



«IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE,
BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME»

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



RIMINI 2012

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BUT CHRIST WHO LIVES IN ME"

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English translation by Sheila Beatty

On the cover: Giotto, *Last Supper* (detail), Scrovegni Chapel, Padua.

Vatican City, April 20th, 2012

*Reverend Fr. Julián Carrón
President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*

Reverend Father,

On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation present in Rimini, you wished to express to the Holy Father Benedict XVI sentiments of devoted and affectionate closeness, assuring particular prayers for his universal ministry as the successor of the Apostle Peter.

The Sovereign Pontiff, in expressing lively appreciation for the praiseworthy initiative of the Fraternity, thanks you for the expression of devotion and for the thoughts of veneration that accompanied it, and, as he hopes that the experience of contact with the living Christ will kindle renewed commitment to generous ecclesial testimony, in the fruitful example traced by the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani, he invokes a bountiful effusion of the Easter gifts of joy and peace, and very willingly sends you and the participants of the spiritual encounter his Apostolic Blessing, extending it to your loved ones.

With sincere respect,

Archbishop Angelo Becciu,
Substitute for the Secretary of State of His Holiness

Friday Evening, April 20th

During entrance and exit:

Johannes Brahms, Symphony no. 4 in E minor, op. 98

Riccardo Muti – Philadelphia Orchestra

“Spirto Gentil” no. 19, Philips

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

Whatever “sentiment of self” each of us may have this evening, the perception one has of what is happening, coming here, God gives us a gesture like our Spiritual Exercises to respond to our life through a fact, as a judgment from which to resume the journey, at whatever point on the road we may find ourselves.

At the beginning of our gesture, let us ask the One who can open our hearts to throw them wide open to the grace that will be given to us in these days: the Spirit of Christ.

Come Holy Spirit

Greetings to all of you present and all the friends following by satellite in different countries, and to those in other countries who will participate in the Spiritual Exercises in the next weeks in other countries.

The affirmation of the positivity of reality has challenged all of us; the diversity of reactions has revealed an unprotected flank, a sign of how the common mentality affects us. This is the perception of reality and of ourselves characterized deep down by a terrible, corrosive doubt about the consistency and destiny of life, of all things. How often have we heard, “But are we sure that reality is always positive? How can we say this in the face of all that happens? In the face of the drama of living, is there some point that holds?” Buried below the top layer of discourses and many activities (which we do with commitment), a negativity can accompany us, one that comes to the surface in certain moments when the difficulty and the contradictions are stronger. Behind the more or less triumphalistic façade there is a disquiet, as one of us wrote me: “At times I sense a kind of unease. There is a kind of triumphalism in what we do that counterbalances the tragedy of an

existence without hope.” This shadow on the ultimate positivity, on the consistence of reality, is not a question for experts or specialists: it concerns everyone and has an immediate consequence, the lack of substance of the “I.” Here is what another person says: “In this period I have happened to meet people in whom this condition of instability has led to the emergence of a human fragility. In all these relationships a question emerges: where is my substance?”

But the question can be even more dramatic, as in this letter: “Dearest Julián: I wanted to tell you about what has been emerging with more clarity in my life this month with the illness of my friend. I’ll start with an aspect that scandalized me greatly, that I wouldn’t have wanted to see in myself, but that has instead begun to be the point of departure for entering into truth or, rather, the one point from which I can start out in order to live with truth. In what was happening to me, I realized that many things I’ve been told these years and that I’d sincerely acknowledged as truthful and appropriate (and that I often repeated to others) had not acquired a sufficient substance (solidity, density, foundation) to remain in the face of all that was happening. I realized this clearly one of the first days I went to visit my friend in the hospital. At a certain point, I realized that, in front of my friend in a coma, I had nothing different from the questions Eluana’s father had [Eluana Englaro was in a vegetative state for 17 years before dying when her father requested that life support be disconnected]. Exactly the same, unresolved. Looking at my friend in a coma, what did I have to say? Wouldn’t it be better to die? What is the mystery of the ‘I’? Realizing I had these questions unnerved me. Many around me were asking for a miracle, but the question in me touched a point that even the miracle of her healing would not have resolved. I, too, want her to be healed, but in me the need is greater, because even if she were to be healed, sooner or later she would be taken from me again, and I will be taken from her and others. Who saves all of her and all of me? Who saves everything? I was scandalized and frightened by my humanity, so different from the image I had of how I should have been in a circumstance of this kind, and I found myself arid instead of impassioned; I was mute before what was happening. There came to the surface a lack of substance of my ‘I’ that I preferred not to have to look at. It was as if all the wound of my incapacity, all my poverty and impotence to be true leaped to the fore shamelessly. An insurmountable disproportion. Here, this is my true humanity, this heart-thawing ache at the impossibility of being true, of staying with truthfulness in reality, if only for

an instant. At this point, you realize that you are need at your very origin, not after some step you've taken on your own. Total need. So then, precisely this humanity that I would've preferred not to look at has become the door for beginning to enter into reality in a true way. I wanted to tell you all this because I realize that the great work asked of me is to accept the battle to continually recover my authentic humanity (and this is not automatic—no, it's a struggle!) to be there on the road that you are showing us.”

This letter expresses the full dimensions of the challenge contained in the affirmation of the positivity of reality. The miracle of healing, which we often want to settle for, would not be enough for looking the true question in the face. “I, too, want her to be healed, but in me the need is greater, because even if she were to be healed, sooner or later she would be taken from me again, and I will be taken from her and others. Who saves all of her and all of me? Who saves everything?” In other words, is there something that saves everything from ending up in nothingness? This friend of ours intuits that the answer involves the recovery of his true humanity. I am amazed that this question has emerged so clearly among us, because it identifies the fundamental feature of our culture, which permeates us much more than we think.

What is this feature of our culture?

Once again, Fr. Giussani comes to our help. In a 1994 interview published in the monthly magazine *30Days*, he indicated that nihilism is “the moral character of modern culture, especially as it is suffered now by everyone, inasmuch as it is the common mentality [...]. Nihilism is, primarily, the inevitable consequence of [our] anthropocentric presumption according to which man is capable of saving himself by himself.” It is a nihilism with ancient roots, in the “rebellion of the 17th and 18th centuries, and before that to a degree since the birth of Protestantism itself, and it continues to grow today [...] As a symbol of this [...] I always explain to the kids the poem by Montale: ‘Perhaps some morning, walking in a vitreous, clear/ air, turning I shall see the miracle appear./ the nothingness around my shoulders and the void/ behind, and know the terror of the drunken paranoid./ Then suddenly, as on a screen, confusion/ of hills, and houses, planted in the usual illusion./ But it will be too late, and I shall be warier/ as I move among those men who do not turn, with my secret terror.’”¹

¹L. Giussani, “C’è perché è presente” [“He Exists Because He is Present”], interview edited by G. Andreotti, in *30Giorni*, no. 10, 1994, pp. 11-12.

The nothingness around at my back, the void behind me: Montale's poem says something that we, as aware adults, know well and continually observe: things do not consist in themselves; they show us an ephemeral nature. From this "vertiginous perception of the ephemeral appearance of things, one develops, as a yielding and deceitful negation, the temptation to think that things are illusion and nothingness." In other words, "The things you have, the people with whom you live, are either nothingness (nihilism) or are an indistinct part—you, too, then, are an indistinct part—of Being." Therefore, one is left with "either nihilism or pantheism. Today, these positions are the ultimate responses everyone yields to and that everyone embraces for lack of a solid and clear foothold."²

Why is there this lack of a solid and clear foothold, so that we all yield to this nihilism or pantheism? It is because often our religious sense is sentimental rather than engaged in a work. The conclusion Fr. Giussani draws is striking; without this work, which would give that solid and clear foothold, where does one seek a solution? Nihilism and pantheism have in common "trust in power and craving for power, however it is conceived, in whatever version." Power "is affirmed as the only source and form of order," the only possibility of avoiding chaos. "At its base, this was also Martin Luther's conception, which opened the door to an absolute State: since all men are bad, it is better that only one man command, or a few command. [...] But how does one pass from nihilism and pantheism to having power as one's objective? If man, reducing himself ultimately to nothingness, a lie, is a sham, feels like a sham, an appearance of being, if his 'I' is totally born as part of the great becoming, as simple outcome of his physical and biological antecedents, he has no original consistency: [...] both pantheism and nihilism destroy what is most inexorably great in man; they destroy man as person."³

This is the extreme consequence of nihilism and pantheism: they destroy our "I." In another text, Fr. Giussani says the same thing with a powerful formulation: "Nihilism does not necessarily see the world reduced to ashes and nothingness, but reduces to ashes and nothingness the 'I,' the subject."⁴ And we perceive this reduction in our own

² L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino. In cammino [Man and His Destiny: On the Road]*, Marietti 1820, Genoa, 1999, p. 13.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

⁴ L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così? [Is It (Truly) Possible to Live This Way?]*, Bur, Milan, 1996, p. 401.

lack of substance, and in our inability to stay in reality; for this reason, terror assails us in certain circumstances or moments of life.

From this situation, from such a clear reduction of the “I” that we all fall into so often, we can only emerge by engaging in a work that allows us to recover our authentic humanity, that is, that makes us aware from whence the original consistency of our “I” comes. The person—each of us—must refuse to be reduced to that rationalistic positivism that leads to nihilism or pantheism; in fact, these positions are children of a rationalism that reduces the sign to appearance, a suffocating positivism that amputates reality from its resonance to something else, forcing it into its own measure. This is why the affirmation of the positivity of reality has challenged everyone, because it has challenged our rationalism, our way of using reason, reduced to everyone’s measure—this is our presumption. This challenge has highlighted our resistance (we are like everyone else) to acknowledging the Mystery as part of reality. The habitual positivism that determines us remains hidden, almost without our being aware, until a dramatic situation makes it appear before our eyes in all its power.

So then, what is the solid and clear foothold that can endure, in this situation? What can we do? What road must we travel in order not to be at the mercy of any circumstance, always burdened by the fear of nothingness? It is interesting to compare Fr. Giussani’s answer with the one we often give. Some have attempted to respond to the nihilism that emerged in the depths of their soul with an “appeal” to Christ, but this did not change the substance of the judgment. In other words, they would say that reality is and remains negative, but for us there is a remedy, a compensation, which is Christ. On the one hand, they continued to affirm a negative ontology (as everyone else does), while on the other hand, they invoked faith—in this way, the separation we have been denouncing for years remains—meanwhile their conception of life, of death, of reality was not even scratched, but instead it was just covered over with a fideistic sheen. Giussani does not follow this road. Nihilism implicates a reduced use of reason, that can then be identically transferred to Christ (we often say, in the face of certain facts, “Why should we say Christ?”). Thus, if one skips the problem, it shows up again, presenting itself exactly the same before Christ. There are no shortcuts, my friends.

What is needed to respond to this situation, to find that solid and clear foothold we need to stay in reality as human persons, to find again the substance that keeps us from being devoured by the circumstances, by the economic recession, by the opinion of others?

Once again, Fr. Giussani comes to our aid.

First, “The deceit implicit in the nihilist position is the evident objection, the fact that one cannot say that everything is null, that at my back there is nothingness: the final word is nothingness when, instead, things exist. [...] Therefore, on the one hand it is necessary to look again at the evidence that reality sets before us, that reality is: it cannot be lived and explained as nothingness.”⁵ And what is the evidence that reality sets before us, that reality is? In other words, “Reality in its being, reality as it appears in experience, that is, as it appears to the reason of man, how can it be there, and what is it made of? Reality as it appears to man is made by God, ‘of’ God. Being creates from nothingness, that is, engages itself. It is the perception of the contingency of reality, of the fact that *reality does not make itself*.”⁶ Take care, friends, because as we heard in the first letter, we can take these facts for granted, as commonplace, without looking them in the face and without engaging in that recovery of the human, of a way of using reason that truly enables us not to be lost in the face of reality. But we all know how much all this is anything but known and familiar in our way of relating with reality!

Now, just as reality exists, so I exist; I am part of it. Therefore, Fr. Giussani continues, “the only true mystery is: how is it that I exist? How is it that I have substance, consistency [...] This question identifies the ontological—not ethical—level of the question.”⁷ The existence of the “I,” of its freedom, of its original needs, indicates something Other, echoes an Other, is the sign of an Other. If I do not have this awareness, if this consciousness of self is not familiar, I do not exist. The true stature of the heart of the human person is this, and nobody can satiate it with any substitute: money, success, or power. We are constantly called to the true nature of our “I,” to the truth of what we are, because nothing but this Other can satisfy the human heart, and thus the heart of everyone, in society. But we all know how much the common mentality influences us; it is rooted in each of us and pushes us to seek satisfaction where everyone seeks it. In our history, we have always had to contend with the incoherence of the person in front of the truth of the Christian proposal—what we have always called “immorality,” in contrast to the true morality that is the continual tension toward the Infinite. Today, we can say it again with even more clarity; we are called

⁵ L. Giussani, “C’è perché è presente”, in *op.cit.*, p. 12.

⁶ L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

to this. The incoherence and the mistake of one are a call for all and for the conversion of each of us.

Second: “On the other hand, in this human reality, in this human life, God entered. Not only with His mercy, with His merciful lead, with his mysterious, fatherly lead, but He entered as a man, born of a woman. God, born as man from the womb of a young woman is an event that happens, that is introduced into the scenario of man’s life. Given this event, there is a new factor that cannot be set to zero with impunity, that cannot easily be forgotten,”⁸ so irreducible is the Christian event.

Thus, we can say that reality exists; we can say that the Christian event exists and is irreducible: “And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.”⁹ This event introduces a gaze upon man that refuses to reduce him to the level of his error, whatever it may be. In tomorrow’s talk, we will see this gaze in the way that Christ looked upon Zacchaeus. Man is never ultimately what he does, rather, he is that relationship with the Infinite that Christ affirmed through His gaze upon all those He encountered, particularly the sinners, to the point of scandalizing everyone, just as happens today. Precisely because we have encountered this same gaze, we can acknowledge our errors and mistakes without justifying them, because a person never ceases to be such, no matter what errors he commits—and it is necessary to demonstrate whether these errors are crimes. For this reason, acknowledging the objectivity of the error and the need for reparation (something that is always intrinsic to a position of truth) does not in any way mean rejecting the person. Christ introduced this gaze into history. Often we are the first to be scandalized by certain errors, ours or others’ (“How is it possible?!”). It is not a matter of denying them, censuring them, or justifying them; it is a matter of being able to face them in order to start anew. But what is the point of departure to begin again? “Recovery for man, in any interest of his, in any expression, can only start from a renewal, full of pain at one’s forgetfulness of the memory of Christ: the memory of Christ as normal content of the new self-awareness of the Christian.”¹⁰ This memory is the source of morality as recovery, as a striving to always begin anew, untiringly, no matter what error has been committed. This is the morality of each and every member

⁸ L. Giussani, “C’è perché è presente,” in *op.cit.*, pp. 12-13.

⁹ *Mt* 28:20.

¹⁰ L. Giussani, “C’è perché è presente”, in *op.cit.*, p. 13.

of our people. If a person commits errors, this person will always be able to start again; if the errors are ours, we, too, can turn toward a renewal—or, in other words, let ourselves be educated. This morality exists solely as a striving and an entreaty, if we turn as beggars, abashed and thus humble, with a certainty that is renewed every morning. As Fr. Giussani always taught us, quoting Eliot: “Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before, selfish and purblind as ever before/ Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the way that was lit by the light;/Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet following no other way.”¹¹

This is the conversion we must ask for today (and which we all need, all of us!): to live faith as an experience, because, as Fr. Giussani says, “only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life’s needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where *everything* pointed in the opposite direction....”¹²

A gesture of these dimensions necessarily requires sacrifice of each of us, in our attention to the announcements, to keeping silence, and to the instructions given. Each of these elements is a modality with which we can ask Christ to have mercy on our nothingness and to give us that conversion that makes us truly ourselves. We all know our need for the silence that consists in letting everything we are told penetrate deep down to the marrow of our bones, making this silence become a cry, a prayer to Christ to have mercy on us.

¹¹ T.S. Eliot, Choruses from “The Rock, VII”, in T.S. Eliot: *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980, p. 108.

¹² *The Risk of Education. Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, Translated from the Italian by Rosanna M. Giammanco Frongia, Ph.D., The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York 2001, p. 11.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 5:34-42; Psalm 26 (27); Jn 6:1-15

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

In front of Gamaliel's the realism (time will show whether this is the work of man or of God), power is revealed in its attempt to reduce the evidence (they need to have the Apostles whipped, to insist on the prohibition against speaking in the name of Jesus), to deny the evidence of a good, of an inexorable positivity, then and now. The instruments change (it is not necessary to provide the details, we are all intelligent), but in every power, the attempt to deny the evidence, the evidence of the good, of the inexorable positivity of this Presence, has at root the fear of a newness, nothingness.

But the Gospel shows us that this resistance is also ours, is also His Apostles', even though they follow and love Him, but in front of His initiative they reduce everything to their measure. It is the dramatic dialogue of Christ with the Apostles, who resist: it seems good sense, realism, and yet it is resistance to His initiative. But His irreducibility does not yield before the flattery of the enthusiastic crowd, the crowd that a few hours later will leave Him in the synagogue, scandalized by His message; the irreducibility of the Lord is in this filial relationship, founded in the Father. Those who realize this and abandon themselves live the same irreducibility, not out of their own strength, but out of the beauty of an evidence of humanity that nothing and nobody—neither Power, nor our fragility—can stop.

The story in the *Acts of the Apostles* concludes this way: "And all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus" (*Acts 5:42*). In the Temple (in the Church), in homes (and in all the world, in every sphere of life, nothing excluded), this moved, passionate Voice resounds through the fragility and precariousness of our existence.

Saturday Morning, April 21st

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Sonatas for piano

Wilhelm Backhaus, piano

“Spirto Gentil” no. 22, Decca

Fr. Pino. Beethoven’s *Sonata no. 5*, which we listened to as we entered, is the piece that, for a full year, every Sunday evening, Gaetano Corti played without uttering a word for Giussani, who returned very late, exhausted by the early, very intense activity of his initiative. Let us try to become one with this human intensity, this vibration of friendship as companionship toward the destiny of the other. This human intensity is not just a question of temperament, but of consciousness, the consciousness that hosts the fact of Christ present, that is, therefore, memory, acknowledgment of what is happening now.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

A Maestro to Follow

I will begin by reading the telegram from the Holy Father: “On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation present in Rimini, you wished to express to the Holy Father Benedict XVI sentiments of devoted and affectionate closeness, assuring particular prayers for his universal ministry as the successor of the Apostle Peter. The Sovereign Pontiff, in expressing lively appreciation for the praiseworthy initiative of the Fraternity, thanks you for the expression of devotion and for the thoughts of veneration that accompanied it, and, as he augurs that the experience of contact with the living Christ will kindle renewed commitment to generous ecclesial testimony, in the fruitful example traced by the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani, he invokes a bountiful outpouring of the Easter gifts of joy and peace, and very willingly sends you and the

participants of the spiritual encounter his Apostolic Blessing, extending it to your loved ones. With sincere respect, Archbishop Angelo Becciu, Substitute for the Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

1. The self-awareness of the “I”

“When in fact the grip of a hostile society tightens around us to the point of threatening the vivacity of our expression and when a cultural and social hegemony tends to penetrate the heart, stirring up our already natural uncertainties, then *the time of the person has come*,”¹³ said Fr. Giussani in 1976.

