giussani, Fr. Julián.

Let us pray that each of us may be made certain of and glad by the graces that are poured out upon us and all the Movement with unimaginable abundance.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest friends:

I do not want to miss the opportunity to send you my greeting and blessing on the occasion of the important gesture which, once again this year, renews in all of you the mindful belonging to the Church according to the charism of Msgr. Luigi Giussani.

“A Presence within the Gaze,” above all in this time when many Christians, women and men of religions and builders of justice, pay with their lives, with exile and great suffering, represents a pressing invitation to radical conversion that opens the heart to total self-offering.

I pray that a mature faith grow in each of you. Faith is mature when the desire to see Jesus face to face becomes dominant in our day, through grace and through faith, and makes us capable of that “possession in detachment” to which the Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani never tired of calling us.

With affection, a special blessing,
His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Fr. Julián:

I join with the entire Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in this moment of grace in which the Lord has touched us anew through the public audience with Pope Francis on March 7th. The Holy Father reminded us that “after 60 years, the original charism has not lost its freshness and vitality” and at the same time invited us to be “decentered” because “there is only one center: Jesus, Jesus Christ!”

This year’s theme, “A Presence within the Gaze,” will help us grasp this center as Fr. Giussani always did, so that He may truly be the center of our life and our mission in the world. In this time of martyrs, I ask the Spirit for the grace that the Spiritual Exercises may renew the truth of our experience and the ardor of testimony, always open to the surprises of God.

I also pray to the Mother of the Lord for all of you; it is my wish for you that we may carry everywhere that unmistakable “gaze” of Jesus that we learned from Fr. Giussani and that you invite us to keep alive in the peripheries of existence, following Pope Francis.

A cordial embrace to all of you, and the blessing of the Lord,
The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness Pope Francis

Your Holiness:

Your message at the beginning of our Spiritual Exercises and your greeting brought to us by Cardinal Müller renewed in us the certainty of the presence of the risen Christ who reaches us through the maternity of the Church. We are grateful for this, together with the 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation present in Rimini and the thousands of other friends participating by satellite link-up in 17 other countries.

Entirely taken by the great event of the encounter with you in Saint Peter's Square, we have realized that we still need to understand the greatness of the gift of God to our life that Fr. Giussani was. "Everything in our life ... starts with an encounter. Jesus Christ always *primerear* us." In Saint Peter's Square, you made happen before our eyes what you had spoken about: an encounter, full of mercy. Your words made us more aware of our unbounded need, and made us ask to be poor in spirit to receive the gift of conversion.

For this reason we have gone back through our history, marked by Fr. Giussani's continual corrections: "Our heart is, as it were, isolated or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart," because "we do not await Him day and night." We feel the urgent need of a mature faith to propose it in a more intense way to all the world. Following Christ and loving Christ in everything is the main characteristic of our journey.

With the intent of remembering him on the tenth anniversary of his birth to heaven, we watched a video of Fr. Giussani's meditation on Christ as not someone of the past, but who happens now. It filled us with silence, and caused us to live again the event of John and Andrew encountering Jesus on the River Jordan; it was easy for them to recognize Him because of the incomparable exceptionality that Christ communicated, because He corresponded to the expectations of the heart: "Those two told other friends, like a great river that grew fuller and fuller, and they ended up telling my mother, and my mother told me when I was small, and I say: 'You alone have words that correspond to the heart.'"

In the footsteps of Fr. Giussani, we want to follow the successor of Peter affectively and effectively, to be active collaborators of his missionary passion, that is, the "arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an 'outward bound' Church."

Persevering in daily prayer to support your universal ministry, we pray that Our Lady, *Salus populi romani* [Protectress of the Roman

People], may obtain from her risen Son the caress of mercy for all our Christian brethren persecuted and killed for the mere fact of having the faith and for our fellow men and women who die fleeing their homes in search of happiness.

