



"WHO WILL SEPARATE US
FROM THE LOVE OF CHRIST?"

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



RIMINI 2013

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English translation by Sheila Beatty

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

Vatican City, April 16, 2013

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

Reverend Father:

On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, to be held in Rimini on the theme, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” in the context of the Year of Faith, His Holiness Pope Francis expresses his cordial and beneficent greetings to the organizers and numerous participants. Expressing appreciation for this praiseworthy pastoral initiative, the Holy Father hopes that it will kindle renewed commitment to the Divine Master and growing awareness that the Lord is alive and walks with us. As he invokes a bountiful effusion of heavenly gifts, he asks you to remember him in your prayers, and through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, gladly sends his apostolic blessing, propitiator of an ever-fruitful ecclesial journey.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of His Holiness

Friday, April 19th, Evening

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Concerto no. 23 in A major, K 488

Wilhelm Kempff, piano

Ferdinand Leitner – Bamberger Symphoniker

Deutsche Grammophon

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

We are not the ones who build the Church; as Benedict XVI reminded us, “the Church does not begin with our ‘making.’”¹ Our “making” is not what reawakens our life.

For this reason, as it was for the disciples, and also is for us, the thing most suited to our poverty and incapacity as we begin these Spiritual Exercises is to pray to the Holy Spirit that He may reawaken us, reawaken all our desire, all our expectant awaiting for Christ.

Come Holy Spirit

I greet each of you here, all the friends in 21 countries who are following us by satellite link, and all those who will participate in the Spiritual Exercises in the coming weeks.

I will begin by reading the Pope’s telegram: “On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, to be held in Rimini on the theme, ‘Who will separate us from the love of Christ?’, in the context of the Year of Faith, His Holiness Pope Francis expresses his cordial and beneficent greetings to the organizers and numerous participants. Expressing appreciation for this praiseworthy pastoral initiative, the Holy Father hopes that it will kindle renewed commitment to the Divine Master and growing awareness that the Lord is alive and walks with us. As he invokes a bountiful effusion of heavenly gifts, he asks you to remember him in your prayers, and through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, gladly sends his apostolic blessing, pro-

¹ Benedict XVI, *Meditation during the First General Congregation of the 13th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, October 8, 2012.

pitiator of an ever fruitful ecclesial journey. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

“But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?”²

It seems to me that this question expresses better than any other the true question before each of us in these very particular times. Since we have heard it many times, there is the risk that we set it aside, considering it a bit exaggerated, a quotation from Jesus that does not really concern us, as if to say, “What does it have to do with us? Maybe it’s applicable to others, unbelievers or agnostics. But for us?” In this way, we archive the question before we even start.

But two examples show us that it is not to our advantage to do this. The first was Benedict XVI’s choice to proclaim the Year of Faith. As he wrote, “It often happens that Christians are more concerned for the social, cultural, and political consequences of their commitment, continuing to think of the faith as a self-evident presupposition for life in society. In reality, not only can this presupposition no longer be taken for granted, but it is often openly denied. Whereas in the past it was possible to recognize a unitary cultural matrix, [...] today this no longer seems to be the case in large swathes of society, because of a profound crisis of faith that has affected many people.”³ This crisis—Benedict XVI told the Italian bishops—is provoking ever-clearer effects even in fertile terrain, which thus risks becoming “inhospitable desert.”⁴

This should be familiar to all of us, because the Movement was born exactly to respond to this challenge to the faith, when the desert began to show its first signs. How many of us arrived here from the desert and discovered anew the value of Christianity, precisely when they were in the void!

However, this cannot confuse us, as if the question were behind us by now. We have a testimony to this in this letter: “The work you have been proposing to us in this period provokes me to ask myself a question that I never would have thought I’d have to ask myself after 40 years in the Movement: Do I believe or not? Well, yes, if it’s a matter of a theory to repeat or principles to affirm, there would be no need; it would be sufficient to learn a discourse once and for all and then adapt it to the differ-

² *Lk* 18:8.

³ Benedict XVI, *Porta fidei*, 2; Apostolic Letter of October 11, 2011.

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Address to the General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference*, May 24, 2012.

ent situations, and many times it is this way. While for today's world faith is no longer an obvious given, for me it often risks being just an obvious given, already known, taken for granted. For such a faith [reduced to this] the question is: Do I believe or not? This question often contains a vein of skepticism or moralism that with time becomes unbearable. It is as if the awareness of what happened and continues to happen to me is insufficient or lacking, and so belief is the outcome of something I add or apply. It is an effort that wears me down."

Or again, in this other letter: "Dear Fr. Carrón: During our little School of Community, some among us recounted their experience. They all told about a certain attitude in the face of life—for examples, one person talked about how he is caring for his parents, another about how a different attitude at work has made him happier, and another expressed a judgment on a certain type of experience. These are all beautiful and interesting things, but they could also be the fruit of an intellectual or moral effort. So then, what has Christian experience to do with this? None of us doubts the existence of God, but wherein lies the difference? Anybody would take care of his parents, anybody could do well at work, everyone wants to treat their boyfriend or husband or children well. It seems that we often jump right away to the aftermath, to the consequences. But what remains of the fascination of Christianity that we speak of so often? What remains of the fascination for Christ? In this period, I have been struck by the Easter readings that recount the amazement of the Apostles in front of the Risen Christ and the line that is repeated continually: 'They believed in Him.' So then, what's the difference between being good people and a Christianity in flesh and blood?"

If faith becomes only a self-evident presupposition or is reduced to some ethical consequences, what remains of the fascination for Christ?

We should all be grateful to those like this friend who ask us this question and force us to look at it, not settling for reductions, but throwing this question in our faces.

The second example comes from Fr. Giussani, who never stopped urging us not to take faith for granted. The reason is simple: you can belong to the Movement, he says, without having a real faith. "The true problem for CL today is the truth of its experience and thus its coherence with the origin. Among us, there is the attitude that the most urgent thing is how things are going, how the community is doing; instead, the urgent thing should be to give renewed life to a sensibility for the truth of the experience of the Movement. CL needs to be life, not remain a mere framework. [...] Today, you can belong to the

Movement without real faith, without the life and faith of people and communities being contested, without conversion.”⁵

Pope Francis said recently that sometimes, “due to superficiality and sometimes to indifference, [we are] busy with a thousand things considered more important than faith.”⁶

But this is not without consequences for our life. To help each of us realize this, Fr. Giussani offers us, as usual, the most striking indicator of this situation: “The most impressive sign that a scheme or program prevails over life is the way the adult becomes bewildered when faced with problems in living. As a general approach, the adult avoids the toil of making faith incarnate in life, and avoids letting faith disconcert him; or in his relationship with his wife, in the education of his children, in the issue of politics or in work, his actions have nothing to do with what he acclaims in the life of the community; at best, he supports and promotes initiatives organized by the community.”⁷

Thus, for Fr. Giussani, our bewilderment in the face of life’s problems is strictly related to our difficulty in incarnating faith in life. If faith is not a resource for living the difficulties we are forced to face, what is the use of believing? What does it mean to have faith? Fr. Giussani has a precise judgment on the situation we are experiencing today: “The great problem of today’s world is no longer an inquiring theorization, but an existential question. Not, ‘Who is right?’ but, ‘How can one live?’ Today’s world has been reduced to the level of evangelical poverty. In Jesus’ time, the problem was how to live, not who was right; this [latter] was the problem of the scribes and Pharisees. This observation also changes the thrust of our concern. We must pass from a position of intellectual critique to passion for what characterizes the human person today: doubt about existence, fear of existing, fragility in living, lack of substance in ourselves, terror of impossibility, horror at the disproportion between oneself and the ideal. This is the bottom of the question; this is the point from which one starts again for a new culture, for a new critical character.”⁸

⁵ “Il vero problema di CL è la verità della sua esperienza” [“The True Problem of CL Is the Truth of its Experience”], edited by L. Cioni, *CL–Litterae communionis*, no. 4, April 1977, p. 8.

⁶ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, April 3, 2013.

⁷ “Il vero problema di CL è la verità della sua esperienza” [“The True Problem of CL Is the Truth of its Experience”], *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁸ *Corresponsabilità*. Stralci dalla discussione con Luigi Giussani al Consiglio internazionale di Comunione e Liberazione [*Co-responsibility*: Selections from the conversation with Luigi Giussani at the International Council of Communion and Liberation], August 1991, *CL–Litterae communionis*, November 1991, p. 33.

These words have even greater weight today than in long-ago 1991 when they were spoken. Fr. Giussani's judgment describes very well our difficulty in living, one described by Pavese with his usual genius: "But a man's life is down there in the valley, in the fields, at home. Beside a hearth and in a bed. And every day that dawns confronts you with the same toils, the same failures. In the end it wears a man down [...]. A sudden storm can refresh the fields—it isn't death and the great sorrows that make a man lose heart. But the everlasting, grinding toil, the effort to stay alive from day to day, the recognition of evil in others, petty evil, as tiresome as summer flies—that's the life that cripples a man."⁹ It is difficult to describe the drama of daily living in a more acute and pertinent way than this. Every day, the same lack and the same toil—an interminable, annoying toil, like flies in the summer. This daily life is the "life that cripples a man." Great pain or death do not discourage us, in the end, but this daily life that cripples us is what makes life truly dramatic.

So then, we need to verify faith in the daily life that cripples us, not in our thoughts, our intentions, our sentiments, nor our arguments, but in the challenges of reality! Fr. Giussani does not loosen his grip; setting us before the question in existential terms, he keeps us from cheating ourselves and the faith. He challenges us, saying that precisely before the trials of living we see our faith's authenticity or lack thereof. "This [...] is the indicator of our faith's truth, its authenticity or lack thereof: if the faith is truly in the foreground, or if in the foreground there is another kind of concern; if we truly expect everything from the fact of Christ, or if we expect from the fact of Christ what we decide to expect, ultimately making Him a starting point and a support for our projects and programs [that become, then, that from which one expects truly everything!]. The law of spiritual development, this dynamic law of the life of our faith [...] is truly of extreme importance for individuals, as it is for collectivities; for collectivities, as it is for individuals. It always remains true that, for those who understand and love God, everything works for the good; and it always remains true that, in difficult times, whether you love God or not comes to the surface. [...] If what we are after is Christ, or if it is our own self-love, the affirmation of ourselves, under any inflection, according to any point of view—this comes to the surface in the exact moment of the trial and the difficulty."¹⁰

⁹ C. Pavese, *Dialogues with Leucò*, Peter Owen Limited, London, 1965, p. 162.

¹⁰ L. Giussani, *The Long March to Maturity. Notes from a talk by Luigi Giussani at the "Scuola quadri" [CL responsables meeting] of Communion and Liberation in Milan, on February 27, 1972*, in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (March) 2008, pp. 20-22.

This year has certainly seen no lack of difficulties. We all have them clearly in mind, from the general ones caused by a deepening recession that increasingly affects each of us, our friends, and our fellow citizens, to the difficulties that have concerned us as a movement.

What has come to the surface in facing all these difficulties? At the Beginning Day, we gave ourselves a working hypothesis for dealing with them: "In the life of those He calls, God never lets anything happen unless it serves for the growth and maturation of those He has called."¹¹ In other words, the test Giussani proposes to verify whether we are becoming more mature in the faith is precisely the capacity each of us has to take what appears to be an objection, persecution, or in any case a difficulty, and turn it into an instrument or moment of maturation. This is what demonstrates the truth of our faith.

What have we done with this working hypothesis? Have we used it? Have we tried to verify it? What has happened as a result of the way each of us has responded to the proposal? If we have used it, what has happened? If we have not used it, what has happened? What experience have we had? What have we learned?

In recent times, we have often repeated, "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, *everything*, pointed in the opposite direction."¹² So then, after this year, are we more enthusiastic about our faith and the journey made, or are we more discouraged, crestfallen, crushed? After all the challenges we have had to face, are we more certain or more uncertain? More substantial or more broken down? The circumstances have forced us to do a work. We can say with more awareness than ever, after the challenges we have faced, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" Saint Paul certainly was not spared enormous difficulties, but they led him to certainty: "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹² L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1995, p. 11.

love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”¹³ Is this a beautiful sentence we agree with, or is it a certainty, the fruit of lived experience? We all know very well the difference between repeating sentences and expressing lived experience, full of flesh, documented by life.

Some can answer in this way: “Dear Fr. Carrón: I read the summary of the Responsibles Assembly that took place in Pacengo. I can answer *yes* to this question: ‘In this entire period, when we have been challenged non-stop, have I come out with more certainty about Christ?’ I might sound presumptuous in saying so, but instead, that’s not the case at all, because it is Christ who makes me.”

Listen to this other letter: “I feel the desire to write you about all my gratitude for the words you have most recently said and written. I’m referring to your summary of the three days with the responsibles of the Movement and the letters you have sent to the press on the occasion of the circumstances that have touched our life. At the same time, I need to tell you how following is becoming a fundamental factor in my daily experience for my personal growth in the faith, which generates certainty in facing daily difficulties. What is happening in me is something surprisingly new and at the same time ancient, that is, the rebirth of the newness that the Christian experience brings to my mentality. It is a very slow journey, but inexorable, and I have no desire to resist it.”

Or another: “Dearest Julián: I can’t keep inside what I want to tell you. For several days now I have been full of emotion, even at night! At the age of 48 I discovered this emotion in anticipation of coming, in a few days, to the Spiritual Exercises! My husband has noticed it, and last night he told me, ‘The most beautiful thing about these Exercises for me is this emotion of yours, this expectation. Who can be as excited as you?’ [It’s not that nothing has happened to her....] In these years, after my father’s death, the desire not to lose him has been the one motor of my life. It made an essential question come back to me: either lose heart in the midst of these circumstances, or begin again from the one true thing that has happened in my life. Your friendship, in your closeness through the School of Community broadcasts, has rekindled this challenge! Over time, it is as if a veil has been torn away and everything around me has begun to be clearer. As I began to see more clearly, all my reality was worsening, collapsing, and all my certainties (my husband’s job, the ever-worsening economic situation, with four children who are studying, one of whom at university) were being demolished,

¹³ *Rom* 8:35-39.

with many connected risks. The absurd thing for me is that I am happier than before, with an almost inexpressible joy. Now I notice that what surprises me is beginning to surprise others, too, and they tell me, ‘You’re different!’ or ‘You’re so passionate about things that I would like to learn from you!’ But the thing that has most amazed me is that in this period, after Pope Benedict’s resignation and the arrival of Pope Francis, I find myself talking with people about Christ in an explicit and simple way, as if it were the most evident sign of what has happened, and a person told me, ‘You know, now that you mention it, I notice it too!’ People want to listen to me, surprised by a judgment that corresponds better to the facts. One person expressed her fear of losing Pope Francis, like a beautiful thing that could end! I answered, first of all to myself, with a line from Miguel Mañara that I’d recently heard read by Fr. Giussani on a CD and that had struck me: ‘Why do you fear losing what has known how to find you?’ All that has happened was not planned by us! This surprised me, but it also surprised the others! P.S.: Thank you for the witness you are for my life.”

What endures when we are stripped of all our certainties? Who are we? To whom do we belong? What lasts after the failure of so many of our projects? What happens when our claims come to nothing? What remains is what has happened to us, because nobody can take that away, not even ourselves with our disappointment, anger, or rebellion. What remains is a fact that happened to us.

But it is not enough that it remains. Each of us must decide, or better, decides and has already decided. The alternative is clear: recognize the Fact, which in any case remains, because nothing can rip it away from us, or not acknowledge the Fact, instead letting our measure, our resentment and skepticism prevail. In the answer we give, we can observe ourselves and discover what we hold most dear, what we truly adhere to, what prevails in our life. The way we answer will cry out to all (beginning with ourselves) what we hold dearest. It is not a moralistic problem, but a question of judgment, of value and esteem.

At this point, we can understand the importance of the initial question: “But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?”¹⁴ Perhaps we are more helped to not take it for granted if we express it in another way: Do we still believe that Christ can fill our life? Do we expect, as Fr. Giussani challenges us, truly everything from the fact of Christ, or, deep down, are we not as naive (we say to each other) as in

¹⁴ Lk 18:8.

the beginning? Is Christ just one among many things, a starting point for our projects? Do we believe that Christ is the adequate answer for us now, in our present circumstances, at our age? Does faith in Christ concern life or is it just a list of abstract affirmations or initiatives to do? What Fr. Giussani says is true: “Today, you can belong to the Movement without real faith, without the life and faith of people and communities being contested, without conversion.”¹⁵

It seems that this particular sentence from Revelation concerns all of us. I feel it is directed first of all to me, and for this reason I propose it to you, too, my friends: “You have endurance [in fact, you are here] and have suffered for My name, and you have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: you have lost the love you had at first.”¹⁶

Where is our first love?

A gesture of these dimensions cannot succeed without the contribution and sacrifice of each of us, in our attention to the announcements, to silence, and to the instructions given. Each of these things is a way of asking Christ to have mercy on our nothingness, to grant us that conversion that makes us truly ourselves. We all know how much we need this silence, which enables everything said this weekend to sink deep into the marrow of our bones; we know how much we need this silence to become a cry, a prayer that Christ have mercy on us.

¹⁵ “Il vero problema di CL è la verità della sua esperienza” [“The True Problem of CL Is the Truth of its Experience”], *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁶ *Rev* 2:3-4.

HOLY MASS

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

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

“Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.’”¹⁷ In a few moments this promise, this judgment of Christ, will become physical reality: His Risen presence, through the 21 centuries and through the distance—Capernaum, Damascus, Rimini—that separate us from these words. No human genius, no matter how great, can imagine such familiarity, tenderness, and passion for the life of the individual person: “My flesh is your food, My blood is your drink for life,” for the *Life* life, so that you live of Me, with Me, for Me. When Jesus pronounced these words everyone left Him, except those 12 men.

It is the moment Fr. Giussani describes as the beginning of faith, when, with his generous and impetuous temperament, Peter tells Him, “We don’t understand how this can happen, but where would we go if we leave You?” Christ seized these simple people, entered into the root of their being, not with violence but with tenderness, continually taking the initiative with them, until their hearts were full of Him, all of Him. He seized Peter, the rough fisherman; He seized Paul, the refined intellectual, the Pharisee, the persecutor, transforming him into a man deeply in love with Him. If he grasped Peter, if He seized Paul, and then a very long chain of people all the way to Fr. Giussani, why can’t He seize—grab—me and you now, in this gesture that is full of tenderness and passion for the life of each of us? Why resist? What is there to oppose? Is there anything simpler than letting His life enter mine, making us one in Him?

¹⁷ *Jn* 6:53-54.

Saturday, April 20th, Morning

During entrance and exit:

Franz Schubert, Piano Trio no. 2 in E flat major, op. 100 D 929
Eugene Istomin, piano – Isaac Stern, violin – Leonard Rose, cello
“Spirto Gentil” no. 14, Sony Classical

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“The Angel of the Lord Declared unto Mary”

The goal of the Year of Faith is to make us rediscover the beauty and joy of faith, which begins with the irruption of the Mystery into history, as we remember every morning: “The angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.” This is the beginning. So then, in this first lesson, let us explore together the Christian event, this irruption of the Mystery, so that we can grasp its true nature, leaving for this afternoon’s lesson the theme of our response to this irruption.