In 1990, at the University Students’ Equipe, he insisted, “In all the circumstances and contingencies of life, of the world, of history, what counts, what one can always start out from, what sustains newness and creativity, has a place called ‘person’: it is the subject, which is called ‘I’ [...]. The harder times get, the more the subject counts, the more the person counts.”¹⁴

Again, in 1998, he has someone ask a question in order then to answer it, so much does he want this to be understood: “*Why does a movement like ours insist so much on the ‘I,’ and why this insistence only now?*” “When you say ‘only now’ it makes me react at once, because the beginning of the Movement was dominated by the problem of the person! And the person is the individual; the person is an individual who says ‘I.’ For a long time, we were the only ones to say—with the fear that we were exaggerating—that the ‘I’ is the self-awareness of the cosmos, that is to say, the whole of reality is made for man. In the Christian understanding, God’s aim in creating the world was the affirmation of the person. This is why now we say that the whole cosmos reaches its summit, its highest peak, in self-awareness; it’s like a pyramid on whose highest peak self-awareness bursts forth: the awareness of self, in nature, in the whole of created nature, is the ‘I.’ So the world, the cosmos would have a meaning if only one ‘I’ existed. The self-awareness of the cosmos is like God’s challenge: ‘I created in order that there would be a creature that become aware of the fact that I am everything, I make everything, I made

¹³L. Giussani, Conversation at the CLU Spiritual Exercises of December 7, 1976, “È venuto il tempo della persona” [“The Time of the Person Has Come”], edited by L. Cioni, *Litterae Communionis CL*, no. 1, 1977, p. 11.

¹⁴CLU (CL University Students) Equipe, Milan, February 10, 1990, CL Archive.

everything.’ For religiosity is the heart of man, the heart of the ‘I,’ and it expresses itself as desire for happiness and as reason that determines all the definitions that we give to words. Reason is the awareness of reality according to the whole of its factors. And morality is the link between an act, an act of the ‘I,’ a conscious act, and the whole of creation, order. These are two definitions fundamental for our conception of the ‘I.’ Anyway, in the first years, the first ten years or so, before the events of 1968 and the great revolt they brought, putting into anxious discussion not so much the ‘I,’ but rather its action in society, the conquest of power (because the conquest of knowledge was secondary to that of power as it was conceived at that time), before 1968, as I was saying, I always used a phrase of Jesus as a starting point for all the retreats and spiritual exercises. [...] The phrase of Jesus that I quoted so many times, like a continuous refrain, rather less often from 1968 onwards, we have now taken up again, because the outcome of politics or of ‘revolution’ has shown the extreme consequences of a lack of awareness, of self-awareness of the ‘I.’ If the ‘I’ is the self-awareness of the cosmos, then the greatest crime that the ‘I’ can commit is not knowing itself. Instead, it must be aware of itself. Jesus said, ‘What use is it if you gain the whole world and lose yourself?’ What He means literally is, ‘What use is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses himself? Or what can a man give in exchange for himself?’ They are things that call attention to each other, because if the ‘I’ is the awareness of the cosmos, of everything, the relationship with the Creator, with the Infinite, with what cannot be measured, the origin and destiny of everything, it is in the ‘I’ that these things are played out, in the awareness that the ‘I’ has of itself. This explains why what we say, the content of our conversation is always centered on humanity, on the human value of things; and the human value is not the value of ‘humanity’ but the value of the individual, of the person. So the whole discourse I started at the Berchet High School, Milan, right away in the first year, gave rise to *The Religious Sense*, then to the second volume, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, and later to the texts on the life of the Church and on the value of the Church. But the *leitmotiv* or the common destiny of all this development was the person—to understand the person and what the person should do, who man is and what man should do in order to be himself [...]. In the time we live in, we have reached, as it were, the sandy shore of a wasteland, a human desert, where it is the ‘I’ that suffers; not society but the ‘I,’ because for the sake of society all the ‘I’s you can think of are being killed. Whereas for us society is born from the existence of the ‘I.’ ‘Increase and multiply,’ God told Adam and Eve: but the nature

of Adam and Eve's task, of their being created as individual persons, is to be company for each other: man cannot live, cannot know, cannot feed himself if not in the company of an other, in the encounter with an other. We are, I was saying, as it were, on sand, on the sandy shore of a terrible collapse of social life. And since the power has as its ideal and aim subjecting everyone's life to rules (the Italian government shows it quite blatantly), this elimination of freedom has dramatic consequences, since we don't want all to be enslaved, or maneuvered on the orders of a central mechanism. So how is it possible to resist? How is it possible to offer an alternative to the dominion of power that means to put itself in a position to determine every aspect, every expression of man's life, dictating even the moral laws? The only resource for blocking the intrusion of power is in that vertex of the cosmos that is the 'I,' that is freedom."

Each of us must compare ourselves against this answer. Who would have said this? Who would have indicated the "I," the person, as the resource for restraining the invasiveness of power? Let's not take it for granted: it is the thing among us least taken for granted, so determined are we by the mentality of everyone, to the point that often we feel like a piece of the mechanism of circumstances; we are pantheists, conceiving of ourselves as part of everything, where the "I" disappears, and so (like everyone) we place our hope in the powers that be.

Fr. Giussani insists, "The only resource that is left to us is a powerful recovery of the Christian sense of the 'I.' I say the 'Christian' sense not out of preconception, but because Christ's word, Christ's attitude, Christ's conception of the human person, of the 'I,' is the only one that explains all the factors that we feel boiling up inside us, emerging in our hearts. For this reason, even in a last-ditch defense of power, no power will be able, could be able to crush the 'I' as such, to prevent the 'I' from being 'I.' [How striking to read it again, in the current situation!] [...] This stress on the value of the 'I' has been not just the reason for a deeper reflection, for a development of religiosity as a fundamental category of the 'I,' but also the fascinating origin of the relationship with all levels of knowledge, the origin of a reading of human experience as that found in the most astute people, who are more gifted with this sensitivity—the poets and the whole of human expressiveness. So you see why I am fascinated with Leopardi: he was the writer, the expression that I had studied most (I had learned almost all his poetry by heart), in whom I grasped the fundamental question. [...] Anyway, the phrase of Jesus that I quoted is tragic, but it is also tragic that I have not heard it quoted by others [this judgment concerns us as well], apart from the

odd rare occasion, because, for us, at the beginning, it was really the point of reference. So go on with it, now it's up to you to go on with the whole dynamic, it's up to you to develop all the dynamics that we have transmitted for years, of the principle reason for our friendship, of our company and of our friendship [this is the fundamental reason; otherwise, over time, it will no longer interest us]: that is the fulfillment of the heart, of the needs of the heart, without which nihilism would be the only possible consequence."¹⁵

Here is our situation: an 'I' that no longer has substance, a search for power driven by fear of this nihilism, the search for satisfaction where and how everyone looks for it, and the fear of the loss of power, like everyone.

But what is the 'I,' that it can restrain the intrusion of the powers that be? What is the source of its substance? The person is its self-awareness. All the consistency of the 'I' is in its self-awareness: "What drives so that the person can exist, so that the human subject has vigor in this situation in which everything is ripped from the trunk to make dry leaves of it, is *self-awareness*, a clear and loving perception of self, charged with awareness of one's destiny and thus capable of true affection for self, freed from the instinctive obtuseness of self-love. If we lose this identity, nothing is of help to us."¹⁶

What does this mean: this clear and loving perception of self, aware of one's destiny, capable of true affection for oneself? Self-awareness is not just an inwardness, not an intimate introspection. What substance could something of the kind have? "The strength of this subject that is called 'I,' the strength of the person, the substance of this person is not in the intimate depths, in intimate possession, detached from the rest, kept free from the rest, but comes from another belonging." What type of belonging? "The greatness of the subject, the newness of the person is given by a belonging that is neither in things that happen, nor in gardens we imagine and construct, in earthly gardens we have thought up and built; it is in belonging to that of which everything is made. In the relationship with what happens, there is something that comes before, something greater that is acknowledged; this is what gives substance to the true protagonist of history, to history's true creative domain,

¹⁵ L. Giussani, "Accettiamo la vita perché tendiamo alla felicità" ["We Accept Life Because We Tend toward Happiness"], *Tracce-Litterae Communio*, no. 5, 1998, pp. II-VI.

¹⁶ L. Giussani, "È venuto il tempo della persona" ["The Time of the Person Has Come"], *Litterae Communio* CL, no. 1, 1977, p. 12.

which is the subject, the person—in other words, the ‘I.’ But the strength of the ‘I’ and of the you, the strength of the subject, of the person, is in something other to which I totally belong, to which the ‘I’ totally acknowledges it belongs. This is the lived experience of the personality: acknowledging that I belong to what makes me.”¹⁷ Thus, when we continue to use reason rationalistically, when we constantly succumb to the positivism that leaves us stuck in mere appearances, we do not live (even if we are here) the belonging to Him who makes us; He who makes us is the ultimate factor that determines our consciousness, because self-awareness is precisely the acknowledgment of belonging to Him who makes me. For this reason, it is anything but taken for granted that the awareness Fr. Giussani describes in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense* should be habitual in us: ‘I am You-who-make-me.’”¹⁸ As soon as something happens, we fall apart, not because we are fragile, or because of the circumstances, or the environment... Let’s stop it! We fall apart because of our lack of self-awareness. No power in this world could eliminate us, no matter what the circumstance, if we had this self-awareness, because the self-awareness does not lie in physical energy, or in our possibility of success, or in our capacity. Our strength, all the energy of our strength is in the simple acknowledgment of Him to whom we belong, He who makes us now. Because the Lord is everything, but “not on the strength of our sentiment, because ‘we feel’ that He is everything; not on the strength of an act of the will, because ‘we decide’ that He is everything; not moralistically, because ‘He has to be’ everything, but by nature.”¹⁹

But how do we come to have this awareness more and more? “The fact that the Lord is everything by nature, however, did not emerge as the fruit of human wisdom, did not come forth from philosophical reasoning. The fact that the Lord is Lord because He constitutes us and thus determines life appeared evident through His intervention in history, through His unveiling of Himself in history. God revealed to man the Face of his destiny by unveiling Himself, making known the Name of human destiny through His Presence; He intervened to remind us that He is the destiny for man, the ‘*Unum*’ capable of making human

¹⁷ CLU Equipe, Milan, February 10, 1990, CL Archive.

¹⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, transl. John Zucchi, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo 1997, p. 106.

¹⁹ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1995, p. 22.

the life of man.”²⁰ Here Fr. Giussani implicates us: “What counts is the subject, but the subject—as we mentioned—is the awareness of an event, the event of Christ, who became history for you through an encounter, and you have acknowledged Him.”²¹

Therefore, the content of self-awareness is the memory of Christ. “Recovery, for man, in any interest of his, in any expression, can only start from a renewal, full of pain at one’s forgetfulness, of the memory of Christ: the memory of Christ as habitual content of the new self-awareness of the Christian.”²² This content of memory determines the stature of a personality. This is true for any person: there is no identity of the “I” without memory; one’s personality consists in memory. So then, what makes the difference is the content of memory. But, right away, Fr. Giussani tells us the sensation we have when we say these things: “Having the courage to affirm that the fundamental problem is that of making habitual the desire of His remembrance, the awareness of His Presence, cannot but reach us as a demand for something abstract, that is added to or overlaid on problems felt to be more pressing and concrete.”²³ This is the challenge: for us all this is abstract, and thus it does not conquer us; we feel Christ is distant from our hearts, and so we fill the void with other things. The urgent need of the heart is so powerful that we try to fill it. If our heart is not filled by Christ as something real that grasps us, then we succumb like everyone else to searching for fullness where everyone else seeks it, because “an abstract Christ”²⁴ does not fill us!

Therefore, the question is how Christ becomes the content of self awareness, how the memory of Christ grows in us, so that it is able to overcome the distance between our heart and Him. Fr. Giussani showed us the road, and it is simple: follow a *maestro*. “The desire for the memory of Christ matures as a history in us; it does not grow automatically, but as our capacity grows, following someone. And just as we cannot possess the project of our maturity, similarly, we cannot ourselves choose the maestro; we must only acknowledge him. The Lord has given us a *maestro* to follow; the Lord has placed him on the road He has placed us on, on the road we are travelling. Choosing the *maestro* ourselves would mean choosing someone convenient, choos-

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ CLU Equipe, Milan, February 10, 1990, CL Archive.

²² L. Giussani, “C’è perché è presente”, in *op.cit.*, p. 13.

²³ L. Giussani, “È venuto il tempo della persona”, in *op.cit.*, p. 12.

²⁴ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano*, *op.cit.*, p. 88.

ing someone who responds to our taste, to our desire to see our project affirmed. 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. The reason for *sequela* among us is not in order to attach to the person, but the *sequela* of Christ is the reason for *sequela* among us.”²⁵

It is a matter of following a *maestro*, as Saint Paul proposed in the beginning of Christian history, daring to say to his friends in Philippi, “Join with others in being imitators of me, brothers, and observe those who thus conduct themselves according to the model you have in us.”²⁶ Since then, this has been the method by which Christianity has been transmitted in history, as the Pope recently recalled, “Ever since Paul’s time, history has furnished a constant flow of other such ‘translations’ of Jesus’ way into historical figures. [...] The saints show us how renewal works and how we can place ourselves at its service.”²⁷ Therefore, Fr. Giussani has told us on many occasions, “Every day, I will contemplate the faces of the Saints, to find peace in their words.” Where should we look? Which *maestro* do we follow?

2. Fr. Giussani’s journey

We all acknowledge that the *maestro* the Lord has given us is named Fr. Luigi Giussani. The request to open the cause for canonization is the sign of this acknowledgment before the Church and the world. Therefore, only in following him can we learn to overcome the distance of our heart from Christ, to not feel He is abstract, and not reduce Him to an object of piety. This is the importance of Fr. Giussani’s life: the Lord, always present in history, wanted to raise up in the middle of the twentieth century a charism as journey to know Christ, precisely in this cultural situation in which we find ourselves living, because the cultural *humus* that the Enlightenment thinkers introduced into Europe to a large extent determines our way of living reality and living the faith (think of what we said in past years about the separation between knowing and believing, which reduces faith to sentiment,

²⁵ L. Giussani, “È venuto il tempo della persona”, in op.cit., p. 12.

²⁶ *Phil* 3:17.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Chrism Mass*, April 5, 2012.

devotion, or ethics). For this reason, the story of Fr. Giussani is so significant, because he lived our same circumstances, and had to face the same challenges and the same risks; he himself had to make the same journey he describes in so many passages of his works (as our Spanish friend Ignacio Carbajosa showed last summer at the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memores Domini*).

Fr. Giussani confesses, “This was a risk [of reducing Christ to a little image; to remembrance and piety] for me, too, in freshman year of high school, when I put the face of Christ by Carracci—who was not a very great painter—on the table, but it reminded me of Christ.”²⁸ And at the 1993 Spiritual Exercises for Priests, he said, “God was born of Our Lady two thousand years ago, and for many years, what put me in relationship with Him I imagined with that attitude that could be indicated with the term ‘piety’: it coincided with the remembrance of a fact that happened. Even in the seriousness of the sacrament, I felt that there was something incomplete, something unfinished in this position.”²⁹ A Christianity reduced to piety is absolutely unfinished. Why unfinished? Because a Christianity understood as “piety,” as “remembrance,” is a reduction of Christianity, which loses the historic characteristics of carnality: Christianity, which is the event of God made man, in time becomes only the remembrance of a fact in the past or a sentiment that provokes me, but this is not what happened in history and fails to have an impact on us and to respond to all the expectation of our hearts. Fr. Giussani continues, “For me, the important thing was to remind myself of Him. But there is something unfinished in this position, in reducing the life of faith to a form of piety.”³⁰

So Fr. Giussani also had to make this journey. What enabled him to leave behind this reduction, as early as his years in seminary? He himself recounts the story: “If I had not met Msgr. Gaetano Corti in my first year of high school, if I had not heard the few Italian lessons of Msgr. Giovanni Colombo, who then became Cardinal of Milan, if I had not found students whose eyes widened at what I said, as before a surprise that was as unimagined as it was welcome, if I had not begun to spend time with them, if I had not found increasing numbers of peo-

²⁸ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way? An Unusual Approach to Christian Existence. Volume 2: Hope*, Mc Gill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca, 2008, p. 144.

²⁹ Spiritual Exercises of the Priests of CL, La Thuile, August 31 – September 3, 1993, CL Archive.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

ple who got involved with me, if I had not had this companionship, if you had not had this companionship, Christ, for me as for you, would have been a word, the object of theological sentences or, in the best of cases, the call to a ‘pietistic’ affection, generic and confused, that was articulated only in fear of sin or, in other words, moralism.”³¹

If Giussani had not thus encountered certain people, Christ would have remained just an object of piety, a devotion, a call to moralism (so often we see around us the return of this reduction of Christianity). Here is the power of the word “contemporaneousness”: if Christ does not remain contemporary, He becomes simply a fact of the past that has no impact on my present “I.” For this reason, Fr. Giussani said that if he had not met Corti, Colombo, the students, and the many who began to widen their eyes before a surprise “as unimagined as it was welcome,” if, that is, he had not seen Christ present, at work, changing people’s lives, Christ would have remained an object of piety. Instead, the relationship with Christ, with God made man, coincides with the relationship with those people who document, who testify that Christ is present, not so much because they are physically present (we find many people, in fact, who are present yet do not change us much), but because they live a human intensity that documents His presence today. In fact, to testify to His presence today, through this intensity, this change, it is necessary for Him to be present. This is the testimony that He is present: people are changed, fascinated by Christ, not because they do not commit errors (as if the testimony could be reduced to coherence!) but because even through the mistakes—in the continual openness to correction—they testify to something greater than themselves. His contemporaneousness, through this change, this intensity, this humanity capable of staying in front of everything, this capacity for living life with fullness, is what has an impact in life, to the point of attracting me, reawakening me so that everything becomes a sign of Him, to the point that the relationship with Him coincides with the relationship with anything, with any “you.” Everything becomes sign. In the history of a great love, everything becomes sign. For this reason, in the Easter 2011 poster, we repeated, “Christ is something that is happening to me;”³² Christ is not a fact of the past. Christ is something that is happening to me now. Is this an abstract sentence, a vision of ours, or is it what we cannot avoid recognizing when we run into certain people

³¹ L. Giussani, *Qui e ora. 1984-1985 [Here and Now]*, Bur, Milan, 2009, pp. 209-210.

³² *Easter poster*, Communion and Liberation, 2011.

because, in staying with them, all our sleepy humanity is reawakened, all our capacity for desire, all the desire for fullness that often we have already rejected, skeptically? Only if we find ourselves before people in whom we can touch with our hand that Christ is happening now (so far is it from anything imagined, so far from any thought), can we recognize Him as contemporary.