We ask you to pray, Holy Father, that each of us keep alive the flame of the memory of the first encounter and be free, centered on Christ and the Gospel.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI

Holy Father:

At the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation we have meditated on the situation of contemporary humanity, where, as you said, “the collapse of the ancient sureties has become an accomplished fact.” In this context, the grateful memory of the charism of Fr. Giussani and the great encounter with Pope Francis in Rome have called us to the urgent need for each of us to live the faith more and more as the answer to the profound needs of our own heart, so that every circumstance and encounter may be lived with the presence of Christ in our gaze, to be the “arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an ‘outward bound’ Church.”

Assuring you of our daily prayer, we ask the risen Lord to continue to be the light that shines in the gladness of your face.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Dearest Eminence:

At the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, with the participation of 24,000 adults and thousands of others by satellite link-up, we return to our homes more desirous than ever to be centered on Christ in the footsteps of Fr. Giussani, to be, in Italian society, the “arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an ‘outward bound’ Church,” according to the mandate received from Pope Francis in Saint Peter’s Square.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Cardinal Stanisław Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

Dearest Eminence:

At the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, with the participation of 24,000 adults and thousands of others by satellite link-up, we renew our will to be the “arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an ‘outward bound’ Church,” as Pope Francis asked of us in Saint Peter’s Square, aware that “there is only one center: Jesus, Jesus Christ!” as Fr. Giussani testified to us with his whole life.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Angelo:

We have lived these days as a prayer for that conversion you wrote of in your letter, aware that the boundless need of our heart cannot be met with discourses or our activism, but only by recognizing Christ who is happening now, as Fr. Giussani always testified to us and as we saw happen again with Pope Francis in Rome. “There is only one center: Jesus Christ”—this is our program of life.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto*

Dearest Filippo:

Grateful for your letter, in these days we have lived the freshness and vitality of the charism because we have seen Christ happen again, present here and now as the One who fills the boundless need of our heart. Following Pope Francis, we ask to be ever more decentered from ourselves to be the “arms, hands, feet, mind, and heart of an ‘outward bound’ Church.”

Fr. Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici

(Guide to the images drawn from art history that accompanied selections of classical music during entrance and exit)

In the dual journey of the day—from dawn to dusk—and of life—from infancy to old age—the works of Jean-François Millet capture the sacredness of the existence of the human person in every moment. The Eucharistic invitation to “do this in memory of Me” finds in the simple gestures of daily life the answer of a faith capable of grasping the inexorable positivity of reality.

1. *The Bouquet of Daisies*, 1871-74, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
2. *Mother Feeding Her Child*, 1861, Marseilles, Musée des Beaux-Arts
3. *Feeding the Young*, 1860, Lilles, Musée des Beaux-Arts
4. *A Young Mother Cradling Her Baby*, 1870-73, Cincinnati, Taft Museum of Art
5. *Woman and Child (Silence)*, 1855-60, Chicago, The Art Institute
6. *Baby's Slumber*, 1854-55, Norfolk, Chrysler Museum of Art
7. *Farmer Inserting a Graft on a Tree*, 1855, Munich, Neue Pinakothek
8. *The Sick Child*, 1858, Private Collection
9. *First Steps*, 1858, 1866, Cleveland, Museum of Art
10. *In the Garden*, 1860, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
11. *Manor House near Gréville*, 1856, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
12. *Knitting Lesson*, 1854, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
13. *The Knitting Lesson*, 1869, Saint Louis Art Museum
14. *Woman Carding Wool*, 1863, Private collection
15. *A Woman Baking Bread*, 1853-54, Otterlo, Kroller-Muller Museum
16. *A Young Woman Churning Butter* 1848-51, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
17. *Standing Spinner*, 1850-55, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
18. *Seated Spinner (Emélie Millet)*, 1854, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
19. *Millet's Birthplace at Gruchy*, 1863, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
20. *House with a Well at Gruchy*, circa 1863, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
21. *The Well at Gruchy*, 1854, London, Victoria and Albert Museum
22. *Girl at the Well*, 1866-68, Paris, Musée du Louvre
23. *Newborn Lamb*, 1866, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
24. *Shearing Sheep*, 1852-53, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
25. *The Pig Killers*, 1867-1870, Ottawa, National Gallery of Canada