1. Christianity is an event: “He was full of that gaze”

“Christianity is an event.”¹⁸ This expression is very familiar to us. But we all know well that possessing the correct definition is not enough for living Christianity according to its true nature. What does it mean that Christianity is an event? What is its content of experience? Christianity reveals itself, in its nature, as response to a present need. Thus it will interest us today if it responds to the need that characterizes the person we are, to that “everlasting, grinding toil” of life that “cripples us.”¹⁹

¹⁸ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 136.

¹⁹ C. Pavese, *Dialogues with Leucò*, op. cit., p. 166.

“Dearest Fr. Julián: I am passing from a ‘heroic’ period of fundamental war (the earthquake of illness) to a day-to-day battle of an understanding that everything must be wagered and is wagered moment by moment. Each day, the nausea, the physical weakness, the sudden changes in mood provoked by the pain medication, the inability to come up with the words I want to say, make me understand that I need a presence, present now, moment by moment, that conquers any reduction caused by habit.” Like this friend, we all need an event now, because the salvation of our “I” and of history is an event, not a thought. Who understands this more? People who are sick, who are wounded, sinners and the needy, that is, people conscious of their human condition, those who do not trample on their own humanity in their need for fullness, for fulfillment.

The Gospels continually document it: the needy were the ones who sought out Jesus. The prototypes are the tax collectors. It is amazing to read in the Gospel—but we almost fail to notice; it passes almost unobserved in its simplicity: “The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, [thus explaining the reason the others drew near to Jesus] saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”²⁰ This other sentence is a generalization of what must have happened many times: “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ And he got up and followed Him. While He was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and His disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to His disciples [again, full of ire and surprise], ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’ He heard this and said, ‘Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do.’”²¹

How is it that those who would seem the farthest, the least interested in staying with Him, are those who most seek Him? What did they see in Him that they did not find elsewhere? Only with Him were they able to look at themselves. This is a brilliant example of the fact that the other is a good. The presence of Jesus was perceived as a precious good, staying with Him was good for them; and for Jesus those people were a good, so much so that He stayed on to eat with them. What a great consolation it is for each of us—if you enter with simplicity into these stories—to be reached by such a Presence (no matter what

²⁰ *Lk* 15:1-2.

²¹ *Mt* 9:9-12.

the situation in which you find yourself, the difficulties you are going through, the challenges you have to face!). Who can feel excluded? “What an impression it must have made, to feel looked at like that by someone, a total stranger, and feel oneself understood in the depth of one’s being.”²²

To be able to stay in front of Him without having to forget or hide anything about oneself.... Not because Jesus pretended not to know all their mistakes, or because He justified them. This would not have given them peace. They already had plenty of people in their lives who justified their mistakes. So why did they seek Him out? They sought Him out because with Him they were not forced to hide anything: everything was manifest to His gaze. Instead, others considered Him naive, unable to realize how things really stood. “A Pharisee [called Simon] invited Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that He was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind Him at His feet weeping and began to bathe His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.’”²³ Immediately, to show the Pharisee that He was not so naive and that He knew well who she was, Jesus told the parable of the two debtors: “‘Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?’ Simon said in reply, ‘The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.’ He said to him, ‘You have judged rightly.’ Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’”²⁴

²² L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 6.

²³ *Lk* 7:36-39.

²⁴ *Lk* 7:41-47.

Those who drew near to Him, like the Samaritan woman, knew well that nothing was hidden from that Prophet: “He told me everything I have done.”²⁵ Even her thirst for happiness was manifest to Him. Thus no mistake, no disease, no pain, no situation, no drama, no circumstance could stop something absolutely unforeseeable from happening, as is shown in the familiar story of Zacchaeus, the head of the tax collectors of Jericho.

Let’s pay attention to how Fr. Giussani invites us to look, in order to understand. What we lose for not having had the time to look as Fr. Giussani teaches us to look! What gain there would be for our living, for our looking at ourselves, if we behaved like Fr. Giussani, trying to become one with Christ so that our life too is full of that gaze, of that gaze that Christ turns upon Zacchaeus!

Here is how Fr. Giussani tells the episode of Zacchaeus: “He was the head of the tax collection office, the mafia boss of Jericho and the surrounding area, the head of the tax collectors, those who were considered enemies of the people and public sinners, from whom people had to stay 30 feet away not to be contaminated by the air, sold-out to the Romans. He heard that Jesus was in town, because everybody talked about it in those areas. He passed in front of the crowd and climbed a sycamore, a tree that is not very tall, so he could see Him pass, out of curiosity, to see Him better in the eyes because he was too short. The crowd comes closer, Jesus is speaking, passes, is there under him, stops, lifts His head and says, ‘Zacchaeus, come down; I’m coming to your house.’ And Zacchaeus: ‘I’m coming.’ Imagine that man who, without speaking, slides down from the tree and runs home. Think of that full silence, with his ear and heart full of the word spoken, of his name: finally his name was pronounced! We can well imagine how that call echoed in everything he did, even when he was in silence, even when he was working in silence. For Zacchaeus, that encounter was a miracle, something that radically transformed his life. Zacchaeus had no fear of losing anything—when he heard ‘Zacchaeus, I’m coming to your house,’ he lost everything he had before his eyes; he was filled by that name.”

Fr. Giussani’s invitation is clear: “We must identify ourselves with the people described in the Gospel. But we do not understand them and we will not manage to identify with what they were, if we don’t identify with Christ who says, ‘Zacchaeus.’ When the word ‘Zacchaeus’ explodes, then we understand Zacchaeus. When Christ says, ‘Zacchaeus, come down; I’m coming to your house,’ we understand what Zacchaeus

²⁵ *Jn* 4:39.

was in that moment. Think what Zacchaeus felt, how all of a sudden he measured all his errors without even measuring them, how he felt what he was and Who the man calling him was. Precisely in identifying with Christ we understand what Zacchaeus was.”²⁶ Elsewhere Fr. Giussani observes: “It is this closeness, this presence, not of someone who looks at you from a distance, but of one who looks at you; it is this closeness that shakes you up, that transfigures your life. Returning home, Zacchaeus did not say, ‘Now this guy is going to tell me that I stole 100 here, 34 there, now....’ He was full of that gaze, went home to prepare lunch for that man, for that fellow there who had looked at him; and after, as a consequence, thought, ‘Here, I’ll give away everything I’ve taken.’ It was a consequence that lasted all his life long, because it is not automatic; each of us knows the impetus with which we give ourselves, and we also know that then we withdraw, therefore, this is the battle of life. But that which allows life to be transformed has become a fact. Matthew was transformed, the woman, that little group of women, were transformed. Try to think of what the husbands and sons of those women would have said: ‘Are you crazy?!’ Those women had become another thing; Zacchaeus had become another thing; their lives were transformed—they understood that they loved their husbands and sons more, and Zacchaeus understood that he was richer than before, transformed, because he was near that fellow there. It is the opposite of the episode of the rich young man, to whom Christ said, ‘Come with Me’—that is, ‘I want to be close to you.’ And the Gospel says, ‘And he went away sad,’ the rich young man, sad. Either transformed or sad, because you cannot remain immobile, where you were before Christ called, when Christ gave a vocation, when Christ came close to our life, when He asked our life to be His testimony in the world. You cannot be like before: either you become sadder, you sadden even more—even if it seems you breathe better, because you return to doing what is convenient for you; you become squalid in a way that is also humanly embarrassing and pitiful—or you are transfigured.”²⁷

That Christianity is an event, in experience, means the predominance of a presence—not just any presence, but that Presence able to respond to life’s needs. “To be recognized, God entered man’s life as

²⁶ Assembly with a Group of Young People Who Had Begun the Vocational Journey in the Ecclesiastical Association *Memores Domini*, June 26, 1993, *pro manuscripto*.

²⁷ Notes from a lesson at the Spiritual Exercises of the novices of the *Memores Domini*, August 1982.

a man, with a human form, so that man's thought, imagination, and affectivity were, in a way, 'blocked,' magnetized by Him."²⁸ Why were they magnetized by Him, by His presence? Because He was the only one able to respond to the needs of life, to the exigency for fulfillment. Christianity as event is the preponderance of the Presence, without which life would be dark, sad, void of a true interest. You cannot live without the Presence. This is the true reason why you seek it continually. Not first of all in order to be "good," but to live, to be able to stay in front of yourself, to be able to have affection for yourself.

"For your love is better than life."²⁹ What is this "love" that is worth more than life? For us this love has a name: Jesus. His person is all love.

How is it that this Presence prevails so powerfully, notwithstanding all of life's problems in which we so often get stuck? How is it that He asserts Himself with this simple power, and we can do nothing to avoid it? How is it that not even our evil, our lack of coherence (and that of the tax collectors was great!), can block Him from asserting Himself in our life? Because of the correspondence He finds—fulfills—in the human heart, which can be distracted or reduced, but nothing can block the assertion of that presence, not even for an instant. The first instant cannot be controlled by man. Nobody can impede being struck by a presence, no matter what his or her situation. Nobody can control reality to the point of impeding the surprise of an event. It is so unforeseen that it surprises us with our defenses down, at least for an instant.

So then, what has this to do with need? Why did Jesus say He came for the sick? Because usually only those who have a wound are ultimately open to something unforeseen. Without need, without a wound, one immediately closes any possibility from this unforeseen, trying to put things in order. Need is the necessary condition, not for the event, but for acknowledging it. An event rushes in, happens, irreducibly, here and now, and is not a consequence of antecedents. Need enables us to see the event, to recognize it. As Pope Francis said, meeting the cardinals, "Christian truth is attractive and persuasive because it responds to the profound need of human life, proclaiming convincingly that Christ is the one Savior of the whole man and of all men. This proclamation remains as valid today as it was at the origin of Christianity, when the first great missionary expansion of the Gospel took place."³⁰

²⁸ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 17.

²⁹ *Psalm* 63 (62):4.

³⁰ Pope Francis, *Audience with the College of Cardinals*, March 15, 2013.

Those who let themselves be struck by that Presence cannot help but perceive it as a good, not to be lost. It is so correspondent to the expectation that nothing else is able to bring such satisfaction. Therefore, with Him, even the most wretched people experience such great satisfaction that they are made free. This correspondence, more than any other formula we could use to classify the experience, cries out the value of this Presence—His exceptionality, His divinity.

When the presence of that gaze carries the day in us, when it bowls over our life, the way we enter into relationship with everything shows it. “His relationship with God—Fr. Giussani is talking about the paralytic healed by Jesus—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.”³¹

This presence is so irreducible that it generates a newness so great that it enables us to look at everything under a new, less confused, truer light. This experience of newness in the relationship with everything introduces us to the true knowledge of Christ. It enables us to grasp His value for our life. It enables us to know Jesus, not as an abstract definition but as experience. This is where the person can understand the value of that presence. Those who discover it recognize it by the judgment of esteem that is generated in them.

Nobody expressed this better than Saint Paul: “If anyone else thinks he can be confident in flesh, all the more can I. Circumcised on the eighth

³¹ L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo* [*From Temperament, a Method*], Bur, Milan, 2002, pp. 3-6.

day, of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrew parentage, in observance of the law a Pharisee, in zeal I persecuted the Church, in righteousness based on the law I was blameless. (But) whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss because of Christ. More than that, I even consider everything as a loss because of the supreme good of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have accepted the loss of all things and I consider them so much rubbish, that I may gain Christ.”³²

Jesus was well aware of what He was bringing into the world: “The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure buried in a field, which a person finds and hides again, and out of joy goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”³³ What is the value of that Presence, if it is so great that preferring it to any other thing is a fantastic deal?

The disciples showed us this: the attraction of that Presence was so great that they left everything to follow Him. Why? His presence so bowled over their life, so responded to their hunger and thirst for meaning and affection, that He was enough. The satisfaction was so powerful that following Him was the only possibility for them, one not to be lost. Morality had the same origin as wonder: His presence. In fact, morality arises from the Presence, not from an effort of the will. Moralism has a different origin from following (which is always wonder at a presence).

The tax collectors encountered this same Presence. One understands why they sought Him continually, and followed Him, not out of moralism, but for the profound affection that His Person awoke in them. They were attracted to Him. They wanted to stay close to Him, as did the Pharisee Paul or the fisherman Peter. “This encounter is what continually orients our life, importing meaning and synthesis to our existence. Without it, there is no source for the awareness of life’s newness. In it, the event of the Mystery that is present touches our lives and makes them part of a continual current of newness.”³⁴

One understands how those who encounter Him, as Dostoyevsky wrote, cannot do without Him: “I know not how it is with the others, and I feel that I cannot do as others. Everybody thinks and then at once thinks of something else. I can’t think of something else. I think all my

³² *Phil* 3:4-8.

³³ *Mt* 13:44.

³⁴ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 18.

life of one thing. I think all my life of what happened to me.”³⁵ We are familiar with words of the same tenor by Möhler: “I think I would not wish to live any longer if I could not hear Him speak.”³⁶

The method with which Fr. Giussani taught us to look at John and Andrew will always remain the criterion for verifying whether Christianity is happening to us now, whether it is the predominance of a presence or is already reduced to a category, an abstract definition. Otherwise, we say that Christianity is an event, but as a definition, not as something that is happening now. “Christianity is an ‘event,’ something that was not there before and arose at a given point. Not that John and Andrew said, ‘What happened to us is an event.’ It was clearly not necessary for them to specify what was happening to them by means of a definition. It was happening! Christianity is an event. There is no other word to indicate its nature, neither the word *law*, nor the words *ideology*, *concept*, or *plan*. Christianity is not a religious doctrine, a series of moral laws or a collection of rites. Christianity is a fact, an event. All the rest is a consequence.”³⁷

The disciples could acknowledge Him through watching Him speak, in feeling themselves looked at and understood in their innermost depths. They perceived that His presence was able to predominate over everything because they were immediately won over—seized—and because they had recognized that man in His unique value, without parallel, divine, and this was easy to realize. When we are dominated by attention to what comes next, it means that we have already shifted away from the fact!

“God became an event in our daily existence, so that our ‘I’ might recognize itself with clarity in its original factors and attain its destiny, be saved. So it was for Mary and Joseph. So it was for John and Andrew, who followed Jesus, taking their cue from John the Baptist. God was entering their lives as an event. Whether they always kept it in mind or at times forgot it, especially during the early days and months, the whole of their lives depended on that event. Insofar as an event is important, you cannot retreat from it. That is how it was with them. This is how it is today with us: an event can mark the beginning

³⁵ Cf. F.M. Dostoevsky, *The Possessed* (or, *The Devils*). Translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett, 1916, available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8117/8117-h/8117-h.htm>.

³⁶ Cf. J.A. Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, edited and translated with an introduction by Peter C. Erb, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington, D.C, 1996, p. 120.

³⁷ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op.cit., pp. 8-9.

of a journey. The event can point to a *method for life*. It is, in any case, an experience to be had. This journey requires the engagement of the person who is struck by the event, and will eventually reveal the true meaning of what he or she has begun to glimpse: it is the development of a way of looking at things.”³⁸

Nicola Cabasilas says, “Knowing through experience [...] means reaching the same thing: here therefore the form impresses itself in the soul and kindles desire like a vestige in proportion to its beauty.”³⁹ The beauty of that Presence impresses itself on the soul and kindles desire; for this reason, it marks a beginning, a journey.

While it is true that one cannot turn back from an event, it is also true that one can follow that desire or not. The fact that we follow our curiosity and engage with it determines whether that event marks a beginning and a journey, or whether the journey of a new way of looking at things is blocked.

Here the drama truly begins, because often what happens before our eyes is nothing other than the event of Christ present. You see it in the difference with which we live the same things as everyone else, as often we recount. It can be the way of living a wedding celebration or of attending a funeral; the others look at us, amazed by this difference. “If it’s this way, it’s almost beautiful to die,” said one person at the funeral of our friend. But if we remain immobile, if we block the desire kindled by that difference, we become slaves of the outcome, and so we get angry at the first setback. Therefore, Fr. Giussani, with boundless charity, wants to make us aware that if we stop merely at the sentimental reaction, without following the powerful attraction of the beauty we have before us, this is not enough for living.

I’ll never forget the following episode, because it truly shows the problem that often blocks us. After a beautiful song executed with care, in a unique, enviable human climate in a home of some *Memores Domini* members, Giussani stopped a moment and noted, “It’s truly beautiful, the music, the singing, the human sentiment of friendship and fraternity and companionship in an adventure. And yet, if the things could be listed as I’ve listed them just now, end of story [everything very beautiful, but ‘enough’ and we stop here], and something else were taken for granted—accepted and acknowledged (understand me!) but taken for granted—and if His name were not produced by an

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

³⁹ N. Cabasilas, *La vita in Cristo [Life in Christ]*, Città Nuova, Verona, 2005, p. 142.

emphasis of dialogue, a desire to be heard, a desire to hear Him, if we didn't feel the urgent need to hear Him, if Christ, His name at a certain point didn't have autonomy, if He didn't have an ultimately singular face, marked by unmistakable, unique features, distinct from those He Himself created as sign of Himself,"⁴⁰ none of this would be enough: it would not be enough for our expectation of happiness, would not be enough for our thirst for destiny, just as it would not be enough even to have an exceptional job or success in life. It would not be enough!

For this reason, friends, he insists, "We have to be careful because among us Jesus can be the origin of the whole world of humanity, full of gladness and friendship, of formally exemplary reasons and of help to each other, even in materially concrete ways, [...] but Jesus [this Presence] could be reduced to the 'portrait of a beautiful woman sculpted on her funerary monument.'"⁴¹ If you aren't moved to tears at the thought of Jesus being reduced to the portrait of a beautiful woman sculpted on her funerary monument...

Christ cannot be "bleached or faded away from the beautiful and glad appearance of the companionship of faces that should have been a sign pointing to Him!" This reduction is avoided only "when one says 'You' really, with all the awareness of the 'I': the more one is conscious of oneself, the more powerful, great, true, simple and pure is the devotion to Him [...]. Christ's presence in the world is the miracle of our company. But this is the emergent clue of a sign that 'is rooted where the truth lies' or better, it is the visible clue of a sign that, as regards all the rest, drowns in the common meaning; for all the rest it drowns in the common naturalness. For this reason, the more intensely one loves, preferentially—wherever the good is to say 'I' with an impetus that the others do not know, or to say 'you' with an impetus that the others do not know—it is not a matter of absorbing the weight of our friendship, of rendering nebulous the charged efficacy of eyes, lips, and face; of words, songs, heart; of a beautiful companionship like this one, but it's like a kind of urge—of everything that I have named and that makes up our company—to cry out Your name, oh Christ: 'Thank you for making Yourself seen and for sitting here.'" ⁴²

⁴⁰ L. Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction of Jesus]*, Bur, Milan, 1999, p. 148.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 152-153.

Therefore, if there is not this extreme tension to cry out Your name, Christ, nothing is enough!

So the question of a total engagement with reality, which we discussed on a recent occasion, is a problem of esteem, as a friend said during an assembly: “One does not engage totally in reality because deep down one lacks esteem for what one has encountered. In fact, one esteems something that has an absolute value for that person, esteems one thing over the others. Well, it’s as if for us the esteem for Jesus were one of many things and not instead ‘the’ esteem: deep down, I do not esteem you, Oh Christ, and so my engagement with reality is partial. I see this in myself and in the people: if you have this total esteem for Jesus then you face reality and look for its meaning. Jesus is everything.”