So then, one understands why reducing Him to piety or a little image or a theological expression was something incomplete for Fr. Giussani. This experience of Giussani, this history of his, is the gift for our life: it is possible to live the contemporaneity of Christ. In the situation in which we find ourselves, it is possible! He himself documents it for us: “Christ, this is the name that indicates and defines a reality that I encountered in my life. I encountered: first, when I was little, a boy, etc., I heard Him spoken of. When we grow up, this word can be well known, but for many people He isn’t encountered; He isn’t really experienced as present. On the contrary, Christ collided with my life, my life ran up against Christ, precisely so that I would learn to understand how He is the nerve center, the crucial point of everything, of my whole life. *Christ is the life of my life*. In Him is summed up all that I could want, all that I search for, all that I sacrifice, all that evolves in me for love of the people with whom He has put me. As Möhler said in a sentence I’ve quoted many times, ‘I think I would not wish to live any longer if I could not hear Him speak.’ It is a sentence I placed under an image of Christ by Carracci when I was in high school, maybe one of the sentences I have most remembered in my life.”³³

Who does not desire this? Who does not desire that Christ be ever and ever more the life of their life? Not just speaking of Christ, but not being able to live anymore without hearing Christ speak. In order to experience this, Fr. Giussani—as we know—had to make a journey, the one he in turn proposed to us. We have to decide whether to follow him or not. His story is decisive for us, too.

What are the necessary conditions for travelling this road?

He himself said it, responding to the question of a person from the *Memores Domini*: “When I held the first meeting for priests—they had asked me to speak because I was already well-known, having about a hundred students who followed me—the first man who stood up asked me, ‘What would you recommend for us young priests?’ I told him, ‘That you be men!’ ‘What do you mean, that we be men?’ ‘That you

³³L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, op.cit., p. 57.

be men! To be good priests, you first of all have to be men. If you are men, you feel that which is precisely man's, the needs and problems typical of man; you live the relationship with all that becomes present and radiates from the present to you. In the effort to respond to all this, you learn both the truth in all these things and the truth of God who fulfills the truth of men.” This he said to priests, and one might think, “What about us?” Here is how Fr. Giussani continues: “Analogously, I'll answer you: be human, live the truth of your humanity.” But take care: our humanity is not the list of the things we do or the things that go badly, in such a way that we immediately reduce everything to ethics. “Your humanity is not what you do now; it's how God made you, how He made you be born from the womb of your mother, when you were little... now, too, you suddenly become small and simple again, and you cry because you need to cry. It's natural to cry, or you are afraid because the problem is difficult and you feel the disproportion of your efforts. Be human, live your humanity as aspirations, as sensitivity to problems, and risks to face; live your humanity as faithfulness to what urges within your soul, that God makes urge within your soul from its very origin; and this way—according to your question—reality will present itself to your eyes in a true way. For God to respond to me, to correspond, to satisfy, I need to be what He created me to be.”³⁴ We have all been created with this humanity. We all have this humanity.

This loyalty to one's humanity—just as God made us, with all our urgent need, with all the aspiration, without taming it, without reducing it—is what Fr. Giussani perceived in himself, and so he was able to see expressed in Leopardi's poetry the vibration of his humanity just as it was made: “When I was thirteen, I memorized the entire poetic production of Leopardi, because the issue he raised seemed to me to obscure all the others. For an entire month I studied only Leopardi.”³⁵ Let us try to imagine the journey Fr. Giussani began, recognizing in Leopardi one who expressed what he himself felt: “Powerful, and most kind/Ruler over the hidden depths of my mind; [this structural disproportion, this urgent need of living that dominated the whole mind of Leopardi to his most intimate depths] /Awe-inspiring, but precious,/ Gift of the gods; [often this boundless profundity of our feeling seems terrible, so much so that it seems a problem we have to solve and not

³⁴ L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, op.cit., pp. 61-62.

³⁵ L. Giussani, *Una coscienza religiosa di fronte a G. Leopardi*, [*A Religious Consciousness in the Encounter with G. Leopardi*] Milano, 1984, pro manuscripto.

the resource the Lord gave us within our humanity]; dear friend [so much is it ours] /Of my most dismal days, /You, thought, returning so often to my gaze [we cannot rip away this humanity of ours; it always returns to the surface].”³⁶

Not only is it impossible to rip this humanity away from ourselves, but we need it! Why does Fr. Giussani consider this so decisive? Why was it so decisive for him? Because this humanity was given to us in order to recognize Christ, to recognize Him in all His power, in all His claim to wholly attract my humanity, to meet my desire, my expectation. It is in the response to my expectant awaiting, to this humanity of mine, to my urgent need for living, that I can know Christ. For this reason, devotion is not enough; piety is inadequate for responding to this urgent need. Only a Christ who has not been subjected to the usual reductions is sufficient. For this reason, Fr. Giussani always insists—as we saw at the beginning of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*—“To consider Christianity in a way that is not somehow reductive depends on the breadth and depth of one’s perception and consideration of the religious fact as such,”³⁷ that is, this humanity of ours.

This is why the humanity of Fr. Giussani is part of the charism, part of the gift the Mystery has given us in history through him, in order to testify to us what it means to say “Christ.” If we begin throwing away the human, thinking of it as a problem, as something to resolve, we will inevitably reduce Christianity to piety or moralism, and we will seek satisfaction where everyone searches for it.

The reason Fr. Giussani was given this humanity is revealed in the moment Christ appears with all His power on the horizon of his life, in what he calls the “beautiful day.” It is an episode that marked his existence, and thus the charism—one he would define as the most decisive moment of his cultural life. It was 1939, when he was fifteen years old. Imagine a humanity like the one described, of one who had spent a year bowled over by the human vibration that he found reading Leopardi, because all the other things seemed secondary to him. One day his Religion teacher in the seminary, Fr. Gaetano Corti, explained the first page of the Gospel of Saint John: “At a certain point he said, ‘You see, “the *Word* became flesh” means that “*Beauty* became flesh,”

³⁶ G. Leopardi, “The Dominant Thought,” XXVI, vv. 1-6, in *The Canti*, translated by J.G. Nichols, Fyfield Books, Routledge, New York, 2003, p. 108.

³⁷ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, transl. Viviane Hewitt, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Buffalo 1998, p. 3.

“Justice became flesh,” “Truth became flesh.” Beauty, Justice, and Truth were a man, born of a woman, who walked on the roads of this world.” It was like a lightning bolt, electrifying. I had always been in love with Leopardi. In one of his poems that I always liked, *To My Lady*, Leopardi addresses the Lady with a capital ‘L,’ Beauty with a capital ‘B.’ And he says with passion, ‘There was a time/When life was not uncertain and not drear;/I thought you travelled on this arid earth/Companionably. But is there anyone/At all like you?’ And then he says again, ‘Now no hope can remain/Of seeing you in the flesh;/Unless it be when naked and alone/My spirit walks those unfamiliar ways/That lead to a strange place.’ I understood in that lightning flash that ‘the Word become flesh’ was the overturning of that sadness. It was the announcement that this Beauty ‘truly’ is found on the roads of this world.”³⁸ *Quid est veritas? Vir qui adest.*³⁹

“Dear beauty, who arouse/My love from far away; who hide yourself,/Except when deep in sleep/Your sacred shadow moves me.”⁴⁰ And a bit further on, “Now no hope can remain/Of seeing you in the flesh;/Unless it be when naked and alone/My spirit walks those unfamiliar ways/That lead to a strange place.”⁴¹ And then the passage we all have learned to love, “If you are one of those/Platonic notions which the eternal mind/ Disdains to cover in a fleshly dress,/In such ephemeral shape/To suffer our sad life and its distress;/Or if another world is where you are,/One world of countless worlds in whirling gyres,/Where some star close to you, some brighter sun,/Shines on you, and you breathe a purer air;/From down here where the years are short and grim/Accept your unknown lover, in this hymn.”⁴² Here is the entire charism. What Leopardi dreamed, that this eternal idea of Beauty should assume material form, became an event in history. Fr. Giussani says, “This was the turning point in my cultural life.” Fr. Giussani’s humanity was so wide open that the Christian announcement had such a grasp on him and when we encountered him he fascinated us and attracted us to follow him. “This was the turning point in my cultural life. I use ‘culture’ in its broad meaning as including both faith and reason [...]: more than any other hypothesis of meaning, it is faith that answers the needs of

³⁸ L. Giussani, “L’intervista [The Interview]”, in *Dimensioni Nuove*, no. 9, 1979, p. 21.

³⁹ “What is truth? A man who is here present.” (Saint Augustine, *A Commentary on the Psalms* 84, 13).

⁴⁰ G. Leopardi, “To His Lady,” *Canti*, XVIII, vv. 1-4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, vv 12-16.

⁴² *Ibid.* vv 45-55.

the human heart, and therefore faith is more rational than any other rational hypothesis.”⁴³

This is the challenge Fr. Giussani issues to each of us today, and we know that these are not just words. We have seen in him how much faith responds to the needs of the heart more than any other hypothesis. It is not a matter of imagining what happened two thousand years ago. Now, in this situation in history, with all the rationalism that pervades us, with all the reduction of the human we find in ourselves, with all the power that wants to rip away this announcement from every fiber of our being, here, now, the Lord has given us Fr. Giussani to enable us to touch with our hand how faith responds to the needs of the heart more than any other hypothesis. For this reason, it is more rational than any other rationalistic hypothesis. This is our culture. “We propose faith as the highest form of rationality, because the encounter with an event that carries it brings about an experience and a correspondence to what is human that would otherwise be unthinkable.”⁴⁴ This is what no power in this world can rip away from our eyes. This is the greatest challenge that we have ever been given.

This is what Fr. Giussani desired for his friend Angelo Majo in 1964, and that he desires—I am certain—for each of us today: “My hope for you is that, in these experiences of yours, Jesus be incarnate with that definitive inexorability with which He was incarnated in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Because the greatest joy of a person’s life is feeling Jesus Christ alive and vibrant in the flesh of one’s own thought and one’s own heart. The rest is fleeting illusion or manure.”⁴⁵

This is how Jesus does not remain outside, juxtaposed, far from the heart. Christ is something that is happening now when He is incarnated in our guts, but to be incarnate in our guts, guts—the human—are necessary. Jesus can be known only by those who see Him incarnate in their own experience, and thus they will understand what Christ is, “Because the greatest joy in a person’s life is feeling Jesus Christ alive and vibrant in the flesh of one’s own thought and one’s own heart. The rest is fleeting illusion or manure.” It is not out of moralism that we do not pursue other things; it is because they appear as illusions to us. Therefore, it is anything but moralism!

⁴³ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op.cit., p. 22.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ L. Giussani, *Lettere di fede e di amicizia ad Angelo Majo* [*Letters of Faith and Friendship to Angelo Majo*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, 2007, p. 53.

For this reason, we understand the importance and the grace of the charism for us, for responding to our lack of substance today, to our nihilism, to our dissatisfaction. “We Christians of the modern climate have been separated not from Christian formulas, directly, not from Christian rites, directly, not from the laws of the Christian Decalogue, directly. We have been separated from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity. We have a faith that no longer responds as it should to the religious sentiment, that is, we have a faith that is not aware, a faith that no longer has intelligence of itself. An author I have been reading for years, Reinhold Niebuhr, said, ‘Nothing is so incredible as the answer to a question that is not asked.’ Christ is the answer to the problem, to our thirst and hunger for truth, happiness, beauty and love, justice, and ultimate meaning. If this is not vivid in us, if this need is not educated in us, what is Christ here for? That is, what is the point of the Mass, confession, prayers, catechism, the Church, priests, the Pope? They are still treated with a certain respect according to the areas of life of the world; thus, they are conserved for a certain period of time out of inertia but they are no longer the answer to a question, and therefore will not survive long.”⁴⁶

And this coincides with the observation of then-Cardinal Ratzinger: “The crisis in Christian preaching, which we have been experiencing to a growing extent for the last century, depends not to a small degree on the fact that Christian responses ignore man’s questions; they were right and continue to be so; however, they did not exert influence because they did not start from the problem and were not developed within its context.”⁴⁷

⁴⁶ L. Giussani, *La coscienza religiosa nell'uomo moderno* [*The Religious Consciousness in Modern Man*], Centro Culturale “Jacques Maritain,” Chieti, November 21, 1985, pro manuscripto, p. 15.

⁴⁷ J. Ratzinger, *Dogma e predicazione* [*Dogma and Preaching*], Queriniana, Brescia, 2005, p. 75.

Saturday Afternoon, April 21st

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Piano Concertos 3 and 4

Alfred Brendel, piano

James Levine – Chicago Symphony Orchestra – Philips

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

The Road of Self-Awareness: a Lived Experience

How can we today make the same journey that—as we saw this morning—Fr. Giussani first had to undertake, in such a way that what he desired for his friend Angelo Majo and for us can come true, that is, that Christ be incarnate in our most human experiences, in such a way as to overcome the separation between Christ and the human and thus overcome the distance of the heart from Christ? What is needed is a journey, not a miracle (as we often dream), a journey that not even Fr. Giussani was spared. This journey requires—as we have seen in his experience—two conditions and a method.

1. Two conditions and a method

a) First condition: an ‘I’ that is not reduced

The first condition is an ‘I’ that is not reduced. We have seen this decisive factor in Fr. Giussani’s approach first of all in his experience. As we continually see in the readings for School of Community, he reminded us of Barbara Ward’s famous line, so that we would keep it in mind: “People rarely learn what they believe they already know.”⁴⁸ In a 1980 conference at the San Carlo Cultural Center, Fr. Giussani gave the example that remains in history as confirmation of this: “The Pharisees believed that they already knew; they did not learn to recognize that Presence [it is not that they did not have it in front of them, because it is not enough to have it in front of you!] that was the answer to their religious sense, to their entire history. Similarly, we can be like

⁴⁸ Cf. B. Ward, *Faith and Freedom*, W.W. Norton & Company, New York 1954, p. 4.

the Pharisees, ‘nothing—how many times have I repeated this line, since I read it in the book I was studying—is so incredible as the answer to a question that is not asked.’ Christ is the answer to the human person’s thirst for living the relationship with his destiny, with the meaning of what he does, of eating, of drinking, of keeping vigil, of sleeping, of loving, of working. To the degree to which this expectation and this desire are not alive in me, I cannot recognize the answer that is given to me, when it is given to me.” It is not that it is not given—careful!—it is that I can repeat it formally, as we have often repeated Christian responses, but then the heart is far away and goes searching for satisfaction elsewhere. “This desire is what makes us capable of recognizing the accent of His voice when it echoes in our life. What enables us to recognize Christ, His accent, the accent of His presence, is the loyalty, the sincerity and intensity of this desire to know what God is for my life, for our life [so often we can be in the same place, before the same facts, the same events, and some are amazed, grasped, while for others nothing has happened; it is not that the Pharisees did not see miracles!]. [...] Nothing is so incredible as the answer to a question you don’t feel, one you haven’t asked. This is why the most important thing, not only for non-Christians, for those who have not yet acknowledged Christ, or for those who have not known Him in His exact orthodox terms, but also for us Christians who live in the Church, is the truth of our religious sense, because then also the reality of Christ is communicated to our life. [...] The important thing for understanding and letting oneself be crashed into and also transformed by the presence of our Destiny among us, of the mystery of God among us, of Christ, is to keep pure, uncluttered, loyal, and sincere that religious sense that is the ultimate constituent of our reason, of our heart, and that expresses itself as thirst to know, and obey, the Mystery [...]. It is what the Gospel calls ‘poverty of spirit,’ because poverty of spirit, purity of heart, like the hunger and thirst for justice, all the beatitudes, are synonyms, are different ways of saying this: that we must keep our religious sense free, uncluttered, sharp, that we need to be—if we want to use another word—simple. Our origin truly dictates the attitude; we must be ‘simple like children,’ like the child is, with all her nature, in her eyes, looking at her mother or at things.”⁴⁹

⁴⁹L. Giussani, “Dal senso religioso a Cristo” [“From the Religious Sense to Christ”], in *Dove la domanda si accende* [Where the Question Kindles], edited by C. Fornasieri and T. Lanosa, Itacalibri, Castel Bolognese, 2012, pp. 53-56.

Truly blessed is the one who hungers to recognize the response that is Jesus. This attitude certainly does not consider thirst and hunger as problems, as things to erase! No! In the Gospel, Christ speaks of this hunger and of this thirst as beatitude! We are blessed if we have them; Jesus calls blessed those who hunger and thirst, not those who are good and never make mistakes. In the Gospel, He does not let one mistake slip by, not even of His friends, but this was not what made the difference. What He praises are that hunger and that thirst, that simplicity of the child, because they are what is needed to recognize His contemporary presence—which is the second condition of the journey.

b) Second condition: the contemporaneity of Christ

The condition necessary for my thirst and my desire to recognize Christ is that He be before me with all His power, with the power of His contemporaneous presence.

But, on many occasions, we reduce His presence to what we can comprehend, as if we said that the presence of a historical person, as in the case of Jesus, lasts in history, remains contemporary, the way a personage of the past can remain contemporaneous, in other words, through the memory of Him, through His doctrine, through the values He proclaimed. Instead, Christianity claims to have introduced into history another form of presence. What remains are not only the teachings, or the values, or the doctrine, but precisely His personal presence. Christ claimed to remain, He Himself, as a living and current presence that challenges our measure. We remembered it at Easter: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; He is not here.”⁵⁰

How can Christ stay on as a contemporary presence? Through those He seizes in Baptism, “He assimilates to Himself all those His Father gives into His hands; all those who acknowledge Him, He assimilates to Himself, so that this coming of His really coincides with a visible phenomenon, tangible, concrete, which is the company of the believers, the assembly of believers, His mysterious body.”⁵¹ This enables the risen Christ to make Himself present now through the flesh of those who acknowledge Him: “It is in His sign, in the sign He constructed, that He created as the locus of His real presence, it is in His sign that we can understand, come to know and understand and believe Christ, that He is risen. The event of His final victory, therefore, continuing up to now, in

⁵⁰ *Mk* 16:6.

⁵¹ L. Giussani, *Qui e ora. 1984-1985*, op.cit., p. 151.

every instant, the dawning of the end of the world, His resurrection, His victory is in His sign that we can see.”⁵² This means that the contemporaneity of Christ must respect the features of His historical figure, and thus cannot be reduced to a discourse or ethics or a sentiment, but it must be a presence—as we continually see our readings for the School of Community—that is present, carnal, irreducible, easy to recognize, attractive, so much does it correspond to the expectation of the heart: “It is in a flesh that we can recognize the presence of the Word made flesh; if the Word was made flesh, it is *in a flesh* that we find it, identically. [...] If God became flesh, became man, it is through a *human* reality that I must understand it; otherwise, it was useless for Him to become man.”⁵³

c) A Method

But precisely because He is present in front of me, to my thirst, in order to know Him I need a method. “The object does not consist of a list of propositions nor does it have the plausibility of a news report. It is rather the truthful testimony about a living person who claimed to be the destiny of the world, the Mystery that penetrated and became part of history.”⁵⁴ Therefore, in order to know Him, two indispensable requisites are needed.

The first requisite is what Fr. Giussani calls “sharing life with Him.”⁵⁵ In fact, “I will be able to be certain about you, to the extent that I pay more attention to your life, that is, that I share in your life. The signs leading to certainty become multiplied in the measure in which you pay attention to them. For example, in the Gospel, who was able to understand the need to trust that man? Not the crowd looking for a cure, but those who followed Him and shared His life.”⁵⁶

The second requisite is intelligent attention to the clues, attention to the signs. “The more powerfully human one is, the more one is able to become certain about another on the basis of only a few indications. This is the human genius.”⁵⁷

⁵² L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, historical note by Giorgio Feliciani, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, pp. 154-155.