26. *The Return from the Farm*, 1850, Milan, Galleria d'Arte Moderna
27. *Woman Carrying Firewood and a Pail*, 1858-60, Private Collection
28. *Peasant Woman Burning Grass*, undated, Ghent, Museum voor Schone Kunsten
29. *Woman with a Rake*, 1854-57, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
30. *Alvernia, the Spinner*, 1868-69, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
31. *Young Shepherdess*, 1871, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
32. *In Alvernia*, 1866-69, Chicago, The Art Institute
33. *The Goose Girl at Gruchy*, 1854-56, Cardiff, National Museum of Wales
34. *Shepherdess with Her Flock*, 1863-64, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
35. *Shepherdess Seated at the Edge of the Forest*, 1848-49, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
36. *Peasant Woman Sleeping in the Shade of a Bush*, 1872-74, Rheims, Musée Saint-Denis
37. *Shepherdesses Watching a Flight of Wild Geese*, 1866, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
38. *Going to Work*, 1850-51, Glasgow, Art Gallery and Museum Kelvingrove
39. *Haystacks: Autumn*, 1874, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
40. *Buckwheat Harvest, Summer*, 1868-70, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
41. *Summer, The Gleaners*, 1853, Kofu, Yamanashi Prefectoral Museum of Art
42. *The Gleaners*, 1857, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
43. *Harvesters Resting*, 1850-53, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
44. *Potato Planters*, 1861, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
45. *The Potato Harvest*, 1855, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum
46. *Breaking Flax*, 1850-51, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum
47. *The Winnower*, 1847-48, London, National Gallery
48. *Woman Grazing Her Cow*, 1858, Bourg-en-Bresse, Musée de l'Ain
49. *Peasant Spreading Manure*, 1854-55, Raleigh, NC, Museum of Art
50. *Bringing Home the Calf Born in the Fields*, 1860, Princeton, University Art Museum
51. *Bringing Home the Calf Born in the Fields*, detail, 1864, Chicago, The Art Institute
52. *The Wood Sawyers*, 1850-52, London, Victoria and Albert Museum
53. *The Sower*, 1850, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
54. *The Reaper*, 1866-67, Hiroshima, Museum of Art

55. *In the Vineyard*, 1852-53, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
56. *The Vinedresser*, 1869-70, L'Aia, Rijksmuseum Mesdag
57. *Man with a Hoe*, 1860-62, Los Angeles, The Paul J. Getty Museum
58. *Shepherd Tending His Flock*, 1860, New York, Brooklyn Museum of Art
59. *Pasture near Cherbourg*, 1871-72, Minneapolis, Institute of Arts
60. *Firewood Gatherer in the Sunset*, 1868-70, Hiroshima, Museum of Art
61. *Autumn Landscape with a Flock of Turkeys*, 1872-73, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art
62. *The Sheepfold, Moonlight*, 1856-60, Baltimore, The Walters Art Museum
63. *Path through the Wheat*, circa 1867, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
64. *Priory at Vauville, Normandy*, 1872-74, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
65. *Winter Evening*, 1866-68, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
66. *Woman Sewing Beside Her Sleeping Child*, 1858-62, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts
67. *Angelus*, 1857-59, Paris, Musée d'Orsay

Table of Contents

Friday, April 24, evening

INTRODUCTION	4
HOLY MASS — <i>HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO</i>	20

Saturday, April 25, morning

FIRST MEDITATION — <i>There Is Only One Center, Jesus Christ</i>	21
HOLY MASS — HOMILY BY H.E., CARD. GERHARD L. MÜLLER <i>PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH</i>	110

Saturday, April 25, afternoon

SECOND MEDITATION — <i>Recognizing Christ</i>	63
---	----

Sunday, April 26, morning

ASSEMBLY	89
HOLY MASS — <i>HOMILY BY FR. FRANCESCO BRASCHI</i>	110
MESSAGES RECEIVED	113
TELEGRAMS SENT	114
ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP	117