So then, our hope is that this Event continue to happen and attract us so much that it reawakens in us the desire to engage, so that we can grasp It when It happens. In fact, if we do not perceive His presence, the center of our affections inevitably shifts, even if we do not realize it. From His presence a whole world of humanity can also flow, but Christ is not predominant. Here, our faith is at stake.

How do we realize that Christ is not predominant? Experience offers us two necessary “indicators:” work or enjoyable companionship are not enough for us. And yet we do not realize how this reduction happens, because of this “odd darkening of the mind,” as Benedict XVI says.⁴³

If the method of knowledge is the Event, if we become aware of ourselves only through the Event present, then only one in whom the nature of the Event is not darkened can make us aware of the fact that we are lost, and of our reduction. This is the gift of Fr. Giussani for us. He not only described, as no one else, Christianity as event, but he also showed it to us. The Event happened continually in him, as shown by the fact that he could recognize each of the reductions we made. The Event was happening in him, because the one who sees the desert does not belong to the desert, and for this reason he did not settle for anything less than His Presence, as we saw in his insistent tension to say His name. In the meantime, we had already lost His Presence along the way!

⁴³ Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times. A conversation with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, chapter 2.

2. “In the beginning it was not this way”

In order to understand an event, we usually start from our experience. Something happens in a moment of space and time, but then one moves on to another thing. What happens can leave more or less of a trace, depending on the importance of the event, but right away it is a matter of the past. We are so convinced that things necessarily go this way that we often comment, “It is certainly not possible to remain amazed like in the beginning!” We even theorize about it.

But Giussani challenges our conception, saying that this way of reasoning does not hold up when dealing with the Christian event: “Christianity is in fact ‘an event,’ a new reality of life that has entered the world and therefore, when it seizes me, it is a new experience of life, not new just at the beginning, but always new.”⁴⁴ Christianity is not what remains after an event, but it is always an event, otherwise it would document its unreliability. In fact, something that is not in some way present, does not exist. Either it is happening now or it does not exist. At this point, we can understand even better what it means to say that Christianity is an event.

Fr. Giussani says, “Running up against the presence of a different humanity *comes before*, not only at the beginning, but in every moment that follows the beginning—a year or twenty years later. The initial phenomenon—the impact with a different humanity, the wonder born of it—is destined to be the *initial and original phenomenon of every moment of development*; there is no development if that initial impact is not repeated—that is, if the event does not remain contemporaneous. Either it is renewed, or nothing proceeds, and right away you theorize about the event that has happened, and you fumble about seeking substitute supports for What is truly at the origin of the diversity. The originating factor is, permanently, the impact with a different human reality. Therefore, if what happened at the beginning doesn’t happen over again and isn’t renewed, then true continuity doesn’t occur; if you don’t experience now the impact with a new human reality, you don’t understand what happened to you back then. Only if the event happens again now can the initial event be illuminated and deepened, thus establishing continuity and development.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Verso una vita di fede più matura [Toward a More Mature Life of Faith]*, edited by Communion and Liberation, *pro manuscripto*, Milan, 1976, p. 6.

⁴⁵ L. Giussani, “Something that Comes First,” in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, Vol. 10, No.10 (November) 2008, p. 2.

With his genius, Fr. Giussani has such an aware perception of the nature of Christianity that in this text he not only reminds us of the permanent requisites of Christianity as event—the contemporaneousness and the irreducible difference—but he also offers us two signs that enable us to realize when Christianity ceases to be experienced as a present event.

First, one theorizes about the event that has happened. Lacking the fascination of the event, we settle for theory, discourse, an abstract category, and we repeat it continually. We even justify it, as Dostoyevsky says: “Man has such a predilection for systems and abstract deductions that he is ready to distort the truth intentionally, he is ready to deny the evidence of his sense only to justify his logic.”⁴⁶ In fact, having lost the attraction of the Presence along the road, in theorization (reduction to category or discourse), what we already know dominates, what we have ourselves established, our schema, our opinion.

But since we are made for fulfillment, the void left by the missing presence must be filled. And therefore—this is the second sign—Fr. Giussani says we seek substitutes on which to rely, and these document the shift of our affections. When the disciples do not realize the importance of the Presence they have encountered, they begin to look for *personal advantage*. “Then Peter said to Him in reply, ‘We have given up everything and followed You. What will there be for us?’”⁴⁷ But isn’t His presence everything? Not even Peter realizes it.

Or the search for *success* prevails: “The seventy-two returned rejoicing, and said, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us because of Your name.’ Jesus said, ‘I have observed Satan fall like lightning from the sky. Behold, I have given you the power to tread upon serpents and scorpions and upon the full force of the enemy and nothing will harm you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven.’”⁴⁸ For the seventy-two, His presence is no longer enough to gladden their life. It is not that they should not appreciate the good done, but this good should not overshadow the enormous distance between the miracles they performed and the fact of being His! But this does not even cross their minds—just as happens with us.

⁴⁶ F.M. Dostoyevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, Dover Thrift Editions, 1992, unabridged republication of the Constance Garnett translation of *Notes from the Underground*, as originally published in the collection *White Nights and Collected Stories*, by the Macmillan Company, New York, 1918, p. 16.

⁴⁷ *Mt* 19:27.

⁴⁸ *Lk* 10:17-20.

Or one tries to fill the void with *power*: “Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him and said to Him, ‘Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask of You.’ He replied, ‘What do you wish Me to do for you?’ They answered Him, ‘Grant that in Your glory we may sit one at Your right and the other at Your left.’ Jesus said to them, ‘You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?’ They said to Him, ‘We can.’ Jesus said to them, ‘The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared.’ When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.”⁴⁹

What are the substitutes we rely on? They differ very little from those of the Apostles that I just described. Let’s look at them together, as Fr. Giussani pointed them out to us.

a) Christianity reduced to values

“The other night, at a gathering in Milan, I observed that, in these years, some fifteen years or so, in all the years of our journey, it is as though [...] the Movement had built on the values that Christ brought us. Thus, all our efforts at associative, operative, charitable, cultural, social, and political activity have certainly had as their aim that of mobilizing ourselves and things in accordance with the ideals, the starting points which Christ has made known to us. But, at the beginning of the Movement, it was not like this. As I mentioned yesterday, at the beginning of the Movement, in the early years, we did not build on the values that Christ had brought us, but we built on Christ, naively if you will, but the theme of the heart, the persuasive motive was the fact of Christ, and therefore the fact of His body in the world, of the Church. In the beginning we built, we tried to build on something that was happening, not on values brought to us and thus on our inevitable interpretation of them. We tried to build on something that was happening and that had bowled us over. No matter how naive and shamelessly out of proportion it may have been, this was a pure position. This is why, because we have in a sense abandoned it, since we have settled on a position that was first and foremost, I want to say, a ‘cultural tradition’ rather than

⁴⁹ *Mk* 10:35-41.

the enthusiasm for a Presence, we do not know—in the Biblical sense of the term—Christ, we do not know the mystery of God, because He is not familiar to us.”⁵⁰ We have to recover the original purity.

How did Fr. Giussani understand this reduction of Christianity to values? He lived Christianity as something that was happening.

Just think how a person in love easily sees when in others the relationship with the man or woman they married has stopped being something that is happening and has become something different from the enthusiasm for a presence.

b) From a presence that dominates to an organization to follow

“The Movement was born of a presence that asserted itself and brought to people’s lives the provocation of a promise to follow. But then we entrusted the continuity of this beginning to speeches and to projects undertaken, to meetings and to things that we had to do. But what we did not do was to entrust, hand over, our lives; in this way, the beginning very quickly ceased to be the truth offered to our person, and instead became the starting point for an association, for a reality upon which we can shrug off the responsibility of our own work, and from which we demand the resolution of things.”⁵¹ It is not that one denies Christ, but simply that Christ has become a “spiritual call,” and what prevails is something different: “For many of us, saying that salvation is Jesus Christ and that the liberation of life and of humanity here and beyond is continually bound to the encounter with Him has become a ‘spiritual’ call. The concrete would be something else: work in labor unions, getting certain rights recognized; it is the organization, and thus meetings, but not as expressions of an exigency of life, but as mortification of life, burden and toll to pay for a belonging that still, unexplainably, finds us in the ranks.”⁵²

Cardinal Bergoglio said this beautifully: “When the faithful realize they have lost the drive and enthusiasm of before, they tend to take on attitudes that are not their own. [...] The loss of initial fervor leads some [...] to take refuge in what we can call ‘secondary tasks.’ [...] The flight is manifested as flight toward ‘secondary’ virtues: some dedicate

⁵⁰ L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, pp. 102-103.

⁵¹ L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo. Come creazione di personalità e di storia* [*The Risk of Education. As Creation of Personality and of History*], SEI, Turin, 1995, p. 63.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

themselves to social work [...]. Others, on the contrary, concentrate on rites. In both cases, this is insufficient for facing the true challenge.”⁵³

c) From a vortex to a correct and proper discourse

When Christianity no longer happens as the event of a Presence who invades life and makes it surge and seethe and ferment, then one ends up theorizing the event that has happened: “A correct and proper discourse is passed on, some rules on how to be Christians and men. But without love, without the acknowledgment of the vivifying Mystery, the individual fades away and dies. Our hope, the salvation of Christ, cannot be something we’ve read and know how to parrot back well. A more or less edifying or moralistic discourse, then, is what the announcement is often reduced to. One needs to surge and seethe and ferment.... [...] There still hasn’t been a communication of the exaltation of the individual, the victory of the Mystery, the glory of Christ in the face of what occurs. But this happens if there is this experience.”⁵⁴

Christ is not, cannot be, something we have read about or a discourse we know how to parrot back. As early as 1962, Giussani warned the CL students (this was the time of the greatest spread of GS [Student Youth] in Milan) about this reduction: “It is as if the original experience that made us enter has fossilized, crystallized. [...] At the origins something agitated for you, in you, over you; it is a reaction of simplicity to this gift that has brought you with us.” But right way, a formalism took over, that is, the “stasis of the newness.”⁵⁵ Formalism and stasis took over.

d) The event becomes a phenomenon of the past

Christianity is so much an event that when it becomes a phenomenon of the past, one cannot make it happen again with another method, Fr. Giussani tells us, that is not that of the event itself. Christianity is so much an event that it must happen again. If we are unhooked from it, if a discontinuity has been produced (so that what happened in the past has become a pious memory), when we try to make it happen again with our initiatives, we do not succeed. “Let’s say that today some people who’d already had the experience we’ve spoken of gather together and,

⁵³ J.M. Bergoglio – Pope Francis, *Aprite la mente al vostro cuore [Open the Mind to Your Heart]*, Rizzoli, Milan, 2013, pp. 154-155.

⁵⁴ L. Giussani, *Un caffè in compagnia [A Coffee in Company]*, Rizzoli, Milan, 2004, pp. 173-175.

⁵⁵ Scuola incaricati [School for Leaders], 1962, CL Archive.

with the impressive memory of an event that struck them, that did them good, that even defined their lives, they want to renew it, overcoming a ‘discontinuity’ that was created over the years. What makes them still feel like friends is a past experience, a fact that happened, but that in the present has become (as we were saying) a ‘pious recollection.’ Now, how is it possible for them to regain continuity with the initial event that hit them? If, for example, they were to say, ‘Let’s get together and do a catechesis study group, or develop a new political initiative, or support a charitable activity, create a work, etc.,’ none of these responses would be adequate to bridge the discontinuity. What’s needed is ‘something that comes before,’ for which all these activities simply serve as an instrument of development. They need what happened to them in the beginning to happen again—not ‘how’ it happened in the beginning, but ‘what’ happened in the beginning; they need the impact with a different humanity that renews the same event that moved them originally. There, everything coalesces, and in following someone they come full circle to what happened in the beginning, and all the principal factors of the past experience re-emerge, clearer now, and more mature.”⁵⁶

No effort of ours can bridge the gap, can transform a pious memory into a present event. Thus what Pope Francis told us on Holy Thursday happens: “This is precisely the reason for the dissatisfaction of some, who end up sad [...] in some sense becoming collectors of antiques.”⁵⁷

We begin to see how we started with the predominance of a Presence that filled every gesture, that made every action the expression of His power, and ended up losing it along the way. Why does this happen? Fr. Giussani says it is because often “our engagement of life in social, cultural, and political problems” is lived “in a way separate from, and separating from, a living, authentic Christian experience. Rather, engagement in social, cultural, and political problems should be the expression of this passionate experience of life. Instead, this engagement all too easily generates a climate that wears down attention to that experience, conflicts with it, almost marginalizing and suffocating it. Or often those who desire to have an experience of authentic Christian life affirm this will [...] in contradiction to engagement in these problems. The one and the other are the two faces of the same

⁵⁶ L. Giussani, “Something that Comes First,” op. cit. pp. 3-4.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, *Chrim Mass Homily*. March 28, 2013.

grave error.”⁵⁸ Activism or inwardness: what dominates is no longer the Event that imposes itself and changes our perception of ourselves, generating a new way of looking and a new passion for everything.

Let’s see how Giussani untiringly unmasked the temptation to reduce the nature of Christianity: “The analysis I want to make of the unease of the current situation [he wrote this in 1976 but it is very apt for 2013, our ‘today’] is purely methodological and not recriminatory; it is an aspect of judgment that enables us to start fresh.”⁵⁹ We are always exposed to this reduction, therefore Fr. Giussani continually judged, corrected, and reprimanded, implacably, relentlessly.

Everything we have described makes us understand the dimensions of our need. We are truly needy! What a liberation to acknowledge it and be able to look at it together! This liberation needs must lead us to prayer, like the one that rises to the lips of the Church: “Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, though in our weakness we fail, we may be revived through the Passion of your Only Son.”⁶⁰

How did Christ respond to the weakness of the Apostles, the weakness that led them to seek substitutes upon which to rely? Not with a strategy or with a moralistic reprimand. It would not have sufficed for them, just as it would not suffice for us. Our need is so great that only His Death and Resurrection could and can heal our suffering at its root. We can regain life again only through the Passion of His Son, says the Liturgy. But often for us, unaware of our drama, saying this is reduced to “devotion.” How do we see this? We see it in the way we face need, in our presumption and superciliousness. Instead, what we need, to use the words of Saint Bernard, is precisely that Christ return and “restore unto me the joy of His salvation,”⁶¹ restore unto me Himself.

3. The permanence of Christianity as event in the present: He is here

Jesus returned, living. If there is a moment in which His living presence prevails again it is the Resurrection. How impressive to see the disciples amazed at His living and inexorable presence! But we also see Jesus

⁵⁸ *Verso una vita di fede più matura [Toward a Life of More Mature Faith]*, edited by Communion and Liberation, *pro manuscripto*, Milan, 1976, p. 6.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ *Liturgy of the Hours*, Morning Prayer of Easter Monday, according to the Roman rite.

⁶¹ *Saint Bernard’s Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, Vol. II, translated by a priest of Mount Melleray, Browne and Nolan, Limited, Dublin, 1920, p. 381.

battle with their incapacity to see: “The disciples did not realize it was Jesus.”⁶² Trying one time after another to make them emerge from their own measure, through a certain way of speaking, “Mary,” or through a miracle, “Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something,”⁶³ Jesus wants to draw forth the faith, the certainty of His disciples: “It is the Lord.”⁶⁴ There can always be a new start because He is alive—The Living One. To make them live anew, He is not content with just remaining an inactive presence. He is a presence that takes the initiative to respond to their need. To respond to the bewilderment of His Death, He explains the Scriptures to them: “‘Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into His glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted for them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures.”⁶⁵ To respond to Peter’s betrayal, He asks, “Peter, do you love Me?”⁶⁶ And then: “Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained.”⁶⁷ Or He makes Himself known to them in the breaking of the bread, in the Eucharist.

This will always be the point of departure. Only His initiative enables us to start again. Benedict XVI reminded us of this at the opening of the Synod last October: “We cannot make the Church, we can only announce what He has done. The Church does not begin with our ‘making,’ but with the ‘making’ and ‘speaking’ of God. In the same way, the Apostles did not say, after a few meetings: now we want to make a Church, and that by means of a constituent assembly they were going to draft a constitution. No, they prayed and in prayer they waited, because they knew that only God Himself can create His Church, that God is the first agent: if God does not act, our things are only ours and are insufficient; only God can testify that it is He who speaks and has spoken. Pentecost is the condition of the birth of the Church: only because God acted first, are the Apostles able to act with Him and make what He does present. God has spoken and this ‘has spoken’ is the perfection of faith but it is also always a present: the perfection of God is not only a past, because it is a true past that always carries in itself the

⁶² *Jn* 21:4.

⁶³ *Jn* 21:6.

⁶⁴ *Jn* 21:7.

⁶⁵ *Lk* 24:25-27.

⁶⁶ *Jn* 21:15-16.

⁶⁷ *Jn* 20:22-23.

present and the future. God has spoken means: ‘He speaks.’ And as at that time it was only on God’s initiative that the Church could be born, that the Gospel could be known, the fact that God spoke and speaks, in the same way today only God can begin, we can only cooperate, but the beginning must come from God. So it is not a mere formality if we start our sessions each day with prayer: this corresponds to reality itself. Only God’s precedence makes our journey possible, our cooperation, which is always cooperation, and not entirely our own decision. Therefore, it is important always to know that the first word, the true initiative, the true activity comes from God and only by inserting ourselves into the divine initiative, only by begging for this divine initiative, shall we too be able to become—with Him and in Him—evangelizers. God is always the beginning.”⁶⁸

Only those who agree to take part in this continual beginning can see how life is reborn, how our existence increases in vigor.

How does Christianity endure in history as a present event? Through those who have been seized by Him, through those in whom the awareness of His presence has become predominant.

Let’s take care not to reduce the density and richness of the company of believers to our attempts, because it would be insufficient for responding to the dimension of our need: “The Event of Christ goes on in history through the companionship of the believers, which is a sign, like a tent in which dwells the Holy of Holies, the Mystery made man. This Mystery goes on in the life of every man and the life of the world, personally and in reality, through the tangibly expressed unity of Christians. The companionship of the believers is the effective sign of Christ’s salvation for men; it is the sacrament of the world’s salvation. This is how the risen Christ holds us in His embrace; this companionship is Christ Himself present. It is Christ in His human reality. It is the body of Christ that becomes present, so that we touch Him, we see Him, we feel Him. The value of this companionship is deeper than appearances, because what we see is the emergence of the Mystery of Christ revealing itself.”⁶⁹

If He died and rose again to respond to our weakness, the question is: How can we today participate in His victory? How does Christ take initiative today to make us participants in His victory? “Christ makes

⁶⁸ Benedict XVI, *Meditation during the First General Congregation of the 13th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, October 8, 2012.

⁶⁹ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 30.