⁵³ L. Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction of Jesus]*, Bur, Milan, 1999, p. 123.

⁵⁴ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit., p. 40.

⁵⁵ L. Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno [The Sense of God and Modern Man]*, Bur, Milan, 1994, p. 64.

⁵⁶ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit., p. 41.

⁵⁷ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op.cit., p. 20.

With these requisites we can identify with the journey of the disciples but—careful—this immersion, this identification, according to what we have said, is not to be reduced to a memory of the past or a reflection on a text, thus substituting experience with comments (as we usually do!). The only true identification is to participate, in the present, in the same experience through living together with the contemporaneity of Christ, Who enables us to experience Him in a presence that cannot be reduced by our attempts to subjugate it to our measure. We will draw upon a chapter of the text of *School of Community* to understand this better.

2. The journey of the disciples: the road to certainty

The fifth chapter of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, I might say, is our chapter, the chapter of the journey, because we have all experienced the encounter. After all, we are all here. What is needed now is for our certainty to deepen, because the lack of substance we often find in ourselves highlights that this certainty is fragile, and not because we have not encountered Him, but because having the encounter is not enough for reaching certainty. This chapter describes the itinerary that the disciples did to deepen their certainty.

“Let us observe now how the exceptional nature of the encounter was confirmed, how an impression, albeit laden with proof, became a conviction. [...] When we meet a person who is to be significant in our lives, there is always that first instant when we have a presentiment, when something inside us is almost forced by the evidence of an unavoidable recognition: ‘That’s him’ or ‘That’s her.’ But only time and space dedicated to reiterating this evidence will bolster the existential weight of our initial impression. Only sharing life (*convivenza*) enables this impression to penetrate ever more radically and deeply within us until, at a certain point, it is absolute.”⁵⁸ For that impression charged with evidence to become certainty, it must enter ever more radically into us, more deeply into us; it must no longer be external and separate. But only living with Him makes this possible. The same thing happened to us, as well. “In a sequence of his film *Andrei Rubliev*, Tarkovsky has one of his characters say, ‘You know very well, you can’t manage to do anything, you are tired, you are exhausted, and at a certain moment

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

you meet among the people the gaze of somebody [a *human* gaze], somebody's gaze, and it's as if you approach the hidden divine, and everything becomes easier.' The Christian event shows itself, reveals itself, in the encounter with the superficiality, the shallowness and the apparent inconsistency of a face in the crowd, a face like all the others yet so different from the others that, when you meet it, it is as if everything becomes simple. You see it for an instant and as you walk away you carry the impact of that gaze within you, as if to say, 'I would like to see that face again!'"⁵⁹

a) The itinerary of conviction

This is the beginning of the itinerary of conviction: the desire to see that face again. But only those who are willing to involve themselves in sharing His life can attain the certainty that makes us consistent. This is the road to conviction. And this "road of 'knowing' will be confirmed over and over again in the Gospel, that is, it will need reinforcement, for the formula 'and His disciples believed in Him,' is repeated many times, until the end. This knowing will be a slow process of persuasion and no subsequent step will negate the prior ones."⁶⁰ Though we may not agree, it is important to emphasize the adverb "slowly," and add, "Thank God!," because otherwise if this thing were to happen from one day to the next, suddenly, we might doubt it right away, just as suddenly; but if it is confirmed when it rains, when it is hot, when we are full of problems, and when it is dark, then when the difficult circumstance arrives we will not be able to say that we invented it in a moment of euphoria. The Lord has us travel this road slowly, but it is decisive precisely in order to acquire a truly sure certainty, that nobody can cast into doubt, because it has so penetrated every fiber of our being. Try to cast doubt on the certainty about your mother, try, when this certainty has penetrated to the marrow of your bones!

"From sharing His life would emerge a confirmation of that exceptional, different quality that had struck them from the first moment. In sharing His life that confirmation grows." It is a road of knowledge, not, as we might wish, a vision, magic, something magic that totally skips the engagement of our humanity, that happens almost in spite of us, suddenly, unconsciously, without commitment of self and without drama, like

⁵⁹ L. Giussani, *On The Way*, Notes from a talk L. Giussani with some university students, La Thuile, August 1992, *Traces*, no. 2, 2000.

⁶⁰ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit. p. 50-51.

a miracle; it is a journey. We often have a conception of certainty, and thus of faith, that is entirely abstract, as if it were a matter of something that introduces itself in us without a reason, without a communicable reason. Instead, “we have seen how the Gospel documents that belief, embraces the itinerary of conviction [that is, an itinerary of conviction is part of my believing] through a series of repeated recognitions which must be given space and time. Here, incarnated in the Gospel testimony, is that methodological reference discussed in the previous chapter. If it is true that knowledge of an object requires time and space, there is all the more reason for this law to apply to an object claiming to be unique.”⁶¹ There is no other method for an object that claims to be unique, as Christ does. Christ submits to the same method so that we can reach the same certainty about Him that we can have about anything else.

b) The discovery of a man beyond comparison

In sharing life with Him, the disciples, like us today, find themselves before One beyond comparison.

As I did with my students, let us simply read the description of a day Jesus spent with His disciples: “As He passed by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting their nets into the sea; they were fishermen. Jesus said to them, ‘Come after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.’ Then they abandoned their nets and followed Him. He walked along a little farther and saw James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John. They too were in a boat mending their nets. Then He called them. So they left their father Zebedee in the boat along with the hired men and followed Him. Then they came to Capernaum, and on the Sabbath He entered the synagogue and taught. The people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes. In their synagogue was a man with an unclean spirit; he cried out, ‘What have You to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!’ Jesus rebuked him and said, ‘Quiet! Come out of him!’ The unclean spirit convulsed him and with a loud cry came out of him. All were amazed and asked one another, ‘What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey Him.’ His fame spread everywhere throughout the whole region of Galilee. On leaving the synagogue, He entered the house of Simon and Andrew with James and John. Simon’s mother-in-law lay sick with a fever. They

⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 51.

immediately told Him about her. He approached, grasped her hand, and helped her up. Then the fever left her and she waited on them. When it was evening, after sunset, they brought to Him all who were ill or possessed by demons. The whole town was gathered at the door. He cured many who were sick with various diseases, and He drove out many demons, not permitting them to speak because they knew Him. Rising very early before dawn, He left and went off to a deserted place, where He prayed. Simon and those who were with Him pursued Him and on finding Him said, ‘Everyone is looking for You.’ He told them, ‘Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come.’ So He went into their synagogues, preaching and driving out demons throughout the whole of Galilee.”⁶²

Fr. Giussani says, “Let us now try to imagine a small group of people—those first friends and others who joined them—who for weeks, months, years witnessed such things, the exceptional quality, the boundlessness of that personality, every day, on an ever more frequent basis.”⁶³ It is not just a challenge of reasoning; the problem is that my eyes, my sensibility, my reason, my entire humanity, are struck by what has happened to me, like your eyes, your sensibility, your way of being are struck by your mother, to the point that now you cannot say, “Mother” without including all that has happened to you in the relationship with her. It is not a line of reasoning that one can eliminate with another one; it is the continual repetition of something awesome. Imagine how the disciples returned home each day: maybe not better or more coherent, but with their eyes filled, more and more, with what they had seen. They could not help returning home with the miracles, His power over nature, disease, His unique intelligence, His goodness in their eyes—a present event, easy to recognize, even for a child. But all this is true for us, as well. We cannot substitute their experience with reflections or comments on their experience! You can imagine what certainty could arrive from there, from our comments... Only if it is possible for us to have their same experience can we too have the certainty the disciples attained. What they saw, running into the humanity of the man Jesus of Nazareth, we see, coming upon His face today, in the humanity of people changed today by the encounter with the event of Christ, recognized and embraced. We, too, for weeks, months, years, have seen and see—just think of the things we tell each other every time we meet—surprising, exceptional facts, one

⁶² *Mk* 1:16-39.

⁶³ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit, p. 52.

after the other, features of a truer and more desirable humanity, different because more fulfilled: a gladness even in pain (like recent testimonies of some of us who have since died, or of their family and friends), an unthinkable gratuitousness in a world where everything is calculation, a fruitfulness of friendship in a context in which a shocking solitude dominates, a unity of life and among people where everything seems fragmented, an untiring constructiveness even in the most difficult situations, in which one would be tempted to give up.

Today, we are witness to the diversity, the exceptionality, the exorbitance of His presence, and the last to arrive recognizes it with ease and also helps us to recognize it (because often we are not amazed anymore!). A university friend of ours writes, "A friend and I proposed presenting the CL Easter poster and invited a freshman we had met through study groups to the public assembly. Already the day before, she had told us, 'Yours is a particular friendship. It's not the kind of friendship that happens among classmates; it's demanding. You listen a lot. You always have the right word at the right time, and then it's obvious that this is not your own work, that someone has taught you to live this way. Yours is a beautiful, lively, and intense relationship.' And then she came to the assembly. 'To be frank, even though I am Christian, till now I'd never found anything fascinating about Christianity. If I had to say what seems most fascinating, I'd say your experience. I'm interested in how you live. Invite me to the things you do, because I'll definitely come. Maybe this is the road for understanding my faith better.' During the dialogue with this girl, all my worries and doubts evaporated (for example, when I ask myself how I can manage to say 'Christ'), because while I was listening to her, I felt within all the vertigo toward He who makes possible what was happening before my eyes. I perceived sharply what Giussani means when he says that faith is an event, a simple acknowledgment of something that happens. That girl, who described so clearly the experience I have been part of for years, was setting me anew before the fact of Christ, and the opportunity of acknowledging Him, and so I felt the need to ask, to attach myself more and more to what has made and makes my life and relationships—as she said—beautiful, vivid and intense, and to educate myself more and more to the simplicity she had in attesting to the facts of experience."

Do you understand? "The greatest miracle of all was that truly human gaze which revealed man to himself and was impossible to evade. Nothing is more convincing to man than a gaze which takes hold of him and recognizes what he is, which reveals man to himself. Jesus saw inside

man. No one could hide in front of Him, and before him the depths of conscience had no secrets. This was the case of the Samaritan woman (*Jn* 4:1-42), who, in a conversation at the well, heard Him tell her life story. It was precisely this that she relayed to her countrymen as a testimony to the greatness of that man: 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did!' This was also the case of Matthew, the tax collector (*Mt* 9:9-13; *Mk* 2:13-17; *Lk* 5:27-32), who was considered a public sinner because he served the Roman economic power. Jesus simply said to him as He passed by: 'Come!' And, recognized, taken hold of, accepted, he left everything and followed him. This also happened to Zacchaeus, the senior tax collector, the most hated man in all of Jericho (*Lk* 19:1-10). Surrounded by a great crowd, Jesus was passing by on the road, and Zacchaeus, a small man, was curious and climbed a tree for a better look. Upon reaching that tree, Jesus stopped, fixed His gaze upon him and cried: 'Zacchaeus!' Then He said: 'Come down quickly, because I must stay at your house today.' What suddenly struck Zacchaeus? What made him run joyfully home? Was he making plans for his vast wealth? Did he want to generously return his ill-gotten gains, to give half of his goods to the poor? What shook him and changed him? Quite simply, he had been penetrated and captured by a gaze that recognized and loved him for what he was. The ability to take hold of the heart of a man is the greatest, most persuasive miracle of all."⁶⁴

This gaze that Jesus introduced remains in history, and through it we can continue to have the same identical experience as Matthew and Zacchaeus, as this new friend writes: "Hello, I'm Paola, and I'm writing to you from Africa. You don't know me, but I wanted to thank you because my life has truly changed, is changing. Thanks to the encounter with the Movement, now I believe in a reachable Christ, truly present in our midst. Now I'm not sorry anymore that I wasn't there when Jesus said to His Apostles, 'Follow Me.' He is saying that 'Follow Me' to me now. I still have time, and my whole life has taken on another color. I get up in the morning, I thank God, and then I'm ready for another adventure because I know that He'll say, 'Follow Me.' I can't miss this opportunity; I'll have to be very attentive, and how beautiful to think that I, too, can look at others with the same gaze of Christ. What a desire with which to head out in the morning! It's a challenge that makes life worthy of being lived. How can I not thank you? Nobody had made me see Christ in this way. I might have died without

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

knowing that the world was so beautiful. Everything began when I met one of the *Memores Domini* here in Africa a few months ago. She probably had the gaze of Christ; her eyes speak. She looked inside me and saw beauty where I saw none. At that point, I let her enter my heart and she brought Christ with her. Her eyes brightened when she spoke of Him. How could I not believe her? Now I go to School of Community every week—even though sometimes the traffic here is terrible—because I don't want the enthusiasm I feel to diminish. I asked someone for a Book of Hours, and I've learned the *Angelus* by heart. I read *Traces*, and observe silence, even though I have grandchildren and children running around the house. I'm willing to do anything as long as I can continue to be so happy. I can't settle for anything less. I thank God, Fr. Giussani, you, and the *Memores Domini*. How beautiful it would be if, one day, someone, meeting me, came to tell you the same thing!"

It is a gaze that entered into history and remains in history. This means that it is possible to have the same experience the disciples had two thousand years ago. Two thousand years have burned by. Now she can have the same identical experience, and not limit herself to commenting on the experience of the Apostles!

This gaze does not change, even if a person has made terrible mistakes. "Everything began about a year ago. I was informed of a difficult situation, a need. Going with a dear friend, I learned that it was a man separated from his wife, on house arrest because of a grave health problem. He himself told me that he had already served 18 years in prison and had 12 to go. He even considered himself fortunate, because his two life sentences had been commuted to 30 years. For a long time, the relationship with him was not exactly idyllic: every time I went to him, he demanded more and more, to the point that he even asked me to pay his electricity bill, to go buy coffee, olive oil... One day he even gave me his shopping list. Each time, I calmly explained the origin of my gesture, the Solidarity Food Bank, but it all seemed like a waste of time, and I almost wanted to escape. One day—nobody could have imagined it—he asked me, 'Why do you continue to have such a profound gaze on me, a man who's killed 17 people?' There, in that instant, I asked myself what he had seen in me. A new world opened for me. We became friends, and he almost didn't care what food I brought, and I often went even without the food, just to chat with him. Like an unexpected and deeply desired miracle, now, after 36 years in the Movement, starting from this thing that I cannot remove from my eyes, my relationship with my wife, the gaze upon my children and grandchildren, the relationship

with the friends of the Fraternity and with those with whom I work, the weariness of certain night shifts... nothing suffocates me. And yet, the ingredients are the same, the shifts are the same. What has simply changed is the music. In any case, I never would've imagined that after so many years and so many things taken for granted, an unexpected encounter could bring a joy that fills my heart with gladness."

Today we, like the disciples, are in front of an irreducible Presence. Another person writes, "In February 2011, I met a girl from the Movement who happened to get a job where I work. We met and began spending time together. It happened that in front of the same circumstances (Mass, performances, relationships with friends), she judged in one way and I in the opposite, but her judgments riveted me. At a certain point, I was forced to deduce that she wasn't luckier than me because things went well for her, but her gaze was different from mine. This gaze fascinated me, because it understood facts, circumstances, and people better. In short, it corresponds to me more, is truer than mine." This encouraged her to immerse herself more and more in the journey proposed in School of Community, and at a certain point she realized that she, too, was experiencing a different way of looking at the usual things, one that wasn't hers, but Christ's. "I taste what it's like to see things with God's eyes, from the right perspective, in their truth. This is fullness, this makes my humanity blossom again in such a clear way that my colleagues, those close to me, notice and think I've found a boyfriend. It's truly an adventure that heightens my striving toward Him. I can finally set off beyond the Columns of Hercules." The others around her try to explain it, and having found a boyfriend is almost always the only hypothesis that comes to mind.

c) A question arises and a certainty bursts in

At a certain point, this gaze, which nobody can remove and which penetrates slowly but surely, deeply into life, at a certain point causes the disciples to ask a question: "Let us continue to imagine what a confirmation each day was for those who lived alongside Him. As Romano Guardini observes, Jesus appears to be superior to everyone else in every circumstance. Something about Him is 'mysterious,' because no one had ever encountered such wisdom, ascendancy, power, and goodness. As we have said, this impression only becomes increasingly precise in those who have made a systematic commitment to share in His life: the disciples. But this man was so much more exceptional that a paradoxical question spontaneously arose: 'Who is He?' It is paradoxical

because Jesus' background, his date of birth, his family, and His home were well known."⁶⁵

This same question often arises today. How many times have we heard, "Who are you? How is it that you're this way?" How many times have we been asked, and how many times does this question arise in us about people whose history and biography we may know, and yet something in them eludes us, a mystery, something that makes them different.

I'll read you another letter: "Yesterday, something happened that left me full of wonder, prayer, and gratitude. I'm a researcher and often have to go to a different laboratory for experiments. All yesterday morning, a girl there went around with a disconsolate expression, unhappy about some work issues. In the afternoon, all of a sudden she looked at me and said, 'Listen, how is it that you're always so optimistic? What makes you so glad?'" This is the question that emerges before a unique exceptionality.

Fr. Giussani writes, "It is a question which illustrates that, by oneself, it is not possible to say who He really is. One can only observe that He is different from anyone else, that He merits our complete trust, and that, in following Him, we experience an incomparable fullness in our lives [like what the girl in the letter observed]. Thus, He is asked who He is. And when He answers, His friends believe Him, not because it is self evident, but because of the irrefutable signs demanding trust. His enemies, by contrast, do not accept His answer and decide to eliminate Him."⁶⁶ This is fundamental: it becomes evident whether one has travelled the itinerary when the dramatic and beautiful moment described in the sixth chapter of Saint John arrives. After Jesus responded to the hunger of the crowd, multiplying the loaves, the people want to make Him king. But here the uniqueness of Jesus is revealed. Knowing that man does not live on bread alone, but instead needs something more for life to become worthy of living, He begins to speak of Himself as the bread of life, of the relationship with Himself as the thing that nourishes life. He is well aware that only if someone lets himself be nourished by His flesh and His blood can he truly live, so great is his need. "You are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled."⁶⁷ But "unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 55-56.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁷ *Jn* 6:26.

⁶⁸ *Jn* 6:53.

With this affirmation, the trouble starts. They wanted to make Him king—what else does He want? This is where His irreducibility appears, that of a Presence that does not accept being watered down, tamed to suit—to our benefit! In the fact that He is irreducible lies our hope; it angers us, but it is the source of our hope. We wonder, “Who does He think He is?” And Jesus, in the face of this scandal, does not yield, does not want to settle for a compromise, not even with His friends, to whom He does not say, “At least *you* stay here, don’t leave me alone.” No! He challenges them again: “Do you also want to leave?”⁶⁹ This question shows all of Jesus’ respect, all of His esteem for the freedom of the Apostles and, at the same time, all of His certainty that they have all the elements necessary to be able to judge whether it is reasonable or not to stay with Him. For this reason, He does not fear challenging them. Jesus does not spare their freedom, does not answer for them, but provokes them in such a way that they are the ones to respond, to become aware of what they have experienced, and to give themselves reasons for remaining. We can imagine the conviction with which Peter’s answer came out of every fiber of his being: “Lord, we don’t understand what you say either, but if we go away, where shall we go? You alone have the words that explain and give meaning to life.”⁷⁰

One can repeat this sentence formally, without realizing the intensity with which Peter said those words, but it is one thing for them to be the repetition of a familiar phrase, and another if they are born of a lived experience. If they are not born of a lived experience we cannot remain when the dramatic moment arrives, and any unforeseen event can make doubt appear in us. We can see the same thing now, from how we react in the face of what is happening: “Do you, too, want to go?” This question forces us, today, to give our reasons—why do we remain? All the darkness, all the confusion, all the solitude of Peter were incapable of eliminating in him the experience that had bowled him over. This is the substance of an ‘I’ that is not more powerful because it is part of the majority, but is more powerful because its substance is entirely founded on an experience like that described—for months, years, shaped by the facts we spoke of before. If we do not reach the point of having this experience, then any moment, any difficulty, any illness, any crisis, any unforeseen event, any chaos, any scandal, any mistake will blow everything away. It is so beautiful how Peter also passed through a simi-

⁶⁹ *Jn* 6:67.