Himself known, makes Himself accessible and therefore gives us His Spirit in the Church by means of Holy Scripture, the Sacraments, and the Apostolic Succession, but above all the Holy Spirit strikes us and invades us through the life of the Church as a whole. The Church is the universe reached, recreated, and possessed by Christ through His Spirit. In other words, the Church is mankind inasmuch as it is made true, made one, by the presence of Christ, by means of that re-creative energy which is the mystery of the Spirit at Pentecost. If He were not present in the living Church, Christ would be irremediably far off and therefore a prey to our interpretation. Were He not to offer Himself to us in the mystery of His Body, which is the Church, Christ would end up being subjectively reduced, in both content and method. So the Church is the method with which Christ communicates Himself in time and space, analogously to the fact that Christ is the method with which God chose to communicate Himself to men for their salvation. Through the Church's humanity, the divine reaches us both as 'communication of the truth' (Scripture, Tradition, Magisterium) and therefore as a help to man for reaching an objective clarity and certainty in perceiving the ultimate meaning of his own existence, and as 'communication of the divine reality'—Grace—through the Sacraments."⁷⁰

Our first activity, then, is the passivity of letting ourselves be involved in this initiative of Christ present in the Church.

The initiative of Christ began in Baptism: "Christ's encounter with our life, in which He began to be a real event for us, His impact with our life, in which He moved towards us and, like a *vir pugnator*, set off an 'invasion' of our existence, is called Baptism."⁷¹ He renews us, makes us become different, incorporating us into His Death and Resurrection: "We were indeed buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with Him through a death like His, we shall also be united with Him in the Resurrection."⁷²

This beginning must be constantly nourished, fed, so that we can continue walking in this new life: "Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ, a flesh 'given life and giving life through the Holy Spirit,' preserves, increases, and renews the life of grace received at Baptism.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁷² *Rm* 6:4-5.

This growth in Christian life needs the nourishment of Eucharistic Communion, the bread for our pilgrimage.⁷³ If we do not want to lose the relationship with Christ that He has won for us, we need to receive the sacraments constantly, like beggars: “*Holy Communion augments our union with Christ*. The principal fruit of receiving the Eucharist in Holy Communion is an intimate union with Christ Jesus. Indeed, the Lord said: ‘He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him’ (*Jn 6:56*). Life in Christ has its foundation in the Eucharistic banquet: ‘As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me will live because of Me (*Jn 6:57*).’”⁷⁴

This is how He seeks us, as Saint John Chrysostom reminds us: “For you I was spit upon, I was scourged. I emptied myself of glory, I left My Father and came to you, who dost hate Me, and turn from Me, and art loath to hear My Name. I pursued you, I ran after you, that I might overtake you. I united and joined you to myself, eat Me, drink Me, I said. Above I hold you, and below I embrace you. Is it not enough for you that I have your First-fruits above? Does not this satisfy your affection? I descended below: I not only am mingled with you, I am entwined in you.”⁷⁵

This alone is the continual source of a real communion among us. Only the Eucharistic Communion can transform us to the point of generating one body, filling all our relationships with His presence.

Our communion with Christ and with our sisters and brothers needs to be continually rebuilt by mercy, that is, the presence of Christ who turns to us, as to Peter after his betrayal. Only this initiative full of mercy toward us rebuilds us in our relationship with Christ, with our sisters and brothers, and with ourselves. Without mercy, there is no journey, no communion. For this reason, “Christ instituted the sacrament of Penance for all sinful members of His Church: above all for those who, since Baptism, have fallen into grave sin, and have thus lost their baptismal grace and wounded ecclesial communion.”⁷⁶

“*Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph 1:4), just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph 5:27). Nevertheless,*

⁷³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1392.

⁷⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1391.

⁷⁵ Cf., Saint John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Letter to Timothy, Homily XV*, New Advent, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/230615.html>.

⁷⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1446.

the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of conversion directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us.”⁷⁷

Only if we agree to participate in, to welcome these gestures of Christ—through which He draws us within Himself, makes us one body, renews us with the sacrament of penitence, nourishes us with His body and His blood—can we begin anew. “Christ,” said Pope Francis on Easter Monday, “has fully triumphed over evil once and for all, but it is up to us, to the people of every epoch, to welcome this victory into our life and into the actual situations of history and society. For this reason it seems to me important to emphasize what we ask God today in the Liturgy: ‘O God, who give constant increase to Your Church by new offspring, grant that Your servants may hold fast in their lives to the Sacrament they have received in faith’ [...]. It is true, yes, Baptism that makes us children of God and the Eucharist that unites us to Christ must become life, that is, they must be expressed in attitudes, behavior, gestures, and decisions. The grace contained in the Sacraments of Easter is an enormous potential for the renewal of our personal existence, of family life, of social relations. However, everything passes through the human heart: if I let myself be touched by the grace of the Risen Christ, if I let Him change me in that aspect of mine which is not good, which can hurt me and others, I allow the victory of Christ to be affirmed in my life, to broaden its beneficial action. This is the power of grace! Without grace we can do nothing. Without grace we can do nothing! And with the grace of Baptism and of Eucharistic Communion I can become an instrument of God’s mercy, of that beautiful mercy of God. To express in life the Sacrament we have received: dear brothers and sisters, this is our daily duty, but I would also say our daily joy! The joy of feeling we are instruments of Christ’s grace, like branches of the vine that is Christ Himself, brought to life by the sap of His Spirit!”⁷⁸

His capacity to transform life and make us participate in this grace is expressed not only in the sacraments, but also through charisms: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church

⁷⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1426.

⁷⁸ Pope Francis, *Regina Coeli*, Easter Monday, April 1, 2013.

that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, ‘allotting His gifts to everyone according as He wills,’ (1 *Cor* 12:11) He distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church.”⁷⁹

John Paul II told us in Saint Peter’s Square on May 30, 1998, “True charisms cannot but aim at the encounter with Christ in the sacraments. The ecclesial realities to which you belong have helped you to rediscover your baptismal vocation, to appreciate the gifts of the Spirit received at Confirmation, to entrust yourselves to God’s forgiveness in the sacrament of Reconciliation, and to recognize the Eucharist as the source and summit of all Christian life.”⁸⁰

This is the historic contribution Fr. Giussani gave us and the entire Church: “A charism is precisely the mode of time, of space, of character, of temperament, and the psychological, affective, intellectual way with which the Lord becomes event for me, and for others in this same way.”⁸¹

Therefore, the charism is the factor of belonging to Christ and His truth: “The question of the charism is crucial, because it is the factor that makes belonging to Christ easier existentially; in other words, it is the evidence of the Event present today, inasmuch as it moves us. In this sense the charism introduces us to dogma as a whole. If the charism is the mode with which the Spirit of Christ makes us perceive His exceptional Presence, then it gives us the power to adhere to it with simplicity and affection. It is living the charism that throws light on the objective content of dogma.”⁸²

We must not forget, however, that only from sacramental grace can the charism and its vitality be born constantly today. Sacramental grace gives rise to the ecclesial body and keeps it alive, as John Paul II told us in a memorable speech: “The rising up of an ecclesial body as an Institution, its persuasive force and binding energy, has its roots in the dynamism of sacramental Grace. However, it finds its expressive form, its operative modality, its concrete historical influence, through the diverse charisms that characterize a personal temperament and history. [...] When a movement is recognized by the Church, it becomes a privi-

⁷⁹ *Lumen Gentium*, 12. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, November 21, 1964.

⁸⁰ John Paul II, *Meeting with Ecclesial Movements and New Communities*, May 30, 1998.

⁸¹ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 79.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

leged instrument for a personal and ever new adherence to the mystery of Christ. Never allow the parasite of habit, of routine, of old age to lodge within your participation! Continually renew the discovery of the charism which has fascinated you and it will more powerfully lead you to make yourself servants of that one power which is Christ the Lord!”⁸³

Only if we let ourselves be reached by the power of the risen Christ, who constantly draws close to us through the sacraments and the charism, will we see the daily life “that cripples us” become liveable: “The miracle is a human reality lived in its ‘day-to-dayness,’ without exceptional grandiloquence, without need of exceptions, without particular fortune; it is the reality of eating, of drinking, of waking, and of sleeping, filled with the consciousness of a Presence expressed in hands that touch, in faces that see each other, in forgiveness to give, in money to distribute, in a toilsome task to accomplish, in work to accept.”⁸⁴

“The presence of Christ, in the normality of living, increasingly involves the beating of the heart—being moved by His presence becomes being moved in daily life and illuminates, beautifies, and softens the tenor of daily life, more and more. Nothing is useless, nothing is extraneous, because nothing is extraneous to your destiny, and therefore there is nothing of which you cannot become fond [...], with its magnificent consequences of respect for the thing you do, precision in the thing you do, loyalty with your concrete work, tenacity in pursuing your goal; you become more tireless [...]. While you obviously get tired, this tiredness is as it were absorbed, becomes a purely physiological tiredness.”⁸⁵

The verification of the victorious presence of Christ in our daily life is what enables us to draw ever closer to Him, to be able to say with Ada Negri, “Everything for me you were and are.”⁸⁶ Perhaps one could say “You were everything for me” of some people, but to say not only “were” in the past, in the initial encounter, but to say “are” now, in the present, this is another thing!

Only by becoming involved in His victory will we be able to say truthfully, “Christ, everything for me You were and are.”

⁸³ John Paul II, *Message to the priests participating in a course of Spiritual Exercises promoted by “Communion and Liberation,”* 2-3, September 12, 1985, available at http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=562&id_n=14562.

⁸⁴ L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo (1990-1991) [A Real Event in the Life of Man]*, Bur, Milan, 2013, p. 269.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

⁸⁶ A. Negri, “Atto d’amore [Act of Love],” *Mia giovinezza [My Youth]*, Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 70.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 9:31-42; Psalm 115 (116); Jn 6:60-69

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN
PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE**

As always, Jesus leaves people free to choose. Even the Twelve must renew their belonging to Christ: “Do you also want to leave?” Simon Peter responds in their name, “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that You are the Holy One of God.” In the face of the words and gestures of Jesus, one is forced to respond with a “yes” or with a “no.” The great drama of the human person is neither illness nor death—it is freedom. One can say “no” to God, and God respects that freedom. The famous poet Hölderlin, a contemporary of Goethe, wrote, “God created man as the sea created the continents: by withdrawing.”

One cannot avoid Jesus Christ. Jesus disturbs, because He is a sign of contradiction. “This saying is hard; who can accept it?” (*Jn 6:60*). We are here because we are disciples of Jesus and because we are bearers of a message for the world... a message that is a radical contestation of “political and cultural correctness.” Think—we say to our friends: “You are—we are—called to eternal life.” Furthermore, it is our task to remind humanity of today and tomorrow of a unique event in history: Jesus rose from the dead! No revolution, no scientific progress can offer people “such an important thing” as the Resurrection of Jesus. It is the gospel of the unprecedented victory over pain, sin, and death that Christ achieved for Himself and us. It is an indescribable event that concerns and envelops all of us!

So then, you see how believing is not simply believing that God exists. No, it is believing that God intervenes in human existence. The object of our faith—I heard Fr. Carrón emphasize it this morning—is an event, or a series of events: believing that God spoke to Abraham, freed the people of Egypt, became flesh in the womb of the Virgin Mary, rose from the dead. For us it is also believing that God is present in our midst in the Eucharist: here is the “supreme paradox.” Actually, people are more or less willing to acknowledge a divinity that is “above them, that doesn’t disturb.” But believing that God intervenes in the weft and woof of human existence, that there are divine works that He does today, this is a “scandal” that most of our contemporaries reject. They reject the supernatural.

This attentive, engaged, and numerous assembly warms the heart because it is a divine event. Here, this morning, *hic et nunc*, God is in our midst in this Eucharist. For us, Christianity is not “a certain vision of the world.” It is not a system that we accept because it is to our advantage. We are here because we believe that something happened, that Christ rose, that He is the Truth and this interests us and all people.

As you know, we Christians are “observed.” Everyone looks not for the beautiful things we do, but rather for our failings. This reminds us that the Church is at the same time a divine and a human reality. However, we need not have complexes, because the Spirit guides the Church and always has surprises in store. Just think of what happened in Rome last month. I noted that in the new Pope’s talks he often uses the expression “go out.” Go out of ourselves to let ourselves be purified by God, go out of our churches, our convents, our meeting halls to reach people where they live, build, suffer, and die.

The first reading presented us with Peter on a “pastoral visit,” as it were. Peace and brotherly understanding are underlined. We know that in addition to this peace and brotherly understanding there must be listening to the Word, breaking the bread, and sharing of worldly goods. These are the characteristics of the first Christian community, and we must always have this community as our point of reference. But Peter’s actions in healing the sick remind us that we must respond to the needs of our contemporaries. They must see us pray so they can ask us the fundamental questions; they need a word that “relieves” their souls, need to encounter communities where they can be welcomed, listened to, and respected. Yes, everyone needs to go out from this context of death, distrust, and suspicion that unfortunately ruins our life and marks today’s culture: the non-sense, the isolation, the disrespect for oneself. Peter was able to respond to the expectations of the people in difficulty he encountered because he himself had learned from Jesus to pray, and what his mission was.

During this retreat, you have asked, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” To be able to answer, “Nobody, nothing,” you, too, must have a life of intimacy, of friendship with Christ.

In today’s world, the great danger is to organize our life and society according to man’s measure. We Christians propose a Heavenly Father close to us, who is our servant and food—this is what distinguishes us from the disciples of Mohammed or Buddha. But take note, we must never become used to this incredible closeness of God. Those who say of God “He,” without ever saying “You,” are slowly forgetting the trac-

es of the face of God. And one fine day God will be nothing more than an idea, and very soon, nothing more than a word.

No later than yesterday morning, Pope Francis reminded us that the Christian life is a personal conversation with God, as you speak with a person. “Not with an ‘all over the place god’, a ‘god-spray’ so to speak, who is a little bit everywhere.”

Brothers and sisters, let us pray that we be given the spiritual energies necessary to be coherent Christians, capable of building a society with goals worthy of the human person. May God preserve us from “lowering our guard,” reducing charity to simple philanthropy, transforming the apostolic spirit into mere propaganda, or the Church into a club.

Let us thank God for this retreat, which enables us once again to realize how numerous are the women and men who in daily life are aware of the faithfulness of God, manifested in Jesus Christ and in His Church. All together we feel stronger to love and serve this world of ours, the world God loves and Christ saved. This world where man wants to penetrate the secrets of the atom but at the same time remains blind to the meaning of the human adventure. This world rich in projects and technological exploits, but at the same time distraught about the future. This world of increasingly rapid communications but that is also the world of solitude. This world where men and women are capable of admirable gestures of solidarity, but that is also the world where many live closed up in themselves.

Well, this is the world that God loves, that we must love and serve. We must keep the doors of our heart open to welcome, understand, dialogue with, encourage, and enable others to grow, growing ourselves, thanks to their questions.

The great Pope Paul VI was right when he said on Easter day, 1969, “Christianity is not easy, but it is happy.” Thus, let us help each other to establish and deepen a personal relationship with Jesus! Jesus who makes Himself our servant, who this morning once again sets the table where He is, at the same time, He who serves and He who gives Himself as food.

Let us maintain absolute trust in this faithful God, and thus our love for the person of Jesus will be so strong that nothing will be able to separate us from Him.

So be it!

BEFORE THE BLESSING

Julián Carrón. Most Reverend Eminence, on behalf of all of us, I would like to thank you first of all for your participation in our Spiritual Exercises.

Allow me to thank you again for the attention with which you follow our experience, an attention that over time has matured into paternal friendship.

It is significant that precisely from your voice we heard on the evening of March 13th the first announcement of the election of Pope Francis, the great gift the Lord has given His Church.

We thank you for your lucid witness of intelligent and discrete service to the Holy Father, who helps us in our daily following of Christ.

Thank you, Eminence!

Cardinal Tauran. Thank you! When I was made Cardinal, I distributed to my friends a small memento card with this expression of Saint Paul, taken from the Second Letter to the Corinthians: “We are your servants in the cause of Christ.” This is the program of every priest.

Thank you for your trust!

Saturday, April 20th, Afternoon

During entrance and exit:

Franz Schubert, Sonata for Arpeggione and Piano, D 821

Mstislav Rostropovich, cello – Benjamin Britten, piano

“Spirto Gentil” no. 18, Decca

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“May It Be Done to Me According to Your Word”

Benedict XVI said: “The entire Christian life is a response to God’s love. The first response is precisely faith as the acceptance, filled with wonder and gratitude, of the unprecedented divine initiative that precedes us and summons us. And the ‘yes’ of faith marks the beginning of a radiant story of friendship with the Lord, which fills and gives full meaning to our whole life.”⁸⁷

It is of this faith that we will speak now.

1. Faith is the recognition of a Presence

“Our position regarding the event of Christ is the same as that of Zacchaeus before that Man who stopped under the tree that he had climbed, and told him, ‘Come down, quickly, I am coming to your place.’ It is the same position as that of the widow whose only son had died, and who heard Jesus saying, in a way that appears so irrational to us, ‘Woman, do not weep!’ It is absurd to say such a thing to a mother whose only son has died. For them, as for us, it was the experience of the presence of something radically different from what we imagine, and at the same time something that totally and originally corresponds to the profound expectations of our person. To experience a total correspondence [as we said this morning] with our heart is something absolutely exceptional [...]. Since our heart is made for this correspondence, it should be something normal in life, but, on the contrary, it never hap-

⁸⁷ Benedict XVI, *Believing in Charity Calls Forth Charity*, 1. Message for Lent 2013, October 15, 2012.

pens. When it does happen, it is an exceptional experience. Faith is having the sincerity to recognize, the simplicity to accept, and the affection to cling to such a Presence.”⁸⁸

Giussani continues: “Faith can only happen in man and in the world if something that is grace, pure grace happens first: the Christ event, the encounter with Christ, in which man experiences something exceptional that cannot happen on its own. Essentially, faith is recognizing a Presence that is different, recognizing an exceptional, divine Presence. [...] Think of how many times the Samaritan woman had thirsted for the attitude with which Christ treated her in that instant. She had never realized it before, but when it happened she recognized it.”⁸⁹

It is necessary to realize that the source of Christian faith is outside us. It is not something that we can create. How often would we like to be the ones who create the correspondence that we want to possess. But if the origin of faith is something outside us, then it has nothing to do with introspection, with something we manage to obtain by digging within ourselves. Therefore, faith is not a sentiment or a set of ethics, because it is not in our hands; it is not in our capacity to generate the presence that corresponds to us. Christian faith is so determined by the object that without this Presence it simply would not exist. It is like falling in love: without the presence of the beloved, it simply would not exist. It is useless to think of being able to generate it with some strategy, with some attempt, with some effort, with some impetus of sentiment, with some line of reasoning (use all the words you want): all this is useless to generate just one instant of experience of falling in love. Falling in love is all about a presence that sparks it, that causes it to well forth, that sustains it.

Therefore: “Faith is part of the Christian event because it is part of the grace that the event represents [...]. Faith belongs to the event because, as *loving recognition* of the presence of something exceptional, it is a gift, it is a grace. Just as Christ gives Himself to me in a present event, He brings to life within me the capacity for grasping it and recognizing it in its exceptionality.”⁹⁰

But in what way does the exceptional Presence bring to life the capacity for grasping it? Because, if His exceptional Presence does not facilitate this and if—as we saw this morning—we do not follow the desire reawakened by that Presence, nor the intense urge to say His name, we

⁸⁸ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., pp. 20-21.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

don't reach it, and our heart does not find that satisfaction for which it is made. For this reason, Giussani writes, "The same gesture by which God makes His presence known to humanity in the Christian event also enhances a person's potential for knowledge, raising him up to the exceptional reality to which God attracts him. We call this the *grace of faith*."⁹¹ By analogy, it is the presence of the beloved that enhances our potential for knowledge to the point that we can grasp the beloved in his or her true depth.

So then, how is it that our potential for knowledge is enhanced so that we can reach the point of grasping all the importance of the Presence? Fr. Giussani insists: "To know, we need [...] an attitude of openness, that is, of 'love.' Without love man cannot know. After all, this love is manifest in that original instinct with which nature—in other words, God who creates us—launches us, through our curiosity, into a universal comparison. [...] In the end, only that lively openness to the object that becomes affection enables the object to touch us for what it is (*affici*, to be touched by). Just as man walks with his whole self, he sees with his whole self, too [you cannot break the unity of the 'I,' as Fr. Giussani always taught us]. He sees with the eyes of reason insofar as his heart is open, that is to say, insofar as affection keeps his eyes open; otherwise his eyes close before the object, they 'go to sleep,' they turn away. Thus, the eye of reason sees to the degree that it is sustained by affection, which already expresses freedom's engagement."⁹²

It is necessary to look at Fr. Giussani's description carefully in order to understand it well. Why is the exceptional Presence necessary? What does it have to do with the openness of the eyes of reason? The exceptional Presence attracts the curiosity and affection of man like a magnet—we see it in children—in such a way as to sustain the openness of the eyes of reason so they can know the object without reducing it. Inasmuch as reason is sustained by affection, it can reach the point of grasping all the factors implicated in the exceptional Presence. Therefore, the exceptional presence of Christ throws wide open the gaze, enhancing our potential to know so that we can grasp Him and recognize Him in His exceptionality. We recalled this with Saint Augustine's line about Zacchaeus: "He was seen, and he saw."⁹³

⁹¹ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 102.

⁹² L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁹³ Saint Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Vol II, 174, 4.4, Oxford, John Henry Parker, p. 893 at <http://archive.org/stream/sermonsonselecte00augu#page/892/mode/2up/search/zacchaeus>.

Fr. Giussani continues: “Faith is the fulfillment of human reason. It is the intelligence of reality in its ultimate horizon, the recognition of That in which everything consists. Natural intelligence [pay attention!] cannot reach this ultimate horizon. It is only through something that has happened, through the event of God-made-man, through His gift, [through the exceptionality of this Presence we have before us] that our renewed intelligence can recognize and touch Him. Thus faith reaches an apex beyond reason: without faith, reason is not complete, whereas, in faith, reason becomes the ladder of hope.”⁹⁴

Faith is a form of knowledge that is beyond the confines of reason. Why is it beyond the confines of reason? “Because it grasps something that reason cannot grasp: reason cannot perceive ‘the presence of Jesus among us,’ ‘Christ is here now,’ the way it perceives that you are here. Yet, it cannot *not* admit that He is here: Why? Because there is a factor within, a factor that decides about this companionship, certain outcomes of this companionship, certain resonances of this companionship, a factor so surprising that if I don’t affirm something else I don’t give reason to the experience, because reason is to affirm experiential reality according to all the factors that make it up, all of the factors. There can be a constitutive factor, of which we only feel a reverberation, of which we feel the fruit [this morning, we said this: the fruit of a different humanity], of which we even see the consequences, but we aren’t able to see this factor directly. If I say [since I don’t see]: ‘So it doesn’t exist,’ I am mistaken, because [in saying that it doesn’t exist] I eliminate something of the experience—[and] this is no longer reasonable.”⁹⁵

Since this recognition involves toil, it implicates an intense urge—how many of you have already thought this, just listening! Imagine doing it!—we often remain at the level of appearances; we stop at the surface of what should be an indicating sign, denying or eliminating that factor whose echo we hear, and settling for those positive resonances, until we tire, we realize that they are not enough for living, that they are unable to fill us, that they do not satisfy life. And then faith begins to fall into a crisis. This is why one is amazed by the testimony Fr. Giussani has always offered us of that intense urge to grasp all the factors all the way to the “You.” When Giussani told us these things, was it just out of a desire to complicate life? Or was

⁹⁴ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 32.

⁹⁵ L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Hope*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2008, p. 104.

it in order not to lose that Presence whose resonances he saw and desired to reach? Listen to the insistence with which he speaks of it: “Faith is rational, for it flourishes on the extreme boundary of the rational dynamic as a flower of grace to which man adheres with his freedom [together with reason, here is the other decisive human factor: freedom]. How can man adhere to this flower with his freedom, this flower that is incomprehensible in both its origin and in its making? For man, adhering with his freedom means unhesitatingly recognizing with simplicity what his reason perceives as exceptional, as he does with the unassailable, indestructible evidence of factors and moments in reality as they enter his own personal horizon.”⁹⁶ “Thus my freedom accepts that event, and acknowledges it.”⁹⁷

Lewis said: “Since I am ‘I’, I must make an act of self surrender, however small or however easy, in living to God rather than to myself. This is, if you like, the ‘weak spot’ in the very nature of creation, the risk which God apparently thinks worth taking.”⁹⁸

“So in us, faith is both the recognition of the exceptional that is present [this fulfills reason] and the simple and sincere adherence that says ‘Yes’ [this fulfills freedom] and does not object. Recognition and adherence are both part of the moment in which the Lord reveals Himself to us through the power of His Spirit. They are part of the moment when the event of Christ enters our life.”⁹⁹

For this reason, Saint Paul says that nobody can say that Jesus is Lord (that is, truly make a full act of faith) except through the Holy Spirit,¹⁰⁰ which brings reason and freedom to their apex, because Christian faith is so human that it exalts all our humanity, reason, and freedom. Without this exaltation and without our deciding to participate in this exaltation, there is no faith. Giussani did not make this gigantic effort for no reason. He did it to help us understand all the factors of faith, because today in our world, in our culture, if reason and freedom are not present in the act of faith, there will no longer be faith—in a world in which everything says the opposite, we cannot believe merely out of habit. For this reason, following Giussani is the only possibility for having faith today. Benedict XVI carried on a fierce

⁹⁶ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces...*, op. cit., p. 24.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁹⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 1940, p. 45. (online at https://thepathtolight.com/uploads/Problem_Of_Pain.pdf).

⁹⁹ L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces ...*, op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. 1 *Cor* 12:3.

battle to broaden reason, to help us understand that faith is reason's apex (attainable through the very event of Christ), so that the affirmation of Christ would not become something added on to life and, deep down, irrational. Each of us must decide whether we are willing to follow Fr. Giussani on this itinerary to be able to live faith as adults, in a world like ours. Faith is not an optional addition to the Event. Without the recognition that the faith makes possible, life is condemned to emptiness. Fear, solitude, and dissatisfaction win. For this reason, Saint Augustine says, "a man is drawn to Christ, when he delights in truth, delights in blessedness, delights in righteousness, delights in everlasting life, all which Christ is."¹⁰¹

So then, how can faith become increasingly my own?

2. How faith becomes personal

The charism—how many times Fr. Giussani has reminded us!—is a gift of the Spirit to help the faith become personal, in this way making it more persuasive in the life of each person. In a letter to Fr. Giussani, John Paul II affirmed that "the originality of the charism of each movement 'does not claim, nor could it, to add anything to the richness of the *depositum fidei*, safeguarded by the Church with impassioned fidelity' [...]. This originality, however, 'constitutes a powerful support, a suggestive and persuasive reminder to live the Christian experience to the full, with intelligence and creativity. Herein lies the premise for finding adequate answers to the challenges and urges of the times and ever-changing historical circumstances.'"¹⁰²

In this sense, Fr. Giussani has a constant concern: that the Movement be able to generate an adult personality. Why did Fr. Giussani continually document this concern? Because he sees the difficulty of generating adult personalities in the faith. The problem of faith is not behind us, like something that only concerns others. No, this is Fr. Giussani's only concern for us, always: "The grave problem is how difficult it is for the adult to emerge. [...] Therefore, what is lacking [...] is the personality of faith. They have personality in terms of culture, in their professions, in

¹⁰¹ Saint Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel according to St. John and his First Epistle*, Vol. 1., Homily 26: 4, John Henry Parker, Oxford, 1848, p. 402.

¹⁰² John Paul II, *Message to Fr. Luigi Giussani on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Pontifical Recognition of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, February 10, 2002.

their temperaments, but not personality of ecclesiastical faith (which is not inwardness) and therefore there is an absence of creativity, because if the human subject is missing, action is missing as well.”¹⁰³ He is concerned about this difficulty in generating adult personalities in the faith.

But Fr. Giussani does not settle for this observation. He also identifies with clarity the profound cause of this lack: “The reason for this situation is the very grave deterioration of the method: what remains of the method [of the Movement] is a cage of words and formulas, and the genius of the method is lacking, as if it had dried up.”¹⁰⁴

What is this very grave deterioration of the method? “Now, the deterioration of the method can be formulated as follows: we who entered the ecclesiastical and social arena as ones who affirm Christianity as experience, have now ended up [he said this in 1976, but I think it is perfectly suitable today] favoring intellectualism over experience, an intellectualism accompanied by exaggerated activism. And this is very serious. Now each of us can say that the Movement is not my life, or better, my life is not the Movement. The Movement is a series of things that condition my life, and thus my life is not evoked by it. [...] ‘There is ideological consensus instead of an experience of life.’ There’s a lot of action, many initiatives are done, but there is no search for how it affects daily life. Instead, daily life, with the humility it forces on us, with its inevitable suffering, with its concrete and unavoidable responsibility, would balance us out, make us more concrete and less evanescent, more effectively faithful [Giussani cares about the fact that faith can impact daily life so powerfully that it responds to Pavese’s grave objection that daily living cripples you; without this, faith will be of no interest to us, first of all, and just imagine the others!]. Again, the intelligence of the person is replaced by the intellectualism of the group, because intelligence—as Saint Thomas Aquinas said—is triggered into action by experience [this is decisive]. Intelligence is triggered by experience of life: if this is missing, there is no intelligence in the person, and so his adherence to initiatives and his behavior in the face of problems that afflict society [...] is a presence without intelligence. The first consequence is conformism; there’s a conformist presence, an absence of critical capacity. A way of judging emerges that, since it is not rooted in an experience of life before God, is superficial and inconstant.

¹⁰³ Scuola responsabili [School for Leaders], Collevaenza (Pg), September 17-19, 1976. CL Archive.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Therefore [a person settles for less, and] either repeats or follows in a mechanical and deaf way, or criticizes in a reactionary way, focused on his own opinion; he is paralyzed, complains, and, haughtily or not, withdraws and does not participate. This judgment is not capable of overcoming the subjectivity of the person's own sentiment, in order to collaborate in creating unity. The second consequence of this lack of intelligence is that there is no creative undertaking. [...] In this way, habit is formed, [...] because creativity depends on the presentiment of a new and different life that one feels within [it is not a matter of taking courses at Harvard, because this different creativity is sparked by a life]. For this reason, the Movement does not become the life of each of us and [...] our communication takes on a tone of 'unbearable worldly banality' [a definition that describes certain dialogues among us]."¹⁰⁵

But this state of affairs does not discourage Giussani at all. Why does the Lord permit this deterioration? "The Lord allowed us to fall so that we would arise again truer, more aware of the fact that only He is capable of moving our life forward on the right road, that only He is capable of spreading the advent of His kingdom. [...] The Lord allows our mistakes and our sins as the strangest, but most dramatically operative, the most pedagogically effective way of deepening the sense of our relationship with Him. We are so tenacious in our self love that without the experience of our limits, we would not say with authenticity, 'God, You are everything,' and 'I am nothing.'"¹⁰⁶

So then, we can summarize the very grave deterioration of method with these words: "There is a decisive prevalence of intellectualism over experience, over the event of life." And this error has an immediate consequence: a life can never be born from an intellectual position. "This is the fundamental point of the Movement: the adult does not grow because there is the deterioration of our method, which is that of experience, participation in an event and not consent to a discourse."¹⁰⁷

Having reached this point, it is not difficult to imagine that Giussani would set out to find who is guilty of causing this situation—we know each other well, don't we?—seeking to dump on someone or on the organization of the Movement the fault for this state of affairs. But Giussani cuts right through, identifying the true responsible party: the problem is

¹⁰⁵ *Verso una vita di fede più matura* [Toward a More Mature Faith], edited by Communion and Liberation, *pro manuscripto*, Milan, 1976, pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 10.

¹⁰⁷ Scuola responsabili [School for Leaders], Collevalenza (Pg), September 17-19, 1976, CL Archive.

you, me, each of us. Here is what he says: “Being in the Movement is participating in a change in how you conceive of yourself, your relationship with others: the Movement is this, not just a weapon for judging others. It is removing any and all alibis, any grumbling, because the problem is *you*, period. In fact, the Movement has extreme need of people who become adults. But what is an adult? The adult is defined by his way of living relationships. The Christian adult is therefore the person who lives, tends to live relationships in the light of faith (between husband and wife, between parents and children, in the community and outside). What does it mean [to live relationships] in the light of faith? It means that the adult tends to live his relationships in the light of the Presence [that has bowled us over], because this is what faith is. The adult is not necessarily the one who gives speeches, proclaims a method, or is responsible for initiatives or assigns things to do, because these are not the things that define the adult: the adult is the one who tends to live relationships with people in Christ,”¹⁰⁸ letting them be bowled over by His presence. If this Presence does not dominate in our eyes, in our life, as something real and present, if this Presence does not fill our way of relating with reality, we live the relationship with everything just like everyone else does. Only those who strive to live any relationship—with themselves, with the people at home, at work, with friends, with circumstances—in Christ, that is, with His presence in their eyes, in their heart, can verify the victory of the risen Christ. It is an experience each of us must have: we cannot substitute it with comments or opinions.

Giussani continues: “This physiognomy of the Christian life is full of victory and boldness because Christ is victorious. Christ is risen here, in me, in my workplace, wherever I go, in my home: He is risen. I am victorious, because the One who possesses me is victorious [that is, risen]. [...] This is the *victory* that conquers the world, that is, our flesh, our insignificance [because it is bowled over by His living, real Presence].”¹⁰⁹

And what is the sign of faith as experience? Gladness. If this victory is not a lived experience, we are not glad. You cannot hide it. We can fill our gatherings with words, but if the experience of the victory of Christ in us is lacking, then “we are not glad and we change nothing around us.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Giornata d’inizio anno di CL [CL Beginning Day], Milan, September 10, 1977, CL Archive.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Convegno adulti [Conference for Adults], Varese, May 19, 1979, CL Archive.

The goal of this tension to live all our relationships in Christ, that is, full of His presence, is to reach what for Fr. Giussani constitutes the adult: unity of life. This is the opposite of the fragmentation that often characterizes us: “Adults are those who have attained unity of life, awareness of their destiny, of their meaning, energy of adherence. They are defined by affection for and thus by enjoyment of their meaning.”¹¹¹

When misunderstandings about the meaning of faith becoming personal emerged, Fr. Giussani made two clarifications.

a) Making faith personal does not at all mean centering upon one’s own problems or suspending missionary impetus. It is not, in fact, “in suspending missionary presence that I find solutions for my problems, that I manage to solve these problems,” a friend observed. On the contrary, as we said earlier, that faith becomes personal means that we live all our relationships, circumstances, challenges, including personal problems, in the light of the presence of Christ, let them be filled with the presence of Christ. Also, or rather first of all, personal problems must be dealt with in the light of the Presence that has reached us.

b) But unless faith shows its pertinence to our personal problems, our mission is presumption: “In these past years we have been truly victims of the Movement’s presumption to be the cure-all for the Church and Italy [for society], but this leads me to the root of the observation: that if the Movement is not the experience of faith as something that solves my problems, illuminates them, it cannot be proposed to others [if the experience of faith is not lived as something that illuminates our problems, if it is not useful for us, we become presumptuous judges of everyone!]. The proposal is through my humanity, and therefore through my humanity answered, or my humanity provoked [the Movement can become a proposal for others]. [...] It is true that we have a missionary task for the Church and for Italy, and for today’s society, but it is through, passing through the phenomenon of a personal issue, the response to it, the provocation of it, [...] that the mission becomes truly a sustainable proposal. [...] The impetus of mission is gratitude; otherwise, it is presumption.”¹¹²

So then, what does it mean to make faith personal? It means this: “Everything we are told and everything that is given to us [the proposal

¹¹¹ Consiglio di CL [CL Council], Milan, June 18-19, 1977, CL Archive.

¹¹² Centro di CL [CL Center], Milan, November 17, 1977, CL Archive.

made to us] must concern life [life!]. Life is the emotion of the heart, a headache, a gaze upon things, curiosity about everything, encountering, laughing, crying, enthusiasm, and bewilderment [a stupendous description to ‘concretize’ the fact that, if faith is not pertinent to the needs of life, it will not interest us and it will be useless for everyone]. In a society like this, nothing new can be created, if not with life: no structure, organization, or initiative will hold. Only a different and new life can revolutionize structures, initiatives, relationships—in short, everything. And life is mine, irreducibly mine [unmistakably mine].”¹¹³

So then, how can faith actually become personal? Christ must be immanent in everything. In “eating and drinking, living relationships with friends, going to work, going to study, in your emotional life with your woman or man, with your children, with others, in public life, on the road, this word that calls us by name must never be forgotten, this Christ who is immanent in our heart, who penetrates our thirst for happiness to say: I am the way, the truth, and the life [may this never be forgotten] [...]. The Movement is this. The life of the Movement must constitute the experience of a greater reason for living—rather, the one adequate, total reason for living [...]. The Movement is what helps this, period. It helps you be yourself.”¹¹⁴

So then, what journey must be undertaken so that faith may become personal?

3. The method for making faith personal is following

“You learn to live life by following one who lives, not because this person is better than you! He can be a billion times worse than you! But as method, as attitude of life, as behavior, as applicable attitude, he is an example. You follow an example, not a discourse, because a discourse is at the mercy of one’s own interpretation, while following an example challenges our way of doing things.”¹¹⁵

Fr. Giussani constantly indicated that the method for reaching maturity is to follow: “There is only one means, my friends, for being educated to this presence, for being sustained in faith to the point of

¹¹³ “Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom], in *CL-Litterae communionis*, no. 11, November 1978, p. 44.

¹¹⁴ Giornata d’inizio anno di CL [CL Beginning Day], Varese, September 17, 1978, CL Archive.

¹¹⁵ Incontro dei preti di CL [Meeting of CL Priests], Idice San Lazzaro (Bo), January 7, 1980, CL Archive.

becoming a witness and not agitators or agitated as in an association: this way by which we can learn the presence is following.”¹¹⁶ “To follow means to become one with persons who live the faith more maturely, to become involved in a living experience, that ‘passes’ (*tradit* in Latin, which gives us ‘tradition’) its dynamism and its gusto into us. This dynamism and this gusto pass into us not through our reasoning, not at the conclusion of a logical process, but, as it were, by osmosis: it is a new heart that communicates itself to ours; it is the heart of another that begins to move inside our own life.”¹¹⁷ This is anything but lines of reasoning, comments, or witticisms! Following is a living experience!