⁷⁰ Cf. *Jn* 6:68.

lar situation, because it is as if he says to us, “It is possible,” and shows us the road for remaining. If we travel the itinerary that the Gospels testify to us, we will be able to reach that type of certainty that endures, almost to our own amazement, in the face of trials.

d) A case of moral certainty

And how does this certainty come about?

“By sharing His life, by continually experiencing the awareness that Jesus was exceptional, it became highly reasonable to trust in Him [a judgment, not a sentiment, not a mood]. With the passage of time, they acquired incomparable certainty about this man.”⁷¹

The exceptionality of the person of Jesus gave rise to a judgment that resulted in such an attachment that, even if all the others left, they remained. The fact that the disciples were able to reach that certainty means that it is within our reach, within reach of all those who follow the same itinerary in the midst of all the turbulence and every circumstance, be it ugly or beautiful.

Therefore, it is not true that we can only reach certainty in the fields of scientific or philosophical knowledge; we can also reach an incomparable certainty about Christ, such that we are attached to Him with an indestructible love. And—Fr. Giussani tells us—“love [...] is a judgment of the intelligence that sweeps along with it all our sensibility.” But, take note, judgment is not a thing for intellectuals, for the specialists. “Judgment is the gaze upon being that perceives as a child does.” It gets no simpler than this; even children know how to do it! And “the outcome of reality that emerges before my eyes is wonder. Certainties are born there [from that wonder], the evidence of certainty is born there; otherwise, they become a definition given by the powers that be.”⁷² The evidence has such power that it enables certainty in those who let themselves be amazed like a child. The evidence is so irreducible that we cannot dominate it; we are the ones dominated by the evidence. We can say it simply this way: first I am amazed and then I realize I am amazed. But if I do not have the simplicity to acknowledge the evidence that glues me and instead try to dominate it, then what defines life becomes my power over the evidence; not power of the others over me, but my power over what happens, and so it is no longer love, obedi-

⁷¹ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit, p. 58.

⁷² L. Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere* [*The “I,” Power, Works*], Marietti, Genoa, 2000, pp. 66-67.

ence to something that comes first. I remain prey to my own power and am the victim of my power; we remain alone, at the mercy of ourselves, alone with our power, that is, with our nothingness. For this reason, when Fr. Giussani insists on saying that all certainties are born of wonder, he reveals the decisive point. It is not enough to see things; what we see, the evidence that happens before us, must be perceived with the openness to being amazed. I either follow this wonder—the disciples then, us now—and submit and adhere to the evidence of what I see, or I decide what I follow, and what prevails is my power over what happens. Life is this battle between wonder and power, between surrendering to the evidence (that is, letting ourselves be glued to the attraction of His presence) or instead resisting the evidence (making our own interests and our own preconceptions prevail).

This dialectic runs through the entire Gospel, and if you want to see it in action, just read the ninth chapter of the Gospel of John, the episode of the man born blind. Here you can observe the substance of an ‘I’ who lets himself be determined by the evidence of what happened to him. What substance is needed, to battle against everything and everyone, to resist being steamrolled and asphalted over! Nothing, neither the dialectic of the Pharisees, nor all the considerations of expediency, could move him before that simple adherence to the evidence: “Before, I was blind, and now I see.” All the power of this world could not introduce even an instant of doubt. Why? Because certainty was born of that wonder, of the evidence to which the man adhered, and this gave him an intelligence for countering everyone, an intelligence to send shivers down your spine. The episode of the man born blind clarifies well what Giussani says: the content of self-awareness is the evidence of what happened. All certainties are born there. In him we see a man who was the least, the most ignorant of all, a man born blind, who had never seen anything, facing the Pharisees, who were the only ones to receive an education, and yet they were unable to win in the face of his simplicity that yielded before the evidence. For this reason, I always quote the Spanish philosopher Xavier Zubiri: “What is proper to reason is not its presumed evidence, not its empirical or logical rigor, but is above all the force of the impression of reality, according to which profound reality imposes itself coercively on the sensitive intellect.”⁷³ The alternative to following the evidence is to come to an agreement.

⁷³ X. Zubiri, *Inteligencia y razón [Intelligence and Reason]*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, 1983, pp. 95-96.

Gianni Vattimo writes, “We don’t say that we have come to an agreement when we have found the truth; rather, we say we have found the truth when we have come to an agreement.”⁷⁴

Jesus has no problem giving His disciples all the time they need to reach certainty, and He does not answer the question about His identity until they themselves have already decided, because they have all the elements they need in order to decide. What great freedom! One understands why, for 50 years, Fr. Giussani challenged everyone in pure freedom, as Jesus did.

3. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me”

What we have said up to this point is summarized in the first part of Fr. Giussani’s speech in Saint Peter’s Square on May 30, 1998, which is the testimony he offers, toward the end of his life, before the whole Church. I encourage you to reread it, later, taking your time. “‘What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?’ (*Ps* 8:5). No question in life has ever struck me like this one. [It is the problem of life: what is man? What am I? What is the source of my substance?] There has been only one Man in the world who could answer me, by asking another question: ‘What would it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and then lose himself? Or what could a man give in exchange for himself?’ (*Mt* 16:26). I was never asked a question that took my breath away so much as this question of Christ! [It is a question that expresses all the affirmation of the ‘I’]. No woman ever heard another voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb [it is not just a question; it is the most positive affirmation that can be made about a person, one not even his mother is able to make, so much so does she reduce him a moment after giving birth to him], with such a wholly positive affirmation of his destiny; only the voice of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth. And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements. No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this! Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart. This is the wonder expressed by Dionysius the Areopagite (5th century): ‘Who could ever speak to us

⁷⁴R. Girard, G. Vattimo, *Verità o fede debole? [Truth or Weak Faith?]*, Transeuropa, Massa, 2006, p. 32.

of the love that Christ has for man, overflowing with peace?’ I’ve been repeating these words to myself for more than 50 years! [...] It was a simplicity of heart [here is where the certainty comes from!] that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain promptness that marks the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierce us to the heart. So the acknowledgment of who Christ is in our lives invades the whole of our awareness of living: ‘I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life’ (*Jn 14:6*).⁷⁵

This is how Christ penetrated Fr. Giussani’s existence. If we have the simplicity to acknowledge the exceptionality of Christ, with that certain immediacy, as happens with the unassailable and indestructible evidence provided by certain moments, then we reach a certainty that nobody can take away from us, not because we are good, but because it coincides with a self-awareness of the ‘I’ entirely filled with Christ, His memory, His presence. The itinerary that Fr. Giussani travelled and that he proposes to us is the only one that can enable us to understand, from within experience, what Saint Paul meant with the expression, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” “‘I, but no longer I’: this is the formula of Christian existence established in Baptism, the formula of the resurrection in time, the formula of the Christian ‘novelty’ called to transform the world,”⁷⁶ says Benedict XVI. Only if I travel this road does what Christ began in Baptism become existentially mine, as experience; only if I travel this road does Christ who seized me become existentially mine as experience. It is the only way to overcome nihilism. Sharing life with Christ shapes life in such a way that Christ is no longer external, but within our ‘I’—it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

Mario Luzi says, “I hold that this is the Christian fullness of destiny:/ being ready for the event, letting its power traverse us/ so it may reshape and recast us.”⁷⁷ It is what we see happening in those who let themselves be swept away like this, as Fr. Giussani says of the paralytic:

⁷⁵ Testimony of Fr. Luigi Giussani during Holy Father John Paul II’s encounter with ecclesial movements and new communities, Saint Peter’s Square, Rome, May 30, 1998. Published in L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World: New Traces of the Christian Experience*, transl. Patrick Stevenson, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca, 2010, pp. IX-X.

⁷⁶ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants in the Fourth National Ecclesial Convention*, Verona, Italy, October 19, 2006.

⁷⁷ M. Luzi, “Libro di Ipazia,” *Teatro*, Garzanti, Milan, 1993, p. 76.

“Jesus is there, speaking at the door of a house, and all the people block the passageway to hear Him talk. At noon He had to eat, but—as the Gospels say—He even forgot to eat: it was as if, in front of people who were suffering, He couldn’t go away. And two fellows arrived with a stretcher carrying a paralytic [...]. Christ turned, fixed His gaze on him, and said, ‘Take heart, your sins are forgiven.’ With great acumen, with His acumen, Jesus sensed the depression and moral weakness that normally accompany long illness (the man had been paralyzed for 20 years), and this is an observation that is quite true, psychologically. Afterwards, He heals him, as a challenge to the Pharisees who were there in front, scandalized because He had said, ‘Take heart, your sins are forgiven.’ But imagine that fellow, getting up from his bed... [...]. Imagine that paralytic who finds himself freed, standing, who is there among the people like everyone else; everyone looks at him with curiosity, a bit frightened because of the strange, supernatural fact (strange, at least), that had happened in their midst. Then that man will follow Him, will understand many things that He said. In any case, the main thing was comprehensible to everyone: He said that He was the Messiah. This truth of Christ came to him bound to the fact that he went there on a stretcher and left the house free. His relationship with God, the way he would pray that evening, the way then he would go to the temple every day, the sentiment of life that he had when he saw the sun set or rise, and when then he went to work every morning with his soul full of gratitude and with his soul overflowing with mysterious fear, fear and trembling toward this mystery of God who reached all the way to him in that man who had healed him; in short, the sentiment towards Jesus, the way he said Jesus was the Messiah—and he said it to others as well, because then he joined along, became His disciple—the way he went together with the others to the villages to announce that the Kingdom of God was already among them (because Jesus was there), the way he did it, the way he thought about his past (the whole shambles he had let himself slip into: the lowness, the discouragement, the blaspheming), the way he had treated his family members, the way he treated them now, were all actions that started from a consciousness of himself, from a sense of his person, the physiognomy of which was shaped by, born of the memory of how Jesus had taken hold of him, of how Jesus had bowled him over, of how Jesus had treated him, of how he had known Jesus. Mary Magdalene is there on the sidewalk, curious (like all women, but she was particularly so), looking at the crowd following that Jesus who they say is the Messiah (they would kill

Him a few months later), and Jesus, passing there a moment, without even stopping, looks at her: from then on, she will not look at herself the same way, will no longer see herself and men, people, her home, Jerusalem, the world, the rain and the sun, will no longer be able to look at all these things if not from within the gaze of those eyes. When she looked at herself in the mirror, her physiognomy was dominated, determined by those eyes. Those eyes were in there—understand? Her face was shaped by them. The methods according to which the Event reached the paralytic and reached Mary Magdalene are different. It is the same Jesus, the same object to believe, but the physiognomy with which He presented Himself is different, and this physiognomy remains all their life long. For all his life, the paralytic would look at himself determined by that ‘I forgive you’ that raised him up, physically as well. All his life—in the details and as a whole—Mary Magdalene looked at herself within that gaze that was not followed by a word, except for a few days later when He, who was called a prophet, was invited to eat by one of the leaders of the Pharisees who wanted to catch Him making a mistake; she entered the dining room without asking anyone’s permission, straightaway, and threw herself at His feet, washing them with her tears and drying them with her hair, to the scandal of everyone (‘If He were a prophet, He would know what kind of woman she was!’). But her whole life—in the details and as a whole—she would never be able to see, feel, live, if not from within that gaze.”⁷⁸

But how does the Event reach me today? We have observed it already, through this charism. “The modality with which the Event reaches you shapes your face, your personality. When I say ‘I,’ I express a personality; when one says ‘I,’ she expresses a personality; when each of you says ‘I,’ you express a personality: we are all human persons, but the personality is different, shaped differently, because being came to me through my father and my mother; the mystery of being reached you through your father and your mother, who are different from mine, and therefore shaped a different face. The modality with which the Event reaches you determines your personality, gives the characteristics that your personality will carry forever. And this is very visible when there are people who take Jesus seriously. Where there are people like this, the environment immediately warms, becomes more vibrant, more in motion, more full of motion—even when they are all still, with everyone

⁷⁸ L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo* [From *Temperament, a Method*], Bur, Milan, 2002, pp. 3-6.

seated, the room becomes full of motion, becomes full of a proposal of different words, and it demands that you who are talking change your words or choose words that are suitable to different ways of listening, to many different personalities. The way the Event reaches you shapes your personality, if you adhere to it. If you adhere: that is, if the presence of the Mystery—the Event—arrests you, bowls you over, invades you, and you welcome it, in fear and trembling, but you welcome it. Then it changes your face. I'll add, more precisely: it brings forth, brings to the surface, all the capacity that you are, your originality, your geniality. As Miguel Mañara says, 'Why did I wait so many years to understand I have a good soul?' The charism is the way the Event reaches you. You are a paralytic; it reaches you, and your whole life long you will start from that memory; without realizing, you will start from that memory. Your face, your character will be shaped, that is, your character will be empowered, highlighted by that memory. The charism becomes the modality by which you become yourself. 'Why did I take so many years to understand I have a good soul?' (exclaims Miguel Mañara, the criminal, the murderer). And the charism always reaches you through words, a discourse, through—more precisely—an encounter. An encounter: you have encountered this companionship; this is the modality with which the mystery of Jesus, Jesus, the presence of Jesus in history, knocked on your door. Now—now!—He is knocking on your door in the same way, because He is 'yesterday, today, and forever.' You become yourself following this companionship—that is, trying to conceive of life in the way this companionship conceives of it, trying to perceive relationships in the way this companionship leads you to do, as this companionship suggests you do, in the way this companionship gives you an example (this is why the person who is greater or has authority is important). You become yourself if you obey, if you identify with the characteristics of this companionship [...]. So then the problem is not to observe certain rules, but to become one with a spirit, to identify with a mentality, to become one with a sensibility; that is, identify with a charism—used as a global term—with a method with which the mystery of God made man has reached you persuasively and has told you, 'Come!' 'Come where? Where?' you asked Him. 'In this companionship.' He encountered you through what? Through this companionship. If you become one with this companionship, your physiognomy, your character, your personality revive, are reborn; you discover you feel, do, understand things you never would have thought (above all in the ordinary things one understands this, because from

the ordinary things one understands things that one would never have thought: ‘Look how beautiful! I’ve read that 200 times and I never realized!’). This is the threshold of the infinite, the threshold of the eternal, but the threshold of the eternal that is in your own eyes, in the beat of your heart, in your touch, and, above all, in your own gaze upon reality, in your own intelligence, in your own reading of reality, which becomes a fresh reading—that of a child or a sage—of things written with clear letters in a way you never would have dreamed before.”⁷⁹

The method by which the Event reaches you and shapes your face is the charism of Fr. Giussani. Through this method, we can see how it is possible to live reality, even the most dramatic situations, bearing the newness of this gaze within us, bearing an otherwise impossible capacity for gladness within us.

One of you writes to me, “The other evening at School of Community, I wondered why I wanted to yell at everyone the reason I discover in the fact that they could live dramatic situations with gladness—something I had not believed possible. Even having seen it with my own eyes in people close to me, deep down I didn’t believe it could be true for me, too.” It is the surprise of seeing happen in us something that we would never have thought of.

The Pope said this in Cuba: “The Church lives to make others sharers in the one thing she possesses, which is none other than Christ, our hope of glory (cf. *Col* 1:27).”⁸⁰ If we live this way, then we can testify to everyone what Christ is and what newness He introduces into life.

For this reason, Giussani valued the generation of a new subject capable of testifying to Christ: “We have to collaborate, to help each other to raise up new subjects, that is, people aware of an event that becomes history for them, otherwise we can create organizational networks, but we build nothing, we give nothing new to the world. For this reason, the increase of the Movement is measured by the education to faith of the person: in an event that is acknowledged, that has become history. Christ has become history for you because He touched you through what we call an encounter; in some way He penetrated you, became *inter-esse*, within your being, in such a way that we have Someone to identify with, in whom we recognize the totality of our humanity. We have Someone in whom we recognize the value of the world and the totality of the world.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 6-8.

⁸⁰ Benedict XVI, Homily at the Holy Mass in the Plaza de la Revolución José Martí, in Havana, March 28, 2012.

Everything is given by the trust in this Something to which we can look, this Something greater. Our influence on the environment, on society, comes precisely from the fact that acknowledging this event, living the faith, trusting in this Something greater of which we are made, that has become our companion, makes our person different, too, changes us, in some way. Therefore, we become disrupters of an unbearable normality and we become the extollers of true normality, that is, normality as relationship with the infinite: the small becomes big; everything becomes big. And this angers the others, because it takes away all their pretexts for rebellion and violence.”⁸¹

This is our contribution to the world today, in a moment in which we see disorientation everywhere.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 32 (33); Jn 6:16-21

HOMILY OF FR. MICHELE BERCHI

“It is I” (*Jn 6:20*). This is the authoritative word our heart awaits expectantly. This certain and powerful affirmation is what we need every day of our life. We need to hear it every day within every circumstance, within the reality in which we live.

“It is I!” If we are not reached by Him this way, being at the mercy of the waves and fighting against violent winds is nothing in comparison. Rowing is useless!

“It is I!” It’s You! And the winds and the waves, in the midst of which we are rowing, become calm. They calm not because the circumstances change, but because our heart is no longer at the mercy of the waves; you are no longer at their mercy. Giving peace to your heart, this is a miracle even greater, more powerful, than calming the winds and waves.

“It is I. Do not be afraid!” As always, the Lord hits the mark. Perhaps before these Spiritual Exercises we might have asked, “Afraid of what?” Instead, it may be precisely this that lodges in the depths of our heart. It is the fear that, as has been said in these days, is rooted in

⁸¹ CLU Equipe, February 10, 1990, CL Archive.

our insecurity: it is the fear of reality that we do not control, of reality that we perceive as threatening, the fear of not making it, the fear that all this is an illusion, the fear that we will not endure, the fear for our children, for our friends, for work, the fear of all of reality. And it does not pass just by clinging close to each other. In fact, if He is not present, we can cling close all we like, we can tell each other, "Don't be afraid," but the more we say it the more frightened we will be. The more we cling close to each other the more wobbly the boat becomes.

"It is I. Do not fear!" Only You, Jesus, can say to our life, "Do not be afraid!" Only You. How beautiful that the Evangelist (who was on the boat that night) says almost in passing that "they wanted to take Him into the boat" (*Jn* 6:21). They wanted. He could have written, "He got into the boat," or "He reached them," but instead he wrote, "They wanted..." For our experience, this note is filled with meaning and clarity. We know well that it is not automatic, that our freedom is needed: they wanted. I desire, I ask to want it.

Our only task is to love You. "[T]he boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading" (*Jn* 6:21). The verb John uses to say they arrived, touched the shore, is the same one he uses to speak of Jesus' going toward His Father. Our Destiny coincides with His presence, Him present among us, in us. And so the boat touches the shore, and things are finally touched, reached in their truth.

We only have to want You to come on board, You, who walk on the water to reach us and do not leave us alone in the crossing of life.

Sunday Morning, April 22nd

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, “Great Mass” in C minor, K. 427 (417a)

Barbara Hendricks, soprano I – Janet Perry, soprano II

Peter Schreier, tenor – Benjamin Luxon, bass

Wiener Singverein – Helmut Froschauer, choir master

David Bell, organ

Herbert von Karajan – Berliner Philharmoniker

“Spirto Gentil” n. 24, Deutsche Grammophon

Fr. Pino: In this moment, what is the difference between a devout memory, between the recitation of a liturgical formula, and the opportunity to be wounded anew, seized, catalyzed by a totalizing fact that needs no additions, no further explanations, corrections, or analyses? Fr. Giussani answered us in those few lines of May 30th that Julián quoted yesterday: “It was a simplicity of heart that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain promptness that marks the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierce us to the heart.”

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Proserpi: The goal of the assembly is not to solve the problem, to solve the questions that have arisen during these days, but, instead, to ask them, to fix our attention on them, so that what we have experienced becomes a sure step on the road. Among the numerous questions that we received, many asked what to do next, how we can help each other, what helps us in the challenge we received in these days. Remaining faithful to the method that has been proposed (don't expect a miracle or magic, but rather a journey), we cannot respond with a prescription, because it would be a deception. We chose the questions that enable us to understand more deeply what is at stake, because these will help us on the road.

In addition, everyone has his or her own pace, and this does not bother us; in fact, it is part of the enjoyment of the journey.

First question: What does it mean that my humanity, exactly as it is, is given to me to recognize Christ; how is my humanity a resource and not, instead, a problem?

Julián Carrón: As we mentioned yesterday, the fact that our humanity, as it has been given to us since birth, with this original openness, thrown wide open toward reality—of which the curiosity of a child is the simplest expression—is a resource is documented by the fact that Jesus called “blessed” those who have this attitude, who acknowledge this humanity of theirs, this original openness of theirs. The beatitudes are not a list of moral rules we have to live up to, not a new code of conduct, as often is thought; the beatitudes describe the attitude Jesus exalts as the condition for recognizing Him, because He made us with such a boundless desire in order to share with us the fullness He lives in the heart of the Trinity. He wanted to create us so poor, so “nothing,” with this heart open to totality so that we can welcome Him, in order to participate in His gladness, in the fullness that overflows from His mystery, from His being. Therefore, this humanity of ours, just as it is made, is the condition for us to have the awareness, the consciousness of who He is. For this reason, Fr. Giussani tells us that the apex of creation, of reality, is that there be one, a being in reality, who can acknowledge Him. Therefore, blessed are those who have this total openness. We often do a double reduction. On the one hand, we reduce the heart—our being totally wide open, with our needs for beauty, truth, justice, love, and fullness—to a sentiment, while on the other hand, at the same time, we reduce reality to appearance. To help us avoid these reductions, Giussani always says that reality is made transparent in experience. What we are, the nature of our heart, is made evident in our relationship with reality, not in an abstract reflection on our heart or on reality, but in our impact with reality, which reawakens all the need of our heart, all the need for reason, for happiness. And so then I discover what I desire. Therefore—Fr. Giussani told us—the heart is implicated in what it experiences. Because, as you see often in your children, and as often happens in us, too, we all form an idea of what we desire, as the disciples did (there is nothing new under the sun...); they, too, formed an idea of what could truly make them happy. Lately, we have mentioned it often: when the disciples returned from the mission all excited with their successes, Jesus looks at them with a tenderness full of affection and tells them, “But do you realize that this

is not enough? Don't rejoice for this, because you already know that after a while it will not be enough. Only the relationship with Me can quench your thirst." And they had Him in front of them—this is decisive and therefore Giussani insists so much on this condition of the human. It is not that the disciples did not have Jesus in front of them; they had both the success and Jesus in front of them, but they continued to rejoice more about the success than about the fact of being His friends and the fact that their names were written in heaven. Not being loyal to themselves, they could not understand the importance of Jesus. So then, without a tender and passionate consciousness of ourselves, we exchange Jesus for any thing: success, money, pleasure—so much so that we can leave as if nothing had happened, bartering belonging to Jesus for a love relationship or our career! This is why we have often quoted what John Paul II said in 1979 in Mexico City: "There will not be faithfulness if it is not rooted in this ardent, patient, and generous search; if there is not in man's heart a question to which only God gives an answer, or rather, to which only God is the answer." Only God, only Christ! But in order to acknowledge this—only Christ is the answer—a truly human question is needed. Otherwise, we can continue to speak of Christ—we use His name far too often!—but the experience we have is not of Christ. So often we can exchange Him for any other thing, so much so that if things do not go according to our idea, then we think that Christ has abandoned us. No! It is different. Christ does not give us the runaround; He does not settle for giving us an answer that will be a disappointment tomorrow. The answer of Christ is called "love." For this reason, one understands Fr. Giussani's insistence—as we said yesterday—on the need of our entire humanity in order to acknowledge Him. This is in the first section of the introduction to *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*: "This is why, when facing the hypothesis of revelation and of Christian revelation, nothing is more important than the question of man's true situation. It would be impossible to become fully aware of what Jesus Christ means if one did not first become fully aware of the nature of that dynamism which makes man human. Christ proposes Himself as the answer to what 'I' am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank, and live Christ. Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name."⁸² Our problem is the lack of loyalty to ourselves, to all the need we harbor within. And we understand it very well: when we seek satisfaction

⁸²L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit., p. 6.

in other things, we see clearly that they are not enough, that they do not correspond to us. If we exchange anything for Christ, it is out of a disloyalty to ourselves. It is not a problem of the others, not a problem of power, not a problem of the universe; it is our problem, the problem of our immorality.

Prosperi: Could you be more specific about the affirmation that the irreducibility of Christ is our hope?

Carrón: What we tried to explain yesterday with the Gospel passage that followed that of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes can be useful for understanding what the irreducibility of Christ means. Jesus is truly another thing: Jesus is an other thing! Yes, we can settle for being together with our children and friends, we can reduce the need, but Jesus does not do this with us, and this is the clearest sign of His diversity. Careful, Jesus is not abstract; He knows perfectly well that those people need bread. In fact, He begins to meet this need: He multiplies the loaves. They are all so amazed that they want to make Him king. But Jesus does not settle for this. They had already acknowledged Him, He could have contented Himself with this... Jesus knows full well that those men, because they are like everyone, have reduced their desire, have reduced their humanity, their need. He, too, could have yielded. "Okay, if you'll settle for this, work it out..." But Jesus does not yield; He insists. Knowing the nature of their need, He insists, "Look, your need for fullness is greater than your natural hunger for bread; in fact, many of you have bread but lack the joy of living. For many of you, life is going well, but this is not enough for it to have meaning, sense. This is not enough for getting up in the morning, for facing difficulties: it is not enough! So then, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Only if you let Me enter as the answer to your need will you be truly able to be yourselves, that for which you were born, what each of you desires for yourselves and for your children and your friends."⁸³ Jesus knows very well that if He goes ahead on this road there will be trouble; in the face of the fear of rejection, of misunderstanding, of solitude, of abandonment, He could have yielded. How often does this fear block us in our relationships! For this reason, I always say that freedom is a very scarce good, truly scarce—it is not easy to find people who are irreducible in front of the truth. Jesus could also

⁸³ Cf. *Jn* 6:1-71.

have yielded, but what hope would there be for the disciples and for us? He does not yield, He continues to prod even when the temptation would be to give in. The only hope for us is that there is One who is irreducible to our power, to our attempts at reduction, to our seeking the most comfortable thing because it is the least demanding. That Christ is irreducible: this is our only hope! In this the ultimate mystery of Christ truly appears. What makes Jesus so irreducible that He does not yield to compromise, does not accept any reduction of His proposal? What makes Him so independent from the understanding or misunderstanding of the others, so impregnable to the fear of remaining alone and beginning all over again from the start? It is His bond with the Father, precisely because He was the Son of God. “Do you want to go, too? I am never alone. The Father who is with Me is He who defines My life.” This is so true that later, when He is left alone because everyone, even the disciples, have abandoned Him, He did not yield before Peter’s attempt to say, “But why passion and death? Why should you do it?” “Get behind me, Satan!”⁸⁴ It is only the ultimate bond with the Mystery, with the Father, that can make Jesus so free and irreducible. His self-awareness, defined by the belonging to the Father, His consciousness of His relationship with the Father, is His strength. He is not spared suffering. Christ introduced into history a figure of man with such self-awareness, with such a consciousness of the constitutive bond, that no power in this world can erase it. They can kill Him, this yes! But they cannot separate Him from He to whom He is bound more than to Himself: the Father. This is what He wants to communicate to us. Friends, without this bond and without this self-awareness we will not be similarly irreducible, even in our relationships among ourselves. We do not need people who compromise—as if our problem was that they do not get angry or that we do not remain alone—but who are true friends, travelling companions. Jesus testifies to true friendship to us. Did He love His disciples or not? Let’s say it clearly. Was He their friend, with their destiny at heart, or not? Do we have our destiny and that of our friends at heart in the same way, being irreducible? Careful, let’s not confuse being “irreducible” with “beating others over the head”! It is not a matter of beating each other over the head or insisting moralistically, but of witnessing even more to His irreducibility: this is the true insistence we must have with others. Jesus does not commit violence against them; He simply refuses to yield to their measure! Irreducibility does not imply permission to enter into the consciousness

⁸⁴ Cf. *Mk* 8:33.

of the other to “beat him over the head.” Woe to those who do so! True irreducibility is a testimony, as we have seen clearly in Fr. Giussani: he did not accept compromise. In a letter about one of the last School of Community gatherings, a person writes, “In last Wednesday’s School of Community, as recently has been happening to me, it was very difficult for me to follow [sorry...]. I experience a subjective difficulty in entering into the terminology and the itineraries you propose for reaching illuminating conclusions for life. Again, Wednesday, I listened to you like a dazed boxer, trying to stay connected, but without much success: words reach me, rather than articulated concepts, among them ‘reduction,’ ‘risk of reduction,’ ‘we tend to reduce Christ to our measure.’ And other equally hammering words, ‘irreducible,’ and ‘irreducible Christ.’ It was a real massacre for a boxer on the ropes. I didn’t understand anything, and you kept hammering. But toward the end of the evening something happened: the word ‘irreducible’ entered me like the wind from a suddenly opened window. Irreducible Christ, Christ not reduced to my measure? But then this is what I want, what I have searched for all my life! I’ve always sought something infinitely greater than me, and was profoundly irritated by that puppet ‘Christ’ in the hands of some human being who was far too human. If this is the way it is, if Christ is truly everything, He is the measure of everything, He and nothing else. At the exit, I really was walking like a dazed boxer, and now, two days later, I am still in the same state of total surprise and wonder at this simple discovery and revelation. Christ has taken hold of me. There’s no need to add anything else.”

Prosperi: Among the many questions about the contrast between wonder and power, formulated in various ways, we chose this because it helps to get at the heart of the question: before the man born blind of the Gospel, I was struck by the immediacy with which he recognizes the evidence of what happened to him, even though he had no kind of instrument, formation, culture, etc. Why is it that for me, with more instruments, it’s so easy to change method?

Carrón: Because of a lack of simplicity of heart. Let’s reread the episode of the man born blind together, following step by step the story of the ninth chapter of the Gospel of Saint John. It begins with the disciples who, as we have seen, have the same mentality as everyone else. “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” And Jesus answered, “Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that

the works of God might be made visible through him.” He spat on the ground and made clay with his saliva, spread the mud on the eyes of the man born blind and said, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.” The man born blind went, washed, and returned with his sight. And here all the trouble starts. His neighbors and those who had seen him before, because he was a well-known beggar, say, “Isn’t this the one who used to sit and beg?” Some say, “It’s him.” Others say, “No, he just looks like him.” He says, “No, it’s me. Don’t be confused. It’s me.” And so they ask him, “So how were your eyes opened?” “The man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and told me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ So I went there and washed and was able to see.” And they said to him, “Where is this Jesus?” He said, “I don’t know.” In the meantime, they brought him to the Pharisees, because that day was the Sabbath. And the Pharisees also asked him—it’s the second time—how he acquired his sight. He had just said it: it was easy to acknowledge it, wasn’t it? And he answers, “He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and now I can see.” Simple. So then some of the Pharisees comment, “This man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a sinful man perform such signs?” And there was a division among them, as happens when one does not have the simplicity to stay before the facts... So then, as if nothing had happened, they question the man born blind again. “What do you have to say about Him, since He opened your eyes?” He said, “He is a prophet.” But the Jews do not want to believe. What don’t they want to believe? That Jesus is a prophet? No, they do not want to believe that that man was born blind and that he acquired sight! That is, to erase the episode, they have to erase reality; the first disloyalty is to reality. For this reason, they involve the parents. “Is this your son, who you say was born blind?” Note that they do not say that he *was* born blind, but that the parents *say* he was born blind! “How does he now see?” They answer, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind. We do not know how he sees now. [...] Ask him, he is of age; he can speak for himself.” His parents answer this way because they are afraid of the Jews, who have decided to expel those who acknowledge Him as Messiah from the synagogue. So they call the man born blind again, and tell him, “Give God the praise! We know that this man is a sinner.” “If He is a sinner, I do not know. One thing I do know is that I was blind and now I see.” So they ask him again (incredible!): “What did He do to you? How did He open your eyes?” “I told you already and you did not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become His disciples, too?” So they

began to insult him, “You are that man’s disciple; we are disciples of Moses!” Moses becomes the alibi for erasing reality; in the name of Moses they deny the evidence. Amazing. “We know that God spoke to Moses, but we do not know where this one is from.” And then the man born blind steamrolls them and asphalts them over: “This is what is so amazing, that you do not know where He is from, yet He opened my eyes.” He even becomes intelligent, understand? Here is the new intelligence. This is true intelligence. When Giussani says that intelligence lies in the attitude of John and Andrew, this is exactly what he means: the intelligence is of this blind man, much more intelligent than the whole analytical attempt of the others to deny reality (this is ideology: there are no facts, only their interpretations). In fact, the man born blind continues, “We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if one is devout and does His will, He listens to him. It is unheard of that anyone ever opened the eyes of a person born blind.” Deal with reality: it is unheard of. “If this man were not from God, He would not be able to do anything.” The others are enraged: “You were born totally in sin, and are you trying to teach us? The criterion is us, not your heart, not your simplicity. We are the criterion, we the leaders.”⁸⁵ Do you see why our humanity is decisive? Without my humanity, without my heart as criterion of judgment, without my being able to recognize the truth, there is always someone else who teaches me what I have to do. The alternative between wonder and power is all here. Here we see the drama before which each of us stands: to let simplicity and wonder prevail before the evidence of what happens (and from which certainties are born), or to impose our power or to be dominated by the power of others. Wonder does not depend on others, or on the powers that be—the last arrival, like the blind man, ignorant (and this is what is amazing), can show us how it is possible to vanquish any power: just simplicity before reality, just let yourself be swept forward by the wonder that, as we heard yesterday, is not something sentimental, but is a judgment. Love is a judgment of recognition that sweeps along all of our sensibility. Certainty is born from the acknowledgment of this evidence. This is the overturning of the method. Why—as the question puts it—was the man born blind, who had no type of formation or culture, able to do what we are unable to do? Let’s reread together the text from School of Community, because it is all there: “If God had manifested a particular will in a particular way in human history, if He had charted

⁸⁵ Cf. *Jn* 9:1-34.

a pathway of His own leading us to Him, the central issue of the religious phenomenon would cease to be man attempting to imagine God, even though this attempt is the greatest expression of human dignity; instead, the whole issue would lie in freedom's pure and simple gesture of acceptance or rejection. This is the overturning of the method. No longer is the focal point the striving of the intelligence, the drive of the will to construct, the stretching of the imagination, the weaving of a complex moralism. Rather, it is simple recognition, the reaction of one who, watching out for the arrival of a friend, singles him out of the crowd and greets him. In this hypothesis, the religious method would lose all of its disturbing connotations of an enigmatic deferment to something in the distance. Rather, it would have the dynamics of an experience, the experience of a present, an encounter. It should be noted that the first method favors the intelligent man, the cultured, the fortunate, the powerful, while the second favors the poor, the ordinary man.⁸⁶ If we are not like the man born blind, it is only because we do not have his simplicity before the evidence of so many facts; we do not have the poverty of the common man who allows himself to be swept along by the evidence of what happens. We think we are more intelligent. But precisely this is what we need to question: that we are more intelligent if we do not have this poverty.

Prosperi: Another question: In concrete terms, what does it mean that I do not choose the *maestro* to follow? At this moment, saying that Fr. Giussani is the *maestro* to follow seems very abstract to me, that is, incapable of overcoming the distance of Christ from my heart. In my daily circumstances I need a person near me to watch, and so I don't understand: who is the *maestro* to follow?