For this reason, as I wrote you in the letter after the Synod, quoting Fr. Giussani: “Following is the desire to relive the *experience* of the person who has provoked you, and who still provokes you, with his presence in the life of the community; it is the tension to become not like that person in his concreteness, full of limits, but like that person in the value to which he gives himself and that redeems, deep down, even his face as a wretched man. It is the desire to participate in the life of that person, in whom something from an Other has been brought to you. And it is precisely this Other to whom you are so devoted, toward whom you aspire, to whom you wish to adhere, all within this common journey.”¹¹⁸ This sentence will remain for us the constant basis for comparison to verify whether each is following or not—that is, reliving an experience or not. And thanks to God, as usual Fr. Giussani has not simply given us this complete explanation of following, but has also judged the concepts of following that are common among us, identifying their limitations, to eagerly help us to avoid wasting time.

So then, without claiming to be exhaustive, let’s see some reduced versions of following.

a) The first reduction of following is thinking it means listening to a discourse or repeating the words you have heard (thinking in this way to

¹¹⁶ Giornata d’inizio anno di CL [CL Beginning Day], Milan, September 10, 1977, CL Archive.

¹¹⁷ L. Giussani, *From Utopia to Presence, Notes from a talk by Luigi Giussani to a group of university students in Riccione, Italy, in October 1976 in Traces*, December 2002, available at <http://www.traces-cl.com/dic02/ptnN1102.htm>.

¹¹⁸ L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo. Come creazione di personalità e di storia*, op. cit. p. 64. Quoted in Carron’s letter to the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation after the Synod on the New Evangelization, November 1, 2012. Available at http://english.clonline.org/whatiscl/default.asp?id=634&id_n=19882.

be even surer of following). “Following certainly isn’t that stuff!”¹¹⁹ says Giussani. In fact, I can listen to what someone says and repeat it without moving the center of my “I,” therefore without the center of myself being touched at its root. Then the proposal generates nothing new in me, does not renew my being. And yet, if you talked to people who try to repeat or learn a discourse, and ask them how they would define what they are doing, they would reply sincerely: “Follow—I’m following.” Instead, no, this is a reduction of following; this is not following. Repeating a discourse is not following. Daniélou said, “All the science in the world can enlarge the dimensions of the cage in which man finds himself, but it cannot make him leave this cage.”¹²⁰ Only an experience can obtain freedom: “Following means becoming one with, re-engaging in oneself, imitating—this is the word—imitating the concrete and practical translation, the concrete and practical ways that the person who guides the community, the Movement, translates the discourse he says!”¹²¹

b) The second reduction is to understand following as initiatives, meetings, things to do. “The Movement was born of a presence that imposed itself and brought to people’s lives the provocation of a promise to follow. But then we entrusted the continuity of this beginning to speeches and to projects undertaken, to meetings and to things that we had to do. But what we did not do was entrust, hand over, our lives [here is the sign that it is not true following]; the beginning very quickly ceased to be the truth offered to our person, and instead became the starting point for an association, for a reality upon which we can shrug off the responsibility of our own work, and from which we demand the resolution of things. What was supposed to be the open-armed welcoming of a provocation, and thus a following that is alive, has become obedience to the organization.”¹²²

c) The third reduction of following is a wrong emphasis on the person I follow: I think I follow because I am attached to the person. No, says Fr. Giussani. In fact, “following means becoming one with intelligence and with heart with [...] a method of life that connects what you live with

¹¹⁹ Diaconia diocesana [Diocesan Diaconia], Milan, January 9, 1980, CL Archive.

¹²⁰ J. Daniélou, *Saggio sul mistero della storia* [*Essay on the Mystery of History*], Morcelliana, Brescia, 2012, p. 136.

¹²¹ Diaconia diocesana [Diocesan Diaconia], Milan, January 9, 1980, CL Archive.

¹²² L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo. Come creazione di personalità e di storia* [*The Risk of Education. As Creation of Personality and of History*], op. cit., p. 63.

your destiny, which is Christ! Therefore following means a way of perceiving, recognizing, and becoming one with the values proposed, that is, with the experience proposed, which can be communicated through a given person; but you do not follow the person; it is not the person you follow! You follow the experience that person lives, therefore [following is] freedom from the person! Instead, for example, among us it is immensely easy to find that people bond to our person [he's speaking of himself] and remain dependent on our person. And a crystal clear symptom [of this] is that following among them does not happen, in other words, affection, communion among them does not happen, they do not become an event, they do not become a unity, an event among each other because [pay attention to the reason Fr. Giussani gives] they are all bound to my person! They can be a hundred, very bound to my person... Look, this is a terrible misfortune!"¹²³ Someone could say: "What would you want more than to be bound to the person of Fr. Giussani?" This is why it is striking that Fr. Giussani should say these things about the bond with his person! He is stating that those who said they were following him were actually not following him, and this is understood by the fact that notwithstanding their bond with him, nothing happened among them. Each one was "dependent" on Giussani, "bound" to him; but there was no affection, no event among them. Why? Fr. Giussani says it is because "What unites is that each person learns," that is, that each person have the experience of the person they follow. Only in this way can communion happen, not by just agreeing on something together. Each person needs to learn from Fr. Giussani, to relive his experience.

Fr. Giussani left us a whole series of instruments—for those who truly want to follow—to help us in the midst of the difficulties we must face on our road.

Returning to the concept of following, we understand that the common denominator of all the reductions is the lack of reliving the experience of the other who struck us, that is, the experience of Fr. Giussani. If you do not travel the road that enables you personally to have the same identical experience as the person who provoked and provokes you with his presence, the thing that struck you in the other will never become yours.

How do I see that I have the experience of following? In the fact that I do not limit myself to listening to a discourse or repeating it; I do not

¹²³ Consiglio Nazionale di CL [CL National Council], Idice San Lazzaro (Bo), March 1-2, 1980, CL Archive.

stop at the organization or at the formal reiteration of gestures; I do not reduce myself to adhering to the person of the other; but I participate in the life of that person who brought me something of the Other. If, in reliving the experience of the other person, I do not reach this Other—which is what my heart desires, that to which it is devoted, to which it aspires—over time I will no longer care about following because it will no longer be able to attract me. People do not leave the faith above all because they have a problem, for example, with the dogma of the Trinity, but because, not having this experience in life, at a certain point faith loses its reasonableness.

The Gospel continually shows the reductions we have mentioned. The disciples, too, sought a bond with the person of Christ: “After the master of the house has arisen and locked the door, then will you stand outside knocking and saying, ‘Lord, open the door for us.’ He will say to you in reply, ‘I do not know where you are from.’ And you will say, ‘We ate and drank in your company and you taught in our streets.’ Then He will say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from.’”¹²⁴

Here is another episode: “He said to them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Simon Peter said in reply, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus said to Him in reply, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah [...]’ [...] From that time on, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, ‘God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to You.’ He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do!’”¹²⁵ Jesus does not let them establish a merely personal bond with Him— it is not enough for Peter to adhere to His person; he needs to participate in His experience, because if Peter does not relive the experience of Jesus, he will not be able to understand and obey the plan of God for Jesus.

The same happens after the multiplication of the loaves: all the people adhere to Him, bind themselves to Him to the point of wanting to make Him king. But Jesus does not yield to this kind of attachment to Himself, because He knows that bread is not enough for people, that they need another thing, and He challenges them: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood,

¹²⁴ *Lk* 13:25-27.

¹²⁵ *Mt* 16:15-23.

you do not have life within you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.”¹²⁶ Jesus wants to bring them to have His same experience.

And when in Gethsemane Peter pulls out his sword and strikes the ear of the servant of the high priest, Jesus tells him: “Put your sword back into its sheath [...]. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and He will not provide Me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?”¹²⁷ Jesus does not accept reductions.

With this, where did Jesus want to bring the disciples? To understand the plan of an Other, so they, too, could enter into it. If Jesus had not introduced us to the Father, He would not have revealed to us the ultimate origin of His difference and would not have helped us have His same experience. We can go through the whole Gospel and verify that the conception of following that Fr. Giussani communicates to us is exactly that of Christ: “Jesus did not understand the attraction He held for the others as ultimately self-referential [as causing people to be attached to Himself] but as an attraction to the Father [to the Other to whom I aspire, to whom my heart can be devoted and bound]: the goal of attracting them to Himself was to lead them to the Father, to knowledge of Him and obedience to Him.”¹²⁸ Without true following, the experience of Jesus could not become mine, and the experience of Giussani could not become mine, yours, ours. But if it does not become ours, we remain alone with our nothingness, because if we do not let ourselves be introduced to the Mystery of God, in whom is found the ultimate meaning of life, in whom we can find that which corresponds to our expectations, how can we stay before life and its dramas, its challenges and pain?

For this reason, if we reduce following, and avoid reliving the experience of the person who struck us, sooner or later Christianity will no longer interest us. It is not a question of strategy. What is at stake here is faith, because without following we will not see how faith is to our advantage; we will not feel how it corresponds to the expectations of our heart. On the contrary, the sign that I live the same experience of the person who struck me is that I find the Other to whom I aspire and therefore I experience that correspondence to the heart that confirms the truth of the faith for me. For this reason, I am devoted, because

¹²⁶ *Jn* 6:53-57.

¹²⁷ *Mt* 26:52-53.

¹²⁸ L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino* [*Man and His Destiny*], Marietti, Genoa, 1999, p. 129.

with Jesus, attached to Jesus, I enter more into the Mystery. Jesus constantly leads me to enter into the Mystery of the Father. He came for this: to educate us to the Mystery, to introduce us to the Father. And precisely because we were made for this, we cannot lie to ourselves and nobody can deceive us. Any other thing may distract us for a while, but since it does not correspond, it will not last long.

If following is the method of making faith personal, then in following I experience more and more how faith becomes increasingly mine, how the relationship with Christ becomes increasingly mine. The signs of this are the newness of life and the change that are born of it. These features begin to define my face, my identity, wherever I am, at home or at work, alone or in company, on vacation or engaged in the problems that arise.

For this reason, we cannot mistake experience for something else: experience is the place of evidence, if we adhere to it we cannot get confused. As Lewis says: “What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing. You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed to go very far before the warning signs appear. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it.”¹²⁹ This is the advantage for those who want to live: they have in their own experience the signs of the truth that has reached them, because experience has such evidence that even if you want to fight it, you cannot erase it. It remains. Therefore, no wrong emphasis on the person, no already-know-it, no interpretation, no reduction can be confused with the experience of correspondence, with the relationship with the Other whom you desire, to whom you aspire. We know this very well. So each of you has to think it through and decide whether or not to obey experience. Because, deep down, what is obedience? “The extreme form of obedience is following the discovery of yourself operating in the light of the words and example of another,”¹³⁰ because you are struck by another. The discovery of self provoked by the experience of an other is an absolutely irreducible event. We can do what we like, we can fool ourselves as much as we want, but this event is irreducible; it is not under our command.

Therefore, Fr. Giussani summarizes the challenge with this word: “following.”

¹²⁹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy. The Shape of My Early Life*, Collins, London, 2012, p. 205.

¹³⁰ L. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Faith*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal, 2008, p. 135.

4. Presence

This following, through the change it generates in us, is what makes us presence. Faith as real experience makes us blossom as presence.

“*Being presence*, this is our ultimate category. Being presence, whatever temperament you may have, regardless of the gifts with which you may be endowed [...] means a different way of being within a situation—because you live in your relationship with your girlfriend, with your friends, with your parents, with your studies at university, with the book you have to study—in a given cultural and political moment of society. Being presence in a situation [just listen to how powerfully he expresses this] means being there in order to disturb it, so that if you were not there everyone would notice. Wherever you are, the others will get angry or will admire you, or will seem indifferent, but they will not be able to avoid acknowledging your ‘difference.’ Being presence means being within a situation making Christ the event of our person. [...] We make the true proclamation [this is the decisive point!] through what Christ has disturbed in our life, through the disturbance that Christ achieves in us: *we make Christ present through the change He works in us. It is the concept of testimony*. We use the word ‘presence’ superficially, but above all, presence is the admirable, fascinating disturbance provoked by the friendship Christ establishes among us—this type of friendship capable of gladness and joy, impossible joy.”¹³¹

Pope Francis reminded us of this: “I ask myself: where did the first disciples find the strength to bear this witness? [...] Their faith was based on such a strong personal experience of the Dead and Risen Christ that they feared nothing and no one [...]. When a person truly knows Jesus Christ and believes in Him, that person experiences His presence in life as well as the power of His Resurrection and cannot but communicate this experience.”¹³²

Thus, we disturb an environment through the change He works in us. This allowing ourselves to be molded by Him is what makes us witnesses, as Daniélou says again: “What makes a testimony is the fact of manifesting a divine action precisely where one finds no exceptional generosity. Heroism demonstrates what man can do. Holiness shows what God can do.”¹³³

¹³¹ L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [*An Event of Life, That Is, a Story*], Edit Editoriale Italiana-Il Sabato, Rome, 1993, pp. 345-346.

¹³² Pope Francis, *Regina Coeli*, April 14, 2013.

¹³³ J. Daniélou, *Saggio sul mistero della storia* [*Essay on the Mystery of History*], op. cit., p. 128.

It is to be hoped that we become, in every situation, that “irruption” described by Julien Green: “Thought today of the din, the thousands of useless words, the noise of the road, infernal noise, depressing, the phone calls, etc., everything that forms the fabric of the day, and in the midst of the chaos, a man with tranquil gestures and words that never change works the miracle of God’s descent among us. [It is the] irruption of faith [...], irruption of the infinite into our contrived, affected time.”¹³⁴ This is what everyone hopes for, as Fr. Giussani reminds us: “What is missing is not so much the verbal or cultural repetition of the proclamation [that is, an intellectualization of faith, or a discourse]. Man today awaits expectantly, perhaps unconsciously, the experience of the encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a present reality that their life is changed. It is a human fact that can shake man today: an event that echoes the initial event, when Jesus lifted His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, come down right away, I am coming to your house.’”¹³⁵ In this way, 2,000 years of history have burned away and now we can have the exact same experience as Zacchaeus. We testify to everyone that Christ is present through the change we discover in ourselves.

“Normal life suddenly becomes dense and taut according to its truth, and its truth is the relationship with the Infinite [...]. Normal life, moment by moment, is relationship with that presence. [...] The presence of Christ, in normal living, increasingly involves the beating of the heart: being moved by His presence becomes being moved in daily life and illuminates, beautifies, and softens the tenor of daily life, more and more. Nothing is useless, nothing is extraneous, because nothing is extraneous to your destiny, and therefore there is nothing of which you cannot become fond. You can become fond of everything, affection is born for everything, everything, with its magnificent consequences of respect for the thing you do, precision in the thing you do, loyalty with your concrete work, tenacity in pursuing your goal; you become more tireless [...].”¹³⁶

Werfel expresses it well: “Every gesture, every greeting, every smile was full of that infinite that had no need of being evoked by name,”¹³⁷ so clear it was.

¹³⁴ J. Green, *L'espatriato. Diario 1984-1990* [*The Expatriate. Diary*], Mursia, Milan, 1992, p. 68.

¹³⁵ L. Giussani, *L'avvenimento cristiano* [*The Christian Event*], Bur, Milan 2003, pp. 23-24.

¹³⁶ L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo* [*A Real Event in the Life of Man*], op. cit., pp. 101-104.

¹³⁷ F. Werfel, *Barbara*, Corbaccio, Milan, 2000, p. 52.

If this is the change that makes Christ present, then we need to purify our conception of presence from certain characteristics with which at times it is identified, as Fr. Giussani encouraged us to do: “Since the 1976 Equipe entitled *From Utopia to Presence*, we have made a journey that now pushes us to explore and reach the core of the word presence: we need to explore it and reach the core. [...] Presence is a topic that coincides with your ‘I.’ Presence is born and consists in the person. [...] And the thing that defines the person as actor and protagonist of a presence is the clarity of faith, that clarity of consciousness that is called faith [...]. Presence consists entirely in the person, is born and consists in the person and the person is intelligence of reality to the point of touching the ultimate horizon.”¹³⁸

Just as making faith personal is not merely a movement inward or the suspension of missionary impetus, in the same way identifying the presence in the person is not to be understood in the opposition between “public” and “private,” like a resizing of the presence, a folding upon itself. On the contrary: it is a profound reconcentration according to the original attitude of the Movement. In other words, stating that the presence consists entirely in the person does not mean separating or imposing a private, inward sphere over the public one (this division does not exist!); instead, it means indicating the original place of every change, the root from which emerges a fruit whose spread fills all of history, according to the plan of the Mystery and not according to our programs. All the rest is illusion, deceit, and a waste of time. The person is not the “private” compared to the “public” (these are worldly, reductive categories, entirely inapplicable to the life of faith). The change of the person and the existence of an authentic Christian community has value in history.

“History is not defined, in its times, by us. It falls to us to live the presence: a total credit to the Infinite that has entered our life and reveals itself immediately as new humanity, as friendship, as communion. ‘Do not be afraid, little flock, I have conquered the world’ (cf. *Lk* 12:32). ‘This is the victory that conquers the world: our faith’ (1 *Jn* 5:4). Will our faith need seven, eight, nine centuries for all the university world to be vested again with the Christian presence? These are not calculations that we can decipher. We are interested in the university for the construction of our subject, not so we can say ‘We win.’ [...] We

¹³⁸ L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo* [*A Real Event in the Life of Man*], op. cit., pp. 142-143.

have to abandon this ideological interpretation of university life that produces labored and exhausting, heavy and bitter work, which causes many to go away, whereas no one goes away from a new humanity, except in the case of a diabolical, ferocious rebellion.”¹³⁹

But saying this does not mean doing nothing. It means starting anew with simplicity, without presumption and claims to hegemony, and establishing new gestures and places where the subject can be built up, so that those who see us desire to join us because they are fascinated by the life they see before their eyes.

“*Multiplying and spreading the Christian community in the spheres where we live* is therefore our help to our fellow men: being open to valuing even the most infinitesimal point of departure that the intuition of the other shows us, ready to collaborate with every fact that appears right to us in the light of the faith. The true subject of this adventure, of this historical contribution, is *the person* inasmuch as he is a member of the *communion*. Thus arose the name ‘Communion and Liberation.’”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹ L. Giussani, *From Utopia to Presence*, op. cit. available at <http://www.traces-cl.com/dic02/pfnN1102.htm>

¹⁴⁰ L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia [An Event of Life, That Is, a Story]*, op. cit., p. 345.

Sunday, April 21st, Morning

During entrance and exit:

Sergei Rachmaninoff, Concerto for piano and orchestra no. 2 in C minor, op. 18

Sviatoslav Richter, piano

Stanislaw Wislocki – Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra

“Spirto Gentil” no. 8, Deutsche Grammophon

Fr. Pino. “He was seen, and he saw.”¹⁴¹ What is the *Angelus*, if not the moment in the day in which we become aware of the initiative of the Mystery made flesh, of Christ, toward each of us? Outside this initiative, there is only the tangle of our images. Realizing His initiative and welcoming it, our protagonism in the world begins.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Daive Prosperi. The goal of this morning’s assembly is to focus on some of the elements that can be most helpful in the journey of the coming months, because we will have the opportunity to work more together on the content of these Exercises.

The first evening we were challenged by Jesus’ question: “But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” We felt this question addressed to us personally, not merely in an eschatological sense, but we were “stripped bare” before our everyday experience, because “when He comes” is now. And this challenge of Jesus, which is an embrace, risks becoming in us doubt and intellectualism. We have seen this in the outcome of the work done in the hotels [by the groups that met to study the retreat together during the course of the weekend], in the questions that they submitted. We think that it can be useful to look at some of these questions, most of which were about the second lesson, in a critical manner, as they underline the difficulty we have in responding to the event, while taking the event itself for granted.

¹⁴¹ Saint Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Vol. II, 174, 4.4.

First question: In trying to identify with Christ, we get to know Zacchaeus; it would seem more immediate to identify with Zacchaeus. How is it possible to identify with Christ, to have His same experience? The thought of having the experience of Christ is spine-tingling.

Julián Carrón: This question is an example of intellectualism prevailing over experience, which is very common among us, because to respond to this question in a simple way it would have been enough to start out from the experience each of us has had. But we are “modern” and as soon as we hear certain words we immediately give them a modern meaning.

For us, what does it mean to identify with Christ, to become one with Him? To “imagine” how He does things. So then, how can we be sure we imagine correctly, and that we do not reduce Christ to our image of Him? Who can assure me that I am having His exact same experience? It is a perfectly understandable fear. But if we followed what Fr. Giussani tells us—correcting us continually—that is, that reality becomes transparent in experience (the experience we have), everything would be simpler. In fact, we can identify with what another person lives only through an experience we have had ourselves.

What experience have we had, running into the Movement? When someone encounters the Movement, when he sees something that amazes him, he does not have to imagine anything: he feels the repercussion of what is before his eyes. This is the overturning of method that happened with Christianity that Fr. Giussani told us about. This is the first thing that John and Andrew and Zacchaeus felt: it was the impact with something different. They did not have to imagine anything; they just had to simply feel the repercussion of such a unique difference, so absolutely out of the ordinary, so exceptional that it was very easy to remain glued to that Presence. It is an impact with something that does not come from us, that we cannot create in ourselves. Tell me if this is not easy! But when people encounter us, when they see how we celebrate a wedding together—as they told me recently at an assembly in Lombardy—it is the same: they see a way of staying together that is unheard of. At the end of the festivities, the restaurant owner went to express his thanks for the celebration. Why? What did he see? He did not have to spend hours in introspection about it! No, he was struck by a way of staying together. And if a restaurant owner is struck, it means that there is something truly different, because he sees wedding receptions continually! I also told you yesterday about the

reaction of the person who went to the funeral of one of us and was profoundly struck by what he saw. How many times might this person have attended a funeral? But to say, “So even dying is beautiful!”, he must have seen something unheard of and irreducible that is not the fruit of our effort, our activity; that is not something we ourselves can manage to do. So then, to identify, to be one with, you need only to have had experiences like these.

Faith always concerns something that happens outside us, has a source outside us, depends on something we do not generate, is born of something we bump into. So then Giussani tells us: “Look at what happened to you,” because that is the way Christ seized you. Now, only by starting from present experience can we identify with Christ, become one with Him, without reducing Him. In fact, the present experience is the experience of that manner of gaze with which Christ reached and reaches us. And when we find ourselves in front of someone who looks at us in a different way, a way we have never been looked at before, we are struck by that gaze. Each of us has to go and trace, in our own experience, when this happened for us, so we can understand what it means to identify with Christ, in order not to reduce everything to our imagination. Christianity is something else!

I understand, then, why we often do not feel the urge to constantly go back and read Giussani or the Gospel: we do not feel the need to. We reduce ourselves to our thoughts, our attempts, our imaginings, which never give us an instant of gladness. Giussani constantly testifies to us instead that he cannot live without Christ! We have to decide if we want to follow Him to the point of having Giussani’s same identical experience, or whether we want to reduce everything to our measure.

Prosperi: Here are two questions I’ll read together because they complement each other:

Today, you spoke about an urge to say His name in every aspect and in every instant of life. How can this be lived in daily life as a free and peace-giving act, and not as an operation that measures?

Recognizing an event is simple, as happened again for me today. How is this simplicity lived together with the journey that requires a total commitment to discover the true meaning, which often does not seem simple to me?

Carrón: Do you see? When we recount an experience it is very easy. “Recognizing an event is simple, as happened again for me today.” When

we detach ourselves from experience we begin to complicate things and no longer know what we are talking about. This is the dominance of intellectualism: we get tangled up in our words and do not know what we are talking about. Fr. Giussani says that if we do not constantly start out from experience, we end up succumbing to confusion.

So, let's look these questions in the face. Think about the experience of falling in love. If you fall in love, it does not mean for you, "Now I'll dedicate myself to the contemplation of her face and I won't do anything." No! Precisely because it has happened, this presence so fills your life that the question is the opposite: How can you do everything, live your daily life, without feeling the urgent need for her? Tell me how! The urgent need for the other is not a titanic effort I have to make, no! It is something I discover in myself. This is what makes me realize what has happened to me, the presence that has filled my life: I cannot live any moment of the day (even when I ride the subway, when I get dressed in the morning, when I am having lunch) without the urge to say her name. This tension, this urgent need that I discover in myself, that pushes within me, is the memory of her—this describes the dominance of a presence. What happens when, at a certain point, this phenomenon no longer happens? You do not decide to stop thinking about her because you have other things to do. Even before, you were busy with things to do, but you could not help her returning to your mind, the dominance of that presence! When it no longer happens, it does not mean that the beloved has disappeared from the face of the earth; she is still there, but the dominance of that presence is no longer something that determines your life—the event no longer pushes within you. For this reason I say—first of all to myself—that the grave problem for us is that we do not miss Christ! We can give all the interpretations we want, but the problem is that often we do not miss Christ. This has nothing to do with the fact that we have limits, that we make mistakes: all this exists—we take into consideration everything, everything, because in life there is everything—but the problem is that we do not miss Christ! We have encountered a man who, having lunch with his friends, could not help but feel the urge to say His name. So then, "urge" or "commitment" is the same: after having encountered Him, I feel the urgent need of Him. I miss Him! If I do not miss Him, no moralism can make up for the tension of this lack.

How can this urge to say His name be a liberating and peace-giving act? The problem is the opposite: if you do not do this, how can you be free in the midst of all the problems of the day?! How can you live in

peace?! How can we always be free in the midst of all of our bustle, if we do not miss Christ, if He is not the One to fill everything with His presence?

But some, when I say these things, object: “This is inwardness.” Not a bit! Ask yourselves if this is inwardness or if it is the sign that Christ means something in your lives! This is faith: to live, I need to recognize Him. The problem of faith is not behind us; it is our daily problem. What does His presence mean for us now?

Prosperi: This is pertinent to the next question:

What does it mean to expect everything from the fact of Christ?

Carrón. Each person has to ask him or herself this question, because only those who have encountered Christ know what they can expect. What is Christ for us? One among many things? As the friend from before said, “It is a problem of esteem.” Is Jesus the thing I esteem more than anything else, or not? What did I experience in the encounter with Christ? It is necessary to answer this question, because if we do, then everything can happen in life: we make mistakes, we get distracted, we think we are missing the best, like the Prodigal Son, and then like him we leave home to look for some kind of fulfillment we imagine to be greater. And when we live for any other thing that is not Him, we can see what happens, just like the Prodigal Son! Why did he remember his father, his home? What does he expect, after having lived all the rest, after having sought fulfillment everywhere? With the father, he had a different, incomparable experience, as we have had with Christ. Therefore, what does the son expect? He expects everything that he has already lived and that otherwise he would not have known about; and we also expect everything that we did not know about before the encounter. Therefore—Fr. Giussani always said—people can always go away, but from a fact, you do not turn back. For this reason, Christ can challenge all of us: “Make the comparison with anything else, and tell Me if you find anything that corresponds to you more compared to what I am, to what you have experienced in the encounter with Me!” In this way, you can begin to see that there is nothing, no other presence, no other way of living life that corresponds better to the expectation of your heart—this is the verification of faith. You do not make this realization because, first of all, you are superior, because you no longer do stupid things like everyone else, because you never get distracted, but because the more you stray, the more you realize what you are missing

in leaving. So then, you expect that Christ will become everything for you, more and more; with pain, starting again, limping, but without leaving, without taking another road—as Eliot said. This, then, is the question each of us must ask: Do we expect everything of Christ? Do I expect everything of You, O Christ? The question is not whether I am “able to” or if I am “worthy of it.” This is not the question. This is the same as Jesus’ question to Peter: “Do you love Me? I do not ask you whether you are good, I do not ask you whether you will betray Me tomorrow, I do not ask you this. But, do you love Me more than any other thing? Does My presence interest you more than any other thing? Do you expect everything of Me? Or am I one among many things? What do you expect will fulfill your life?” If, for us, deep down, Christ is one among many, among the many things of life, we will answer: “Yes, Christ is okay, but let’s not exaggerate!” That Christ can be everything, this is the question of faith: Do I expect everything from Christ? Faith is not just making a list of the truths we believe in, because these truths are often perceived as a series of abstractions. The issue is that Truth became flesh, beauty became flesh, happiness became flesh. The issue is whether Christ is this event for us. Otherwise we are already on another side, not because we are incoherent—pay attention!—because the tax collectors were much more incoherent than we are, but they returned to Him continually. It is a problem of esteem, a problem of judgment. There is nothing sentimental or moralistic in this. Who is Christ for the life of each of us? It is a problem of judgment.

Prosperi: There are another two questions that are related to each other:

On the objectivity of Christ 2,000 years ago, no problem. Instead, on the objectivity of Christ today, the risk of following our own idea of God is very high. What frees us from this risk?

Peter also ran the risk of a wrong emphasis on the person, but in the end he truly knew Christ. What is the thin line between following the presence and following the person? Why is this difference so important?

Carrón: Do you see that this is not just our particular problem? Peter also ran the risk of following his own idea of God or following his own idea of Jesus (about what was in Jesus’ best interests); the Gospel documents it, as we heard yesterday. This is inevitable in us, as Fr. Giussani tells us—it is inevitable that as soon as someone knows something, he forms an image of it, formulates an idea about that thing; therefore

we should not be upset by this. The true challenge is that when I find myself before something irreducible like Christ—just like Peter did—I yield. And Peter, after he was praised for having professed that Jesus was the Christ, bore the brunt of His full reproof: “You don’t think like God!” Peter, too, formed his own idea of God. What constantly frees us from our idea? This is the question, today as 2,000 years ago. We are only freed by an irreducible Presence. For this reason, Christian faith is not possible without something objective in front of oneself; without something outside of me that I run up against, that I cannot reduce to my images, to my ideas, to my sentiment, to my reaction, or to my interpretation. Christian faith will always be the collision with a Presence that frees you from your measure, frees you from your cage, frees you from your bunker (to use Benedict XVI’s image). Christianity endures throughout history because His Presence continues to happen and therefore I am liberated from myself, from my cage, from my bunker—because with my interpretations I can bury myself and with my thoughts I can suffocate. How do I perceive that Christ is present? By the fact that before Him I have such an experience of freedom, of breathing freely, that I say, “Here He is!” As the person said, “This event happened again yesterday.” How many times, staying together, participating in something, do we find ourselves in front of the testimony of someone, facing something that happens, and we are freed! We know that Christ is present, not because we say so, but because we discover ourselves breathing freely, liberated from our measure, from the suffocation, from the cage. And when this happens, you are so amazed that you say, “Thank you, thank you for being here, O Christ, today, present in our midst, in Your body that is the Church, in Your visibility in history, that cannot be reduced to my measures.” Just think about whether something happened during these three days, about how you were when you arrived here and whether or not something happened. As one of you wrote to me, you arrive all tangled up, worried about many things, and you find yourself before something irreducible; not because we talk about our concerns at work, what we left behind at home, no! You find yourself immersed in something irreducible. Otherwise, why should we come here, if not for this? Why should we be Christians, if not for this? Why should we belong to the Movement, if not for this? All our attempts are in order that the Movement be a place where liberation happens over again: not an agency for activity nor an NGO, as Pope Francis said, but a place where the newness of my “I” happens again, so that one can return home changed. So then, being

liberated is living Christianity as an event. We can live it according to its nature only if it constantly happens again as event. Otherwise it loses interest for us. Instead, if it happens every time, then you become more and more attached, you are increasingly filled with reasons. For this reason, we have repeated, to the point of tiring of saying it, that if Christianity is not a present experience where I find confirmation that it responds to the needs of living, then faith will be unable to endure in a world where everything says the contrary. This is our problem. For this reason, Giussani insists on denouncing the reductions of the Movement or of following, according to all the variations we have talked about in these days, not just for the love of analysis or to reprimand us for something—it is to save us! Because all these various reductions will never be Christianity, will never be the Movement. The Movement will be and is the repercussion of the beginning, even with people like us, full of fragility. It is the repercussion of the beginning that liberated us. If it is not this, over time it will cease to interest us.

Prosperi: The last two questions refer to particular experiences, but bring up issues that concern everyone.

After the significant experience of CLU, I returned to my town and now have great difficulty with the local community of the Movement, which seems to me very different from life in CLU. I have been told that I am the one with the problem, because I cannot see the value of what is there. Is it my problem? In this situation, what does following mean?

Carrón. The first thing is that the Fraternity is one, and the Movement is one, just as the Church is one. Our communities and groups need to open their windows because if all the air of the totality of the Movement does not flow in each community, if in each group all the air of the Fraternity does not flow, then everything becomes suffocating, as can happen with any group of friends. Today, nobody, no matter his or her situation, can fail to have at hand all the richness of the life of the Movement, even if she or he lives in the furthest corner of the earth. Thus, everything that the life of the Movement reaches all the way there. At the end of the first lesson, I made a comparison with the Church. In fact, this type of self-referentiality of every community can happen in respect to the Movement, and we do not get out of it by changing strategy. No! To make the Apostles abandon the reduction they were using, Christ did not change strategy; He gave His life for them, died and rose for them. You must choose to participate in

the totality of the life of the Church, which is communicated not just by gathering for a meal together with friends. The life of the Church is much richer than all our attempts and if we reduce our companionship to our attempts, where do we go? If we do not breathe the totality of the Church and do not feel the urgent need to participate in this objective fact that is much greater than us, that forgives us, that constantly nourishes us with the Eucharist, that constantly offers us His word, that offers us the richness of His testimony and His companionship, how can we not succumb? I emphasize this because what happens with the Church happens with the Movement. If the life of every group is not open to this totality, we suffocate. Each of us has everything needed to live there, where we are. “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,”¹⁴² said Saint Paul to the community of Corinth, in the midst of the Roman Empire, when they were an insignificant little group. “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift.” And so nobody is stopped from living in any situation, in any community, in any place—you can even give value to everything, without reducing the community to what is there, but throwing it wide open. You can arrive there with all the richness of what you experienced in CLU and disturb the community with the “disturbance” that happened to you, as we said. If the disturbance can happen in your workplace, it can also happen in our communities. In fact, we *hope* that someone continues to disturb the communities, otherwise we are finished! For this reason, nobody keeps us from living, in whatever community in which the Mystery has placed us.

Prosperi: You told us that the event is not generated by our doing. However, the Movement calls us to gestures (charitable work, AVSI fund raising, the Food Banks, etc.) that are an educative instrument. How can we avoid this being reduced to activism?

Carrón: What happened to us is not the product of our doing. The Event is not generated by our doing, and since the very beginning it has not been generated by our doing. We ran up against something different that we had not created and that changed our life. All that we do, the gestures, are the expression of that newness that the Movement introduced, of the newness that Christ introduced in life. The problem occurs when the gestures change from the expression of a newness to something to

¹⁴² 1 Cor 1:7.

do. All women understand this. When they get married and have at heart keeping the house beautiful and in order, or making a tasty meal, so the home is a place you desire to return to, why do they do it? Because they want what has happened to them to fill everything, and so every gesture is an expression of love, passion for the life of their family. What a pity when this is lost and everything becomes “things to do”! What was the expression of love becomes then a complaint: “Do I still have to do this? You always go away, and I’m here cleaning!” There is a point to this; I do not doubt it. I do not want the men to take this as an excuse to justify themselves, because the same thing happens with the men!

Gestures can be expressions of an event, expressions of love, of passion, or they can simply be reduced to things to do. Instead of continually generating the relationship, of being expressions of the relationship and facilitating the growth of the relationship, they become mere things to do.

The risk is always this dual reduction: activism or inwardness. The clearest example of this conflict is the episode of Martha and Mary. Martha works so hard! Who of us would not be happy and honored to do things for Jesus, to host Him in our house? But you can have Jesus in your home, have the fortune of serving Him, and even so be dominated by complaint. “Look, Mary is not helping me!” The complaint dominates. And then, when Jesus tells Martha, “Only one thing is important,” He is not saying that contemplation is better than activity. No, He is underlining that Martha does not grasp that, in whatever she does, what must dominate is the fact of Christ, the fact of being honored to be with Him, that everything is for Him. When Jesus tells her this, it is not as a reprimand. “If you do not realize this, dearest Martha, your doing is not enough for you, and this is seen in your complaint.” When Fr. Giussani invites us not to succumb to activism, he does not do so because he does not want us to do activities, and when we say these things to each other, it is not to insist on inwardness instead of activism. No, you confuse things! The fact is that activity, when it is not lived according to its true nature, generates complaint because it is not the expression of a love, because it does not help to sustain the memory of that love, because it does not make me aware of that love. In fact, even if I were to have an inward attitude and did not recognize Him, it would be the same: complaint! The problem is not activism or inwardness, the problem is whether His presence dominates or not. The alternative is not between doing and not doing, but between letting a Presence enter and strike us, such that it dominates life, or not.

If He does not dominate, we can do or not do, but the complaint, the unease, dominates. Often people carve out time for themselves, so life does not get too complicated. But does this respond to what we need? Does any form of this conflict, between doing and not doing, respond? The problem is that at times we think that, in balancing these options, we can manage. No! Our doing has to be entirely filled with His presence, just as our resting, because what happens in doing happens in resting. Thus, even when we do nothing, we do not miss Him—the same reduction that transforms activity into activism also happens in rest, so that we go on vacation like pagans, expecting merely what everyone else expects, instead of living vacation, too, as the opportunity for the memory of Him, for the urge to say His name.

When you come down to it, the problem is always faith: whether this Presence dominates as an event in life or not. Pay attention! Let's not confuse things, as if this meant saying we need some extravagant form of coherence or irreproachability. No, no, no! We see it well when the event of falling in love is alive. We can continue to make the same mistakes as before, but the urgent need, the gratitude, and the joy of the presence of the beloved dominate. I am happy because You live, Christ, because You exist; I am not forced to suffocate in any thing I do, in activity or in rest, because You exist! It is the question of faith, because for us faith is involved with everything, not something that cuts out a piece of life for itself. Faith is something that has to do with everything.

For this reason, we continue our journey trying to follow what the Church proposes to us in the Year of Faith, so that we may rediscover the beauty of faith, to live, to live more, to live more intensely, to live life with true intensity, in order to respond to that “daily life that cripples you.” Otherwise, faith will have an expiration date, not out of some stinginess on our part, but because it no longer interests us. Our interest will shift elsewhere. You can be here and your interest can have already shifted elsewhere. It is not so difficult to understand, as Fr. Giussani said: we can be in the Movement without faith being at the center of our interest. Not that Fr. Giussani thinks we pronounce heresies against faith, no, but because the center of affection of our “I” has already shifted elsewhere—we no longer expect everything from Him. This is the problem of faith.