Carrón: I do not choose the *maestro*. I acknowledge the *maestro*. We are not the ones to decide the person who makes the road viable, who truly helps us live; we just acknowledge it, discover it—listening to certain things or sharing certain situations with people, as some of the letters I read yesterday documented—attracted by someone who has a different judgment, who corresponds more to the expectation of the heart. We do not decide this, but we acknowledge it. I repeat: we acknowledge the *maestro*. Does this eliminate my 'I'? No! Because without my 'I,' as we have said, I am not able to acknowledge the *maestro*, that which

⁸⁶L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op.cit., p. 31.

truly corresponds to all my expectation, that which truly measures up to my desire, my humanity, my drama. Thus—what a risk the Mystery runs!—to acknowledge “the” face among the many faces one runs into in life, one’s own humanity is needed. We do not decide what corresponds or does not correspond. We acknowledge it, as we said yesterday quoting Tarkovsky: “And suddenly in the crowd you meet a person’s gaze—a human gaze—and it is as if a hidden divine presence had approached you. And suddenly everything becomes simpler.” I have told you many times of my experience. I was in Spain and for many years I did not spend time with Fr. Giussani, but the one thing I could not say was that he was abstract for me because I knew, even from far away, through the instruments I had available (much fewer than today), what helped me in life. I had read many things in life, but what truly was a companion to me was what I heard from him. I dedicated all my effort to comparing myself with his message, which reached me not simply through a face, but through a text, through many things he did. Then my friends and I tried to help each other understand more and more, because the only thing we were seeking was to follow what was proposed to us. The person who helps us is not one who is simply nearby, but one who illuminates life, even if the person is on the other side of the ocean, a person who, living, you feel illuminates your life. For this reason—now that Fr. Giussani is no longer in this world—I have nothing else to propose, as you saw yesterday, than his charism. It is not that I want to “repeat” Giussani. No, the fact is that I have nothing more interesting to say, because there is nothing more pertinent to our situation, to the historic situation we have to face, than what he said: School of Community, the gestures, the texts, all the proposal of an experience that he documented in many ways. We can make this comparison constantly: whether we are willing to follow Fr. Giussani or not. Then, obviously, I hope that each of us has friends nearby in the Fraternity group, in the communities, and can find in them companionship that helps us to follow. I hope that it is this way for everyone, but it is what we say together, particularly during the Spiritual Exercises, that gives us the criterion for knowing whether we are following. And if we are not following, we cannot complain about our lack of substance; it is not enough to warm a seat here, if we do not try to become one with what is said and constantly try to have what we hear become experience. From this point of view, the answer Fr. Giussani gave when someone spoke to him about the abstractness we often hear about, is revealing: “In Rimini, I said that the ‘I’ is the crossroads between the

eternal and nothing, and existentially and historically this becomes real, as either the recognition of Christ or not. The ‘no’ said to Christ, not saying ‘Christ,’ is the same as saying, ‘Everything is nothing.’ Tell me logically how this can end up differently—tell me! This is so true that the highest human ideal, which seems to be the Buddhist one, conceives of the solution to everything as a drop that falls into the ocean, and mixes into the ocean, the harmonious ocean of everything. What beautiful harmony! Where the ‘I’ disappears! Disappearance is what you’re aiming towards. [...] Yes, what seems abstract is something that we’ve already said no to. Because if I didn’t say no, even if it appears abstract, then I understand that I have to go through all the struggles necessary to make it concrete, to make it an experience. Everything we’ve said to you, I swear to you will become experience. It’s become experience for us—that’s why we’re here. We’d have to have a lot of courage to gather so many people together like this in order to tell a lie. You can’t have courage to do something like this—you’d need to be a politician or maybe a panderer: it’s always a question of money, because power is only about money. Something is either true or not true; to say that something true is abstract means that you’ve already said no: what appears abstract is what we’ve already denied. If they tell you something that appears abstract, you must commit yourself to see how you can concretize it, and in this attempt to make it an experience, you learn it.”⁸⁷ This is the decision that each of us must make: whether to continue saying that it is abstract or to try to experience what we are talking about. Only you can have this experience, personally, just as I must have it, too. Only if what I am told becomes experience can I understand whether it is true, and then can all the reasonableness, all the evidence, all the clarity of that correspondence I am seeking appear before my eyes. For this reason, friends, if the charism does not become our experience, it will always remain abstract.

Prosperi: I would like to understand the nature of sharing and living together. The Apostles became certain spending time with Him; they became attached to Him. In the first lesson, you said that following the *maestro* means identifying with him, but not being attached to his person. But the Apostles were attached to Him.

⁸⁷ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live this Way? An Unusual Approach to Christian Experience. Volume 3: Charity*, op.cit., pp. 117-118.

Carrón: “Jesus did not conceive His attraction to others as an ultimate reference to Himself, but to the Father: to Himself so that He could lead to the Father, as knowledge and as obedience,”⁸⁸ Fr. Giussani states. This is the identical method that then-Cardinal Ratzinger spoke of at Fr. Giussani’s funeral: “Fr. Giussani really wanted not to have his life for himself, but he gave life, and exactly in this way found life not only for himself but for many others. He practiced what we heard in the Gospel: he did not want to be served but to serve, he was a faithful servant of the Gospel, he gave out all the wealth of his heart, he gave out all the divine wealth of the Gospel with which he was penetrated and, serving in this way, giving his life, this life of his gave rich fruit—as we see in this moment. He has become really a father to many and, having led people not to himself but to Christ, he really won hearts; he has helped to make the world better and to open the world’s doors for heaven.”⁸⁹ This is true affection. Becoming one with the experience of Jesus and with the experience of Giussani: this is following them. It is not a sentimental question, but it means learning a relationship with reality, because only if we observe how they lived their relationship with reality can we see generated in us a substance, a self-awareness that enables us to stay before any circumstance. True affection is opening our being to the Mystery. The whole effort of Jesus with His disciples is to introduce them to the Mystery, and for this reason He never yields to their measure, but constantly starts again, with being scandalized (as so often we saw Fr. Giussani start fresh with us, without being scandalized by the fact that we did not understand anything). We can do the same now, without being scandalized, slowly, but always in battle, never taking another road. This is morality; for us it is not first of all coherence, but tension toward the true, not the justification of deceit, but the tension toward the true. For this reason, we truly attach ourselves to the people who throw themselves wide open to the totality. First, we decide if we want to go to destiny and totality, then we “yield” to the presence of those who want the same thing. Or we “decide” who to follow, because we have established that we don’t give a fig about ourselves; we’ll settle for something less than what corresponds to our need for totality. Friends are the consequence of what we have decided for our heart. It is a life choice: as the Italian saying goes, “God makes

⁸⁸ L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino* [*Man and His Destiny*], op.cit., p. 129.

⁸⁹ J. Ratzinger, “In Love with *Christ*: In an Encounter, the *Road*,” homily at the funeral of Fr. Luigi Giussani, Milan Cathedral, Feb. 24, 2005, in *Traces*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2005), pp. 12-13.

them and then He pairs them.” Do you understand? First we decide what we want in life, and then we choose our friends, because they are the ones who go where we want to go. We have to be loyal to our own heart, with our own need to follow Jesus and Fr. Giussani.

Prosperi: The last two questions concern the substance of the ‘I.’ Speaking of Peter, you said that all the darkness could not eliminate all the evidence he had seen. This is the substance of the ‘I.’ Why does the substance of the ‘I’ allow the experience of darkness to still exist?

The second: The economic crisis is seriously harming my work activity, causing very grave worries. I said and continue to say that reality is positive, but nonetheless I am afraid and can’t sleep at night because of economic commitments. I would like to be helped to understand this apparently contradictory fact.

Carrón: Jesus entered into history and brought a presence that fascinated those who encountered Him; He did not enter into history and put everything right. Ever since the Mystery began this fascinating adventure of becoming companion of man so he might rediscover himself, the method has always been what Fr. Giussani has testified to us. What is the method? We see it from Abraham onwards: to reach everyone and everything, God began by choosing one. When He chose Abraham, did God set everything right in reality and history? No, He began to generate an ‘I,’ to give consistency to that ‘I,’ so much so that Fr. Giussani spoke to us of Abraham as the “birth of the ‘I’ because the ‘I’ is constituted only in the face of a Presence that calls it, that attracts it, that reawakens it from the torpor into which it often falls. This does not mean that everything around Abraham suddenly changed. No, Abraham changed. And at times even Abraham was scandalized by those around him: “Why are you this way?” It is precisely because we are this way that God has given grace to you, Abraham; it is because we are so muddled and blind and lazy, because all around us is darkness, that God began to give grace to you, to make you consistent, to begin to generate a place where the darkness can be overcome, where nihilism can be overcome.” In the same way, Jesus does not promise us that everything will go well, that we will not have illnesses, that we will not lose our job or that we will always be successful. This is a Calvinist Protestant conception: God exists if all goes well. This is contrary to the whole history of the people of Israel! Unlike all the other peoples—precisely because God’s way of being was another, God was another

reality, different, irreducible—Israel could lose everything—the temple, the land, the monarchy, power—and even experience exile. In any other situation it would have been the end of the god, because the divinities of any other people were linked to the possibility of worldly victory. When we think that if we lose some power we will be vanquished, we show where we place our hope. But Christ is generating a place where we can find a consistency that enables us to face everything, even defeat, even exile, so that we can realize that victory is not given us by the number of horses in our army or the number of places we have, and we are brought to the purification we need to experience the true substance that leads us to Destiny. So then, Jesus did not propose to us that he would eliminate the darkness. He Himself crossed through the darkness and conquered it because of His substance and His bond with the Father. Not even Jesus was spared the Passion, entrance into darkness and death. Do we want to be His disciples, or do we think it is better to be the disciples of someone else? The question is whether in the moment of difficulty and fear we return where He returned, that is, to the bond with the Father, with He who enables us to stay before any circumstance, and whether we help each other to set ourselves before that bond. As Fr. Giussani says in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, those who have this awareness, who have this substance, who have this self-awareness, “can enter any situation whatsoever, profoundly tranquil, with a promise of peace and joy.”⁹⁰ How often have we been amazed to see how so many of our friends face illness and death? Are they spared anything because they have encountered Christ? Nobody promised this. Jesus wants to generate an ‘I,’ a creature so new that he or she can stay before everything. This is the new creature. The problem is not that we be spared anything: no, that would be too little, because—as one of the letters said yesterday—a person could be healed, the Lord could heal her, but the true challenge is that this is not enough; the true question is whether there is an adequate response to death, because even after healing we will have to stand before death. This is the creature that Christ wants to generate, and this is the opportunity for us, for our friends, for our loved ones, for the world: that there be in reality, in history, in our workplace, in our family, among our friends, a new, consistent ‘I.’ This is possible only if we follow the *maestro* who has been given to us and who fascinated us. It is not something automatic; it is only the consequence of a *sequela*. We all know that when we follow,

⁹⁰L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op.cit., p. 106.

this substance arrives. We have many witnesses before our eyes, now, in these circumstances of history—not in the Middle Ages or in the era of the Fathers of the Church, but now! We see it before our eyes: following with simplicity the proposal that Fr. Giussani has made to us, one that he testified to us to the very end, gives us the opportunity to have a substance that enables us to stay before everything.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity and, out of the gratitude we have for our history, it seems to me a favorable occasion to review some of the things Fr. Giussani said about what the Fraternity is and what Fraternity groups are.

He said in a Fraternity assembly: “The life of a Fraternity is fundamentally a call and a help to live the relationship with one’s destiny [look at the focus he introduces with the first sentence: a call to one’s destiny, nothing less than this]. Because, my friends, we have to admit that it is not human to live differently, to live with our head in a sack is not human. The difference between the child and the adult is that the child is unaware of purpose [that is, destiny]. An adult who acts like a child is called a goose, because he has no awareness of purpose. Most people live like geese; they have no consciousness of purpose. If the purpose of the Fraternity is to call and help each other in this, [here is the value of a series of elements of the life of the Fraternity] then here is the value of the moments of *prayer*. It is not possible to recognize each other as help on the journey towards one’s destiny without at the same time *sharing our needs*. [When, as we have seen, one has the problem of work, is sick, is messed up, we can either be complicit or we can be of help.] It is not possible for us to be Christians in the world if we are not charitable first of all with those who unite with us as companions on the road, thus sharing our needs deep down. The third key point is the *conception of life as missionary*, because mission is not a detail of life; it is life. For a mother, a woman who is a homemaker, it is reasonable that she do this if she offers what she does for the world, and bringing up children has no sense if they are not brought up for the Kingdom of God. So then, your life being in function of the Movement is nothing other than the practical application of this missionary impetus, because the Movement is nothing other than the way, our way, by which we have been introduced to live the world and life

according to the heart of the Church. Therefore, the Fraternity is the conception of your life, family life, profession, the education of your children, free time, energy, and money in function of the Movement, that is, in function of something greater, where one acts in total freedom, because without freedom there is no human answer. An answer of 0.1 out of 100 in freedom is better than an apparent answer of 50% without freedom, even 100% without freedom.”⁹¹ This is because, he said on another occasion, “the Movement is not made to grow because of initiatives; the Movement is made to grow if persons grow mature in the faith. Initiatives are an instrument for this maturing process; if the initiatives are not an instrument for maturing in the faith, the Movement does not grow: they may be things that give pleasure and satisfy the self-regard of those who do them, but they do not make the Movement grow. In fact, it always happens that, whenever they are structured in a certain way, they are closed up in themselves and generate divisions, or better, alienation. On the other hand, initiatives, all of them, from handing out leaflets to the cooperative you set up, must be conceived and approached as instruments for getting both the individuals who take part and the outsiders who see them being done more interested in this great thing, which is the presence of Christ, to whom our life and the world belong; because, if Christ were recognized more, we would all be better off, a hundred times better off, on this earth.”⁹²

For this reason, your concern should not be how to organize the life of the group, but rather “concern yourselves with [...] reminding each other of Christ, loving each other, not in the sentimental sense of the term, but by sharing needs, paying attention to each other, overcoming dislikes, forgiving each other, and ‘nursing inside yourselves’ a passion for the Movement.”⁹³

At a certain point, Fr. Giussani talks about the freedom we must have even in looking for what most helps us: “If the group doesn’t work for you ... fine. You can have travelled the road together for three years, and the third year you can up and go and find another group, create another more suitable solidarity, freer than the situation you are in. It’s not necessarily the case that just because you’ve spent five years in a

⁹¹ Assembly of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Marches Region, Loreto, January 5, 1984, CL Archive.

⁹² L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, op.cit., pp. 178-179.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

Fraternity group you have to stay there for eternity.”⁹⁴ What most helps us? So often if someone moves because he feels suffocated or because he finds a group reality that is more suitable, it seems like a scandal for everyone. Come on! It is the goal–destiny is the goal–not just huddling around the hearth.

“So as not to live the Fraternity group, too, in the schematic way into which every belonging to movements and associations normally degenerates, it is necessary to be free. And freedom, if it is intended not to be a choosing according to our own tastes or instincts, is knowing how to choose and value those presences in our life which call us back most copiously to our destiny.”⁹⁵ This is the criterion for choosing the Fraternity group. This is another thing we do not decide ourselves, but recognize: those who most copiously call us to our destiny. The Fraternity is an obedience, as the Movement is an obedience, as the *maestro* is an obedience: since we are needy down to the marrow of our bones, what is the question? That we find those who most call us, who most help us, who most reawaken us. This requires real freedom. But often in our groups, if someone moves, it seems like she does not love the others... no! Maybe, someone’s moving–because God gives a person the grace to move–can be the modality for reawakening the group, because the method of God is always the same: giving grace to one, if it is not a purely sentimental move, to reach everyone.

For this reason, “knowing how to choose and value those presences [...] which call us back most copiously to our destiny, to the purpose of life, and most help us to do our duty, to carry out our task. The vitality of our faith cannot be circumscribed within the group. Group life is like family life. Family life does not have as its purpose to circumscribe existence within the boundaries of the family itself: this is the death of the personality. The family is a tool, which nature places and develops in man, to make him widen his interest and his arms to embrace the whole world. The family is there to educate us in relating to the whole world. Thus, the group has to foster a similar input. If, living the life of the Movement, one encounters persons or things or situations with which he feels in harmony, he feels aided, he should not feel blocked by a false loyalty toward his little group [these are his words! What sche-

⁹⁴ Assembly of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Marches Region, Loreto, January 5, 1984, CL Archive.

⁹⁵ L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, op.cit., p. 87.

matic thinking we use to justify our connivance and our not moving!]; he is open to friendship with anybody, in freedom, and this helps him even more with his little group.⁷⁹⁶

It should be the Fraternity group that encourages these moves, because if one moves it is a grace for everyone. We see it among ourselves: a grace given to one is a good for all. For this reason, let's look at the experience we have in our groups, in order not to be accomplices.

Common fund

I want to remind you of the importance of the Common Fund, the value of this gesture. We spoke of this last year: you can re-read the booklet of the 2011 Spiritual Exercises. I'll only add this: the fact that some of us are in difficulty because of the economic situation and have not suspended their giving until better times come around, but have only reduced their contribution, is something moving, that speaks of our education, because it is not a problem of quantity. Someone may regret not being able to continue giving the same amount, but can remain faithful. Who among us cannot give a euro? Tell yourself whether you are able or not. For this reason, there is no alibi for not paying the Common Fund, because it is not the amount, but the education that interests us. After all, money does not resolve anything. Faithfulness to the Common Fund is a sign of the importance one assigns to this gesture for one's life, as gratitude for what one experiences in the Fraternity.

Some new members have asked if there is a standard amount for the Common Fund. No! Fr. Giussani always said that the amount is totally free, as I said before, and that the important thing is faithfulness to this gesture, and not the amount.

Traces

I'd like to remind you that *Traces* is the official magazine of the Movement and the only instrument, other than the CL site, for which we feel directly responsible.

In the announcements you will find the proposal for a special effort to distribute the May issue, dedicated to the great encounter of families with the Pope. I would like to encourage renewed focus on sharing the magazine in the various public spheres of our lives (work, school, universities, parishes, acquaintances, friends, etc.) because we have seen

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

that it is a great educative opportunity for everyone and affords the chance to make known the presence of our community right where we live. Our friend demonstrates this in her letter: “We spoke about distributing *Traces* in our community. Nobody was distributing it in front of the churches anymore. I began speaking about it with my friends in the School of Community. One of them took this call seriously and began distributing the magazine at the exit of the Mass he attended. To those who objected that they didn’t have time, or found the lingo difficult, he extended an invitation to read the magazine at his house, combining it with dinner together. The monthly reading group is going forward, with invitations and new people joining in. Two people are coming to School of Community, and this is important because otherwise it risks being a sentimental Christian-style get together. Now we are able to propose the magazine at a number of Masses because others have joined in to help. We have increased the number of copies and it seems like a miracle because we have taken seriously the signs that this is a work for our lives, not an almost forced militant action. This communication of the experience opens our hearts and causes us to set to work on ourselves, in order to explain what one has encountered.” In addition to public distribution, I encourage it on a personal level. Often one happens to talk about certain issues and then find in an article of the magazine an opportunity to offer others a different perspective. At times in dialogue with colleagues, friends, and acquaintances, we can find occasions to make the magazine known starting from a particular article or a theme important to them, and so there one opens to the totality. Often the articles, interviews, and judgments contained in the magazine are the cue for encounter and dialogue with people with whom one enters into contact at work or elsewhere. So let’s use it as an opportunity for testimony.

Prayer to invoke the intercession of Fr. Giussani

In order to respond to a need that has arisen in the life of many people after the request to introduce the cause of beatification of Fr. Giussani, that is, to be able to invoke his intercession in an orderly way, corresponding to the true nature of his charism, the Fraternity has requested and received from the appropriate ecclesiastical authority approval of an invocation to be used—take note!—for private devotion, the only form allowed by the Church for a Servant of God, which Fr. Giussani now is.

We strongly encourage you to avoid composing and distributing other forms of invocation. The Fraternity disapproves of any other initiative.

World meeting of families with the Pope

The Feast of Testimonies, which will take place Saturday, June 2nd, and the Solemn Mass on Sunday, June 3rd, are the two moments in which Benedict XVI will participate in the World Meeting of Families. This event is the opportunity to offer a testimony to the originality of our charism in the spheres where we are and with all the people we encounter. I encourage you to take very seriously the invitation and to promote it with friends and colleagues, in parishes and dioceses.

I'd like to read you the telegram we sent to His Holiness: "Your Holiness, 25,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have participated in Rimini in the traditional Spiritual Exercises, meditating on the expression of St. Paul, 'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' Other thousands have participated by video-conference in 13 European nations. In these days, we have experienced anew Christ as the answer to what each of us is, verifying that only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of one's own self throws us wide open to recognize Him present here and now, the Only One who overcomes the separation between knowing and believing, which Your Holiness indicated as 'the' problem of Christians today. If Christ, in fact, does not live in us, dualism wins and nihilism dominates. Fr. Giussani accepted living up to his humanity; he did not withdraw himself from the gaze of Christ, and for this reason showed the road for each of us, in the *sequela* of the Pope and of the Church, testifying to us with his own experience that only Jesus corresponds to the totality of the expectation of the heart. Full of enthusiasm for your person, who gives flesh and blood to the Easter message—'If Jesus is risen, something truly new, that changes the condition of man and of the world, has happened. The Risen One does not belong to the *past*, but is *present* today, alive'—we await the encounter with Peter in Milan together with all the families of the world. The affection of our heart is for you."

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Mass: Acts 3:13-15.17-19; Psalm 4; Luke 24:35-48

HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE MARC CARDINAL OUELLET PREFECT OF THE CONGREGATION FOR BISHOPS

Dear friends,

“The risen Christ appeared to His Apostles and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”

Here is the announcement that summarizes not only the meaning of today’s Liturgy, but also the core of the Christian event, in fact, the meaning of all of Sacred Scripture.

“The risen Christ” is that unique man who amazed His peers and people of all centuries as no one else has done. This man brings with Himself a measure of the human that exceeds our capacities, but that reawakens and radicalizes the human heart’s prayer for meaning. He ended up on the Cross because His claim to come from above scandalized the authorities of the time and their followers. His challenge continues through the centuries. There is no end to the attempts to make Him fit into the horizon of the historical reason of humanity.

1. This man Christ not only rose, but appeared mysteriously to His own, letting Himself be recognized, letting Himself be touched, inviting them to believe in spite of the shock of His tragic destiny. He did not appear in just any way, but with the design of forming witnesses of a new reality that cannot be reduced to the categories of the world, but profoundly intelligible through the intelligence of the Scriptures. “These are the things that I told you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms had to be fulfilled.”

2. Jesus’ unheard of claim ended with the crucifixion and the victory of the Risen One over death. Then His appearances made His disciples understand His present identity: His being there, alive, beyond death, more alive than them, not subjected to the bonds of space and time, but fully free to manifest Himself to them. Now they could understand Who He was, where He came from, and where He returned after His obedient journey on the road of Incarnation. He was truly the Messiah, the only-begotten Son, Revealer of the Father, the Mediator of the Spirit.

3. All this is contained in the greeting that summarizes all the Messianic gifts: Shalom! “*Peace be with you,*” a greeting of peace

charged with meaning and often repeated. I give you Peace, My peace, which is not as the world gives it, because My peace contains forgiveness of your sins, reconciliation with God and among yourselves, and a new life of communion that is not of this world. It is the “*Peace that the world derides, but cannot rob*” (Manzoni, *La Pentecoste*).

4. “Peace be with you.” Receive it from Me, not only as the revelation that *I Am* (Εγώ εἰμι) but also as the revelation of what you are, my friends: you are *children of God!* Receive it in fullness to understand and embrace what you are by grace. In fact, Christ breathes upon them and upon us His *Holy Spirit* that makes all things new. This Creator Breath therefore joins *their identity with His* in a definitive and indestructible shared life, one that constitutes the identity of the Church and that spurs every community to be witnesses of the Risen One for the world.

5. How is this testimony incarnated when one is aware of having received the gift of a special life together with the Risen Christ? Here is the question of your Spiritual Exercises, using Paul’s expression: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Responding seriously to this question, to this existential challenge, has been the objective of the prayer and reflection of these days.

6. Let us draw upon the event that gathers us, which our brethren of the East call “the Divine Liturgy,” to grasp another essential feature of our vital relationship with Christ. What does the sacramental encounter with Christ produce in us? How can we ensure that it will always be new and regenerative? To avoid routine and mediocrity, one must try not to reduce the Divine Liturgy to devotion, that is, to a series of rites, duties, sentiments, and attitudes that we manage in our relationship with God. Instead, we must live it in the light of the appearances of the Risen One, as an encounter that leaves *traces*.

7. In fact, the Liturgy is the irruption of the Risen Lord into our history, through the simplicity of the word proclaimed and the humility of the rites. It is not a performance of ours, but an event that is never tamable, the Incarnation of a living and full Word, who reaches and recapitulates all the spaces and movements of our human life. The Liturgy wraps our existence in Easter light and thus gives us eyes to see the signs of the Lord present in all of our life.

8. The irreducibility of the Christ event, the uncontrollableness of His appearances, and the fullness of His peace overflow from the Sacred Liturgy. Is this not one of the most decisive messages of Pope Benedict XVI? Let us reflect a bit and we will see that the meaning of the Christ event, that similarly shook Fr. Giussani and Joseph Ratzinger, has a

common root in Easter: their fascination with the figure of Christ flows from the personal encounter of the incarnate Word in the Eucharistic mystery, which illuminates the more linear, discrete, and totalizing way of His being present in the very concrete trajectory of all of human life and of all men.

9. *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”* Believing in Him, being one with Him, means belonging to His Eucharistic and ecclesial body. This belonging confers upon human life a fullness of meaning that sweeps our personal experience beyond ourselves in the experience of ecclesial communion.

10. The exchange of identity between Christ and me flows from the event of Baptism, but is fulfilled in the peace of the Eucharistic communion. Precisely because our concrete daily human experience is wrapped in the mystery of the Eucharistic-ecclesial communion, our human relationships of family, friends, and society are, so to speak, inhabited by and directed toward an exchange of gifts that includes our own identity: *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”*

11. Out of laziness and mediocrity the event of Eucharistic communion can always be reduced to devotion, but for His part, Christ offers in it nothing less than the Trinitarian communion, poured into hearts through His body filled with the Holy Spirit.

12. *“Peace be with you”* thus expresses the action of God that actualizes, *here for us* in the sacrament, the process of divinization of all our being and of all our work. In the Eucharist, mystery of communion with the glorified body of Christ, seed of immortality (cf. Saint Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Discourse XXXVII*: PG 45, 97), we participate in the divine life. Grafted into Christ, “men become gods and children of God, ... dust is raised to such a degree of glory as to be equal in honor and deity to the divine nature” (Nicola Cabasilas, *La vita in Cristo [Life In Christ]*, I: PG 150,505. Cf. *Oriente Lumen* no. 6).

Let us welcome the presence of the Risen One with gratitude and great joy according to the terms proposed by the initial collect prayer:

May Your people always exult, O Father, I in the renewed youth of the Spirit, I and as today we are gladdened at the gift of filial dignity, I may we eagerly anticipate in hope! the glorious day of the resurrection.

13. Strengthened by this prayer of the Church, let us entrust ourselves to the Breath of the Risen One, and allow Him to shape in our innermost beings our response to the Word of the Teacher as we immerse ourselves in adoration: “You are Mine and I am yours. I have bought you at a dear price, the price of all My blood poured out. Be

Mine as I am yours. We are one thing alone, one body, one Spirit. Receive what you are, My body, and allow Me to continue walking on the earth in the midst of women and men thanks to you, to your heart given to Me, to your spirit indwelt and transformed by My love. I came in the flesh not to then abandon the flesh, but to make all of humanity My body. You, together with your and My friends, are the prophecy of the destiny of all, that all may be One.”

14. Dear friends, let us praise the Lord with profound joy and gratitude as we offer ourselves to be His witnesses in the power of His Spirit. May our witness be humble and courageous, may it not so much be ours as His, more alive in us than we ourselves.

May His embrace of Peace become our personal and ecclesial embrace, an embrace that is sacrament of His Peace for the world. Amen!

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Julián Carrón: Dearest Eminence, in the name of everyone I wish to thank you first of all for your participation in our Spiritual Exercises. Please allow me to thank you, in addition, for your years of friendship and the warmth with which you are attentive to our experience. Last but not least, we would like to express our gratitude for your testimony of true oneness with Peter in his delicate task in the service of He who is the sweet Christ on earth, especially in these harsh and confused times. Thank you, your Eminence.

Cardinal Ouellet: Dear friends, before saying goodbye, I want to thank you again for the great privilege of celebrating the Holy Eucharist with you in the light of the Risen One. It is a grace for me to be welcomed into your communion in one of the most significant moments of your spiritual journey. May God repay you a hundredfold.

I would like to add thanks for another reason. Everyone knows of the friendship that continues to flower and bear fruit between Communion and Liberation and the Holy Father Benedict XVI. I thank you very much for this, for your hidden and public contribution to his great pontificate. I entrust each of you, your families, and your works to Mary! Please pray for me, as well.

Thank you!

MESSAGES RECEIVED

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20)

Dearest ones:

Again this year, I wish to be present to you on the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises, a decisive gesture for your personal life and all the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

“I, but no longer I,” thus Benedict XVI made his own the profound Pauline affirmation, to which your gathering is dedicated, at the ecclesial convention of Verona.

Each of us, shaken by this affirmation, experiences a jolt: on the one hand, we are lead into a “new space,” opened to a fulfilled horizon through the desire that never abandons our heart; on the other, however, as an almost inexorable repercussion, we are immediately assailed by fear of our incapacity to actuate this decisive aspiration.

The more the years go by, the more the paradoxical nature of this jolt risks wearying our heart, weakening our faith, restraining the beauty of communicating Jesus Christ, the only Savior and Redeemer.

Rightly, Fr. Giussani indicated, as antidote to this risk, the moral figure of “starting anew.”

May each of us ask Mercy, who is Jesus Himself dead and risen, the energy for starting anew.

Let us entrust each other to Mary.

From Czestochova in the Lord, I greet you and bless you.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola

Archbishop of Milan

Dear Fr. Julián!

The time that passes makes us ever more certain of the power in our life and history of Christ, God made man, who suffered on the Cross, and is Risen!

The time that passes makes it more evident that Christ did not come to make us more perfect; just look at history, the world two thousand years after His coming, or cast a humble and sincere gaze upon oneself: “You know nothing in the immense universe that is not the instrument of an unhappiness” (Péguy). Christ has been the bearer of a newness that can be experienced in our life and in history: He Himself present who changes the human person and the world, transfiguring them (John Paul II). “Our Lord Jesus Christ, after having died on the Cross

for our sins and ascending to heaven, did not leave the world as He found it, but left a precious gift behind. He left in the world something that was not there before: a secret refuge, so that we can enjoy faith and love wherever we find them” (Newman).

Thus, as time passes, the mercy of God can be experienced more and more, God who recreates, the visible action of the Risen One who “in this Easter gladness makes us innocent again.” It is the spectacle of His people, of the people who is His home among men (the Jews), who the Risen One generates so that each new beginning, like the powerful gesture of the Spiritual Exercises, may become road and dwelling place.

I accompany the gesture of the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises with my poor prayers and offering.

Yours through the grace of Jesus Christ Our Risen Lord.

Most Reverend Paolo Pezzi

Archbishop of Madre di Dio in Moscow

Dearest Fr. Julián Carrón:

My greetings and prayers for you and the friends of the Movement for the good outcome of these Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. After 27 years of mission in Brazil, begun at the invitation of Fr. Giussani, I have returned to Italy, for the past several months serving in the Archdiocese of Taranto. I find myself immersed in the ecclesial world and the society of the city that is going through a very delicate moment because of the conflict between saving jobs and defending health and the environment.

This is a difficult situation for all of Italian and European society, but also a great opportunity to show everyone the hope in us because of the immensity of the charism of Fr. Giussani that we have encountered. He has made us participants in the experience of Saint Paul that is the theme of these Spiritual Exercises: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” This is the dominant fact of our life in the circumstances that the Lord calls us to face, and so everything is different and truer.

Full of trust, I unite with all of you in this moment of grace, asking for the whole Movement the openness to follow the step that you indicate to us and offer each of us.

Invoking the blessing of the Lord and the protection of the Great Mother of God, I send my warm greetings.

The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro

Archbishop of Taranto

TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness
Benedict XVI*

Your Holiness:

25,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have participated in Rimini in the traditional Spiritual Exercises, meditating on the expression of St. Paul, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Other thousands have participated by video-conference in 13 European nations.

In these days, we have experienced anew Christ as the answer to what each of us is, verifying that only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of one’s own self throws us wide open to recognize Him present here and now, the Only One who overcomes the separation between knowing and believing, which Your Holiness indicated as “the” problem of Christians today. If Christ, in fact, does not live in us, dualism wins and nihilism dominates. Fr. Giussani accepted living up to his humanity, did not withdraw himself from the gaze of Christ, and for this reason showed the road for each of us, in the *sequela* of the Pope and of the Church, testifying to us with his own experience that only Jesus corresponds to the totality of the expectation of the heart.

Full of enthusiasm for your person, who gives flesh and blood to the Easter message—“If Jesus is risen, something truly new, that changes the condition of man and of the world, has happened. The Risen One does not belong to the *past*, but is *present* today, alive”—we await the encounter with Peter in Milan together with all the families of the world.

The affection of our heart is for you.

Fr. Julián Carrón

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

Your Eminence:

The 25,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” renew their will-

ingness to collaborate with the Italian Church in the immense work of testifying that only in Christ does man find peace and a credible reason to live, so much more needed in this moment of crisis and confusion.

Fr. Julián Carrón

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

Your Eminence:

25,000 *christifideles* of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,” and thousands others by video-conference in 13 European countries, confirm their commitment to testify to the profound change Christ works in those who let themselves be seized by Him.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Scola
Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Angelo:

Your words have provoked us to be even more docile—abashed and thus humble—and open to the renewal that only the mystery of the Risen Christ, contemporary to each of us, can work in our life. The painful awareness of the lack of substance of our ‘I’ that provokes a “jolt” of fear and doubt, urges us to the memory of Christ and pushes us to follow more consciously the road Fr. Giussani travelled, testifying to us with his life that faith is the supreme rationality and that no success or power can satisfy our heart.

Awaiting the Holy Father’s great encounter with the families of the world, we entrust your intentions to Our Lady of Caravaggio, asking you to pray for the conversion of each member of the Fraternity.

Fr. Julián Carrón

The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Excellency:

Grateful for your message, from Rimini we pray for your new pastoral ministry, confident that faithful to that form of teaching to which we have been consigned, you will continue to draw the criteria for being a witness before your people that Christ is the only One in whose gaze all our drama and that of our fellow men is embraced and saved.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Most Reverend Paolo Pezzi
Archbishop of Madre di Dio in Moscow

Dearest Excellency:

Grateful for your prayers for our Spiritual Exercises, we have experienced again Christ contemporaneous through the newness introduced into our life, fragile and yet certain that He is the Lord. May Our Lady of tenderness make your life ever more a testimony to Christ, the thing we hold dearest, on the road indicated by Fr. Giussani.

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)

The catacombs are the place the first expressions of Christian art are found, an art that is born in connection with the cult of the dead, because the victory over death—the ultimate barrier upon which all the ancient cults shattered—is at the heart of the experience of the first Christian communities. Salvation history, recounted in its principal episodes, is seen with this gaze directed to Christ, who with His resurrection defeated death forever and with His sacrifice opened to man the possibility of a companionship forever.

1. Rome, Catacomb of Commodilla, Chi-Rho, alpha and omega
2. Vatican City, Collection of the Teutonic graveyard, funereal slab with Chi-Rho, alpha and omega and two doves
3. Rome, Coemeterium majus, Adam and Eve
4. Rome, Catacomb of Via Latina, The Offering of Cain and Abel
5. Rome, Catacomb of Via Latina, Abraham and the Three Angels
6. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, The Sacrifice of Isaac
7. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, The Sacrifice of Isaac
8. Rome, Catacomb of Via Latina, Jacob's Dream
9. Rome, Hypogeum of Via Dino Compagni, Samson Drives Out the Philistines
10. Rome, Hypogeum of Via Dino Compagni, Balaam and the Donkey
11. Rome, Catacomb di Saint Sebastian, The Three Young Men in the Burning Furnace
12. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, The Three Young Men in the Burning Furnace
13. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Daniel in the Lion's Den
14. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, Daniel in the Lion's Den
15. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, The Crossing of the Red Sea
16. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, The Fiery Chariot
17. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Moses' Miracle of Water from the Rock
18. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Joseph's Dream

19. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Jonah Thrown into the sea
20. Rome, Hypogeum of the Aureli, Jonah Thrown into the Sea
21. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Jonah Vomited by the Whale
22. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Jonah's Rest
23. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, The Baptism of Jesus
24. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, Jesus the Good Shepherd
25. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, Jesus the Good Shepherd
26. Rome, Hypogeum of Trebius, Jesus the Good Shepherd
27. Rome, Hypogeum of Aureli, The Sermon on the Mount
28. Rome, Catacomb of Via Latina, The Multiplication of the Loaves
29. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, The Healing of the Woman Who Was Bent Over
30. Rome, Catacomb Saints Peter and Marcellinus, The Samaritan Woman at the Well
31. Rome, Hypogeum of Via Dino Compagni, The Samaritan Woman at the Well
32. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, The Healing of the Woman with the Hemorrhage
33. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Cubiculum C, The Resurrection of Lazarus
34. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, The Resurrection of Lazarus
35. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, The Resurrection of Lazarus
36. Rome, Catacomb of Domitilla, Christ among the Apostles
37. Rome, Catacomb of Via Anapo, Christ among the Apostles
38. Rome, Catacomb of Domitilla, Christ and the Apostles
39. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, Eucharistic Banquet
40. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Eucharistic Banquet
41. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, Eucharistic Banquet
42. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Callixtus, Eucharistic Fish
43. Tabgha (Israel), Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves, The Multiplication of the Loaves, pavement mosaic
44. Rome, Catacomb of Commodilla, Peter's Denial and the Rooster
45. Rome, Hypogeum of Aureli, An Apostle
46. Rome, Confessio under the Basilica of Saints John and Paul, A Saint Praying
47. Rome, Catacomb of Via Latina, Portrait of a Girl

48. Rome, Catacomb di via Latina, Portrait of a Girl, detail
49. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Figures of Saints
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51. Rome, Hypogeum of Trebio, Building Scene
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53. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Cubiculum C, The Resurrection of Lazarus
54. Rome, Catacomb of Saint Sebastian, Noah in the Ark
55. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, Orant, called “The Veiled Woman”
56. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, Group from the “Veiled Woman,” lunette
57. Rome, Catacomb of the Giordani, Orant
58. Napoli, Catacomb of Saint Gennarius, Arcosolium of the family of Teotecnus
59. Rome, Catacomb of Priscilla, Mother with Child
60. Rome, Coemeterium majus, Virgin Orant with Child
61. Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua, Madonna and Child
62. Rome, Santa Maria Antiqua, Figure of a Saint
63. Rome, Catacomb of Commodilla, Madonna and Child with Saints
64. Rome, Catacomb of Saints Peter and Marcellinus, Christ with Saint Peter and Saint Paul
65. Rome, Catacomb of Commodilla, Bust of Christ

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The first part of the document discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions and activities. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for ensuring transparency and accountability in financial management. This section also outlines the various methods and tools used to collect and analyze data, highlighting the need for consistency and precision in data entry and reporting.

The second part of the document focuses on the implementation of internal controls and risk management strategies. It details the specific measures taken to prevent fraud, errors, and misstatements, as well as the processes for identifying and mitigating potential risks. This section also addresses the role of management in overseeing these controls and ensuring that they are effectively integrated into the organization's operations.

The third part of the document provides a comprehensive overview of the organization's financial performance over the reporting period. It includes a detailed analysis of the income statement, balance sheet, and cash flow statement, along with a discussion of the key drivers of financial success and areas for improvement. This section also highlights the organization's commitment to sustainable growth and long-term value creation.

The final part of the document concludes with a summary of the key findings and recommendations. It reiterates the importance of maintaining high standards of financial integrity and transparency, and provides a clear path forward for the organization's future success. The document also expresses the organization's appreciation for the support and collaboration of its stakeholders, and looks forward to continued growth and achievement in the coming year.