Living the experience of recognizing His Presence, through what Christ generates in us, we will be able to witness to Him in everything we have to do, in all the gestures we do. Let's accompany each other in this; this is why the Fraternity exists.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

I'll say a few things about the Fraternity that can help us remember its purpose. I was very struck by some membership requests that express again the reason, the concern that prompted Fr. Giussani to establish the Fraternity.

One of these requests says: "Today, after over two years in the Movement, I am certain that this is the right road because the method it offers me helps me in life; the judgments we give each other help me, as does the sharing of experience we learn in School of Community. I learn to understand that my freedom and happiness are not based on my individual independence, but on a relationship with the You, on the awareness that I am walking on the road to my destiny. The friendship and communion we live in community are necessarily part of this road, of this relationship and also of my happiness and freedom. For this reason, I would like to ask to become a member of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, because the Lord has made me understand that this is my road."

Another friend writes: "I would like to enter into the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation because I realize that it is the only road that makes me truly happy and through which Christ makes Himself known to me. The Movement is the specific way Christ makes Himself known to me. When I first met CL, I was a great individualist [this is the point: you can start out this way, an individualist, but then you desire to belong because you experience liberation from your cage], a man who wanted to succeed in everything alone, in his own way. CL was my project, and not just CL, but all my life was my project [when we have this outlook, we even turn the Movement into a project] and I was stubborn about it. Then I had to look for some compromises, and when they did not work, the problems began. But a little at a time, in everything I was living, in the good and in the bad, I learned that what I need is a place where I can continually encounter Christ, alive." You begin as you can, we are all wretches; the challenge comes at a certain point when you find yourself before something irreducible. "I learned what I needed: a place where I can encounter Christ alive [in experience, he knows what he was living in the beginning and what happens when he lives within a place like the Movement]. For me, this place has become the community of CL people in which the memory of what is important in my life is renewed in me. It is also the place where I continually learn, where I feel at home."

At the most recent Diaconia of the Fraternity, last month, a friend told us that, within a short time, three friends died in Montreal, Canada. One of them, sick with cancer, had pressed to join the Fraternity before dying, and asked to be accepted as soon as possible. He was buried with his Fraternity membership card in a pocket near his heart, like a treasure. He wanted to die belonging to the place where Christ drew near to him.

Fr. Giussani, in a 1992 interview, said, “Enrollment in the Fraternity is a personal act, wholly the initiative of the individual, not a choice made by a group. It is born as a personal need for one’s own faith [as we have seen] and for the realization of one’s own Christian physiognomy. Its aim [...] is that of belonging to a company that helps in the journey to holiness; that is to say, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love of Christ for the good of men, for the Kingdom of God on earth.”¹⁴³

We should read these sentences often because, unlike all our reductions, they tell us what the Fraternity is. “It is born as a personal need for one’s own faith,” that is, for one’s own life, as a “belonging to a company that helps in the journey to holiness.”

When you do not understand this, when you have reduced your need and your necessity, then you do not even truly understand what the Fraternity is. In January, for example, at a gathering of responsables in the United States, some of the participants told me about the difficulty some have in participating in the Fraternity. Why? Because the Fraternity is a proposal that concerns the totality of life, because of the very nature of the Christian event. It is a common problem that we often choose to be a member of a club or association that responds to certain particular needs, and at times the Fraternity is one among many places or clubs to which we belong. The American friends asked me the reason for this difficulty, and I answered, “Belonging to the Fraternity in this way, what is the problem? You do Fraternity like a club; what is the problem? Is everything fine this way?” And so they began to speak up, one after the other, saying, “No, it is not fine. This is missing in my life, that is missing in my life....” “Ah, so then you reduce the Fraternity to one of many clubs that do not resolve life, that do not help. For this reason the Fraternity is a different proposal from a club, because you have membership cards for many clubs, and you come one after the other to say what is not right. This is why the Fraternity, if lived

¹⁴³ L. Giussani, “Per una fede matura” [“For a Mature Faith”], interview by P. Colognesi, *CL-Litterae communionis*, February, 1992, p. 26.

like one more club, holds no interest.” Instead, the proposal of the Fraternity is different. For this reason, who can truly belong to it? Who can desire it? Those who do not settle for less than everything! That is, those who feel within the urgent pressure of this personal necessity. If the hypothesis of the Fraternity does not click, it does not click because this desire for holiness is missing—that is, this desire for the fullness of which Fr. Giussani speaks, that desire for total fulfillment of your life. Those who have this desire feel the need to join together with others to be sustained in their attempt, aware of their fragility. It is friendship as companionship guided toward destiny. When it clicks as a hypothesis, it is as the consequence of this desire, of this following. It is enough to be loyal to our needs, to understand the urgent need that we have for a real, true, irreducible place, where we are truly helped.

As Fr. Giussani said, again: “Since the aim of the Fraternity is the commitment in personal responsibility before holiness and destiny, the true problem is the capacity for friendship, for common life [companionship guided toward destiny]. It is a sharing of life without pretensions, without measures, without sentimentality [Fr. Giussani said], even to the point of social and material assistance. School of Community and mission are the goals to dedicate yourself to.”¹⁴⁴

Again, in America, they asked me a question about the first groups that were being formed, with this concern: “Since throughout the country the Fraternity groups have grown a great deal, we want to understand the importance of being faithful to the common fund, of following a rule that gives a certain structure to this friendship.” Here we see, as I said before, that doing a gesture, establishing a minimal rule of prayer, invitation to fidelity to the common fund, are little things, a minimal commitment, but are also the simplest expression of this desire to belong to the one Fraternity. Understanding the meaning of these simple gestures is decisive for not living them in a formal way, but rather as the expression of our belonging. In this, there is a long road ahead. If we live these gestures in a true way, they help increase awareness of belonging and thus constantly generate this belonging; they are the way to nourish the awareness of belonging; they are a help.

And in the Letter that he sent to new members, Fr. Giussani wrote: “*The ‘Fraternity of CL’* aspires to be an aware and committed—that is, mature—expression of the history of the CL Movement. It aims at

¹⁴⁴ L. Giussani, “Per una fede matura” [“*For a Mature Faith*”], op. cit., p. 26.

being the level at which all the insights, which by the grace of God have motivated and motivate us, are realized, both in the sense of ‘becoming aware’ of them, and in the sense of putting them into concrete form.”¹⁴⁵ In this sense, even caring for the “formal” aspects of the life of the Fraternity is important. I was struck, for example, by the words of the responsible of Latin America at the last Diaconia, when he said what an opportunity for education the formal tasks we are sometimes called to do can offer. He had to take care of the election of diocesan responsables of the Fraternity for the various nations—as you know, every three years the members of the diocese where the Fraternity is established are called to elect the diocesan responsables of the Fraternity—and it seemed a formal thing to him. “Initially, it was not very important for us. Instead, having taken it seriously, I understand that even such a juridical detail can become a very educative aspect. This fact meant for me taking seriously the freedom of the people who participate in the election and an attempt at judgment on the situation of the Movement, requesting people’s opinions.” All these instruments can be something formal or they can become an opportunity for education to understand what our companionship is, what our Fraternity is.

Fr. Giussani continued, “The aim of the ‘Fraternity of CL’ is to ensure the future of the experience of the Movement and its usefulness for the Church and for society. It does so through a continued emphasis on education and the realization of cultural, charitable, and missionary works in the structures of society both in and outside the Church. At this level I intend to take into consideration those persons who are willing to live it wholeheartedly.”¹⁴⁶ This is what builds our Fraternity: people who want to live it “wholeheartedly.”

Common Fund

Finally, I want to underline again the importance of the common fund. As I said publicly in the General Assembly of the Companionship of Works last November 25th, “Since the very beginning, the Movement has been supported exclusively by the economic sacrifices of the people who belong to it. Those who belong to the Movement commit to a monthly donation of a freely decided amount, the so-called ‘Common

¹⁴⁵ L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, op. cit., p. 256.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

Fund' that Fr. Giussani always indicated as a gesture that educates to a communal conception of what one possesses, to the awareness of poverty as an evangelical virtue, and as a gesture of gratitude for what one experiences in the Movement. Precisely for this educative reason, what is important is not the quantity one gives, but the seriousness with which one remains faithful to the commitment. To support the life of our communities in Italy and the world and its charitable, missionary, and cultural initiatives, the Movement of Communion and Liberation needs nothing else [and I have to yell at everyone that we need nothing else!], and for this reason we are free from everything and everyone in carrying out our task as a movement."¹⁴⁷

But we still have trouble with this. Just as other gestures in the life of the Movement "enter" increasingly more (for example, charitable work, because you perceive the good it is for you to participate in the gesture of charitable work, in order to then live everything), concerning the common fund we still have a long way to go, so much so that there are still—here!—3,000 people who give nothing to the common fund. Why is this? It is not an economic problem, because the common fund is not a question of quantity, but of faithfulness. We still do not understand the educative importance of this thing, its capacity to generate a new way of living, and so we have trouble with it. The first reason for the common fund is to educate us to live everything as received from an Other. It is in our best interests not to lose awareness of this. The second reason is to collaborate in the mission of the Church, building the Movement. The more you understand the importance, the more you want it to spread, so that we can testify to it everywhere (where the Movement is constantly born).

Some of us are faithful to the common fund in spite of difficulties. I'll read a letter: "Unfortunately, this evening I am not writing what, for a few years now, I expected to be writing you, that is, that I had sent a money order to cover all the past donations I had been unable to pay. Instead, I have to tell you that I just can't manage to pay those donations [this is also possible among us, with the mortification that you live, among ourselves we can say these things with freedom]. Bit by bit as I tried to set aside something to send to the common fund, some unexpected expense would come up. There's no use telling you these are difficult times. My husband worked a great deal for low wages, and

¹⁴⁷ J. Carrón, "With the Audacity of Realism," in *Traces-Litterae communionis*, December 2012, p. VI.

even though we make big sacrifices to be able to pay the mortgage and face all our expenses, we are not always able to honor our commitments without the help of our parents. Till now I have never written you, nor have I lowered the donation amount, even though it was already low, because I was ashamed that I could not respect my commitment. Now, instead, I am ashamed for having yielded to my pride and lost so much time in thoughts rather than participating in a work, even if with little [the quantity does not matter; it is a question of belonging, of awareness of belonging, of love for what we live together]. I hope one day I will be able to recover and make a donation.” The fact that someone can feel so strongly about this matters much more than how much they can give.

Books

Fr. Giussani’s new book has come out. It again takes up the texts from the “Equipes” of university students in the years 1990-91, and is entitled, *Un evento reale nella vita dell’uomo* [*A Real Event in the Life of Man*]. It is surprising to see how Fr. Giussani describes the nature of Christianity: “The real event of the life of a man is the recognition of and adherence to Christ; it is accepting to be chosen.”¹⁴⁸ And again, “Christianity is not the bond you establish with Christ, but it is the bond that Christ establishes with you.”¹⁴⁹ Only those who agree to let themselves be molded by this real event can become protagonists able to live the interminable toil of daily living, without being defeated by circumstances.

The book of the month for May-June is *The Power of the Powerless* by Václav Havel. The original text has been enriched with other very interesting speeches he made after 1978. Now we can perceive much better the power of these writings. Just think of the famous example of the gardener, which is the documentation of the cognitive, cultural, and “revolutionary” aspect of an “I” that establishes itself in reality. This is the only resource we have, Fr. Giussani told us.

Traces

Fr. Pino recounted recently how amazed he was by the fact that every morning a group of kids sells *Traces* at the Catholic University of Milan,

¹⁴⁸ L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell’uomo* [*A Real Event in the Life of Man*], op. cit., p. 163.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 326-327.

and that it all started with the initiative of a girl who said, “This is not the magazine of CL. This is ‘my’ magazine.” She spoke about it with five or ten friends, and for some it was the opportunity for an encounter, as happened, for example, selling the March *Traces* with Pope Benedict on the cover: some people wanted to understand why he was so important for us.

HOLY MASS

Readings: Acts 13:14,43-52; Psalm 99; Rev,9:14-17; Jn 10:27-30

HOMILY BY FR. MICHELE BERCHI

“I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can take them out of My hand.” This is what Christ desires for me, for each of us: to stay with me, to stay with each of us for eternity. You want me to be Yours for eternity. This is eternal life. We could say that Jesus is dying with the desire to stay with me. He died for the desire to stay with me, to make me His forever.

But who am I for You? Only before this faithful and unimaginable statement of Christ can we begin to understand who we are. Only before this true declaration of love, the first love: “My sheep,” Mine. Jesus saying “My sheep” to each of us is like a mother and father saying it to their child, like the man in love saying it about the woman who has told him *yes*. “My sheep hear my voice; I know them, and they follow Me.” Only before this declaration of love can we begin to understand that who I am coincides with who I am for You; who I am for You, O Lord.

Nobody can rip this experience away from us, nobody can take us out of Your hand, nobody. The form that You impressed in our heart, encountering us one by one, we will never be able to uproot, because all the thousands of people here, all of us have been encountered one by one; this immense multitude that nobody could count, of every nation, tribe, people, and tongue, has been gathered one by one. Who among us cannot say that the Lord brought us here, drying every tear from our eyes? You have made us Yours, and from that moment nobody will ever be able to take away this encounter that has made us Yours.

There is only one danger, the same one faced by the Jews, who, as the Acts of the Apostles tell us, condemned themselves as not worthy of eternal life. You can even be jealous of this belonging, and yet not adhere. You can belong to the chosen people, and not adhere. This incredible point of resistance is yet always possible; how well we know it, how well we know that cursed pride, that self-love to the point of self-ruin. However, looking at it well, this point of resistance fills us even more with wonder, because You, Lord, prefer to risk my saying *no* to You, rather than to buy my freedom. Why do You love us so much? Why?

Let us pray in this Holy Mass that the Spirit, through the flesh of Our Lady, from whom this companionship was born, may keep this wonder alive in us, because it is through this that it becomes true that nothing will ever separate us from the love of her Son.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest Ones:

This theme of this year's Spiritual Exercises, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" addresses squarely the way the Christian proclamation must be proposed to everyone, in particular to the women and men of our wearied Europe.

In fact, only the certainty of having been definitively seized by His love makes possible the passionate openness to what Fr. Giussani called "all the existent and all existence."

I ensure you of my closeness in prayer and in affection during these days of extraordinary importance for the life of Communion and Liberation.

I greet you and bless you.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Fr. Julián Carrón:

I unite with all of you gathered for the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in this extraordinary time in which we have participated in such great facts of grace as the resignation from the Petrine ministry of Benedict XVI and the beginning of the pontificate of Pope Francis, the new "Bishop of Rome." The Lord has surprised us with His presence and with the quality of His closeness. As we felt the intense and beautiful paternity of Benedict, so I feel particular familiarity, because of the 27 years spent on mission in Brazil, with the heart and the direct and simple style of Francis. Having met him, in Argentina and in Brazil at Aparecida, was a grace that opens our heart to a total following that involves intelligence and full availability, as we have always experienced with the Holy Popes, according to what Fr. Giussani taught us.

For this reason the theme of the Spiritual Exercises, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (*Rom* 8:35), opens us to the school of the charism and fills us with trust in the journey the Lord offers today to all of us and to His Church. I ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to live these Exercises as a true opportunity, as a favorable time for our person and for our mission in the world. In the "Year of Faith" and before such prodigious works of the mercy of God, may Our Lady make us

like herself, open to welcoming the gift of God, to giving ourselves totally to His plan and to communicating to everyone with frankness how much has happened to us.

Invoking upon you the blessing of the Lord and the protection of the great Mother of God,

I greet you cordially.

*The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Archbishop of Taranto*

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness

Pope Francis

Holy Father, 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises and thousands of others participating by satellite link in 21 nations, have meditated on the theme, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?”

Grateful for your blessing, which makes us experience the maternity of the Church, we have deepened the awareness that “the Lord is alive and walks among us” because Christianity is the experience of an event, Christ risen, as Fr. Giussani testified to us with his life and as we see in the words and gestures of Your Holiness, a continual spring of wonder and affection.

In a time in which faith is no longer “an obvious presupposition” (*Porta fidei*), we felt Jesus’ question directed to us, “But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?” The beginning of your pontificate urges us to rediscover faith not in a theory or a set of rules, but in the recognition of a Presence that is “attractive and persuasive because it responds to the profound need of human life.”

In the memory of Fr. Giussani, we wish to relive his same experience, to be so full of the gaze of Christ as to be a different presence, above all in the “existential outskirts” of this world.

In this Year of Faith we once again place ourselves and our communities, scattered throughout the world, in the hands of Your Holiness, with the desire to testify to the joy of being Christian to help our fellow men and women find in Christ the mercy that saves.

Together with our best wishes for the upcoming feast of your patron saint, we pray that Our Lady may render the mandate of the Successor of Peter a “*dulcis pondus*” as you journey with His people.

We look forward to meeting Your Holiness on May 18th in Saint Peter’s Square.

Thank you, Your Holiness.

His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Your Holiness, together with 24,000 friends of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for our Spiritual Exercises, and thousands of others participating by satellite link in 21 nations, meditating on the passage of Saint Paul, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” I thought of your person. We all ask Our Lady to accompany you in becoming one with Christ, the Friend who never abandons us. Hidden from the world, but not from our affectionate hearts, I ask your prayer for all our persons, that we may rediscover the joy of being Christians in this Year of Faith that you proclaimed with the solicitude of a father, to testify to the beauty of being Christians in daily life.

Most Illustrious Giorgio Napolitano

President of the Republic of Italy

Most Illustrious Mr. President:

The 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises have learned the news of your re-election.

“In this moment I am moved by the sentiment that I cannot shirk an assumption of responsibility toward the nation, trusting that it is matched by an analogous collective assumption of responsibility.” Your gesture of freedom increases our admiration for your person.

In this dramatic moment you appear to us as a resource for Italy, in the face of the urgent need to resume the road of true peace, which obtains the good so necessary for the life of individuals and society.

While aware of our limits, as believers educated by Fr. Giussani to passion for the destiny of our fellow men and women, we desire to offer our testimony, together with all people of good will, as a contribution to unblock the situation, affirming the value of the other in the search for the common good above any particular interest.

Understanding the enormous burden of new responsibility, we hope you obtain that for which you accepted this great sacrifice.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco

President of the Italian Episcopal Conference

The 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises, meditating on the theme, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?,” in the certainty that the risen Lord is the only One able to fill the infi-

nite need of the heart, confirm their commitment to live a faith that becomes increasingly personal, following Pope Francis who invites us to witness to it in the “existential outskirts” of our society, above all in this moment of great uncertainty.

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

Dearest Eminence:

The 24,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises and thousands of others following by satellite link from 21 nations, meditating on the theme, “Who will separate us from the love of Christ?” renew their commitment to live their Baptism as testimony of the joy of being Christians, in following Pope Francis.

His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Angelo:

Grateful for your message, we tell you that in these days we have experienced anew the presence of Christ, who seizes us through that form of teaching to which we have been entrusted.

We ask you to pray for each of us, that we may always be full of His attractive and persuasive gaze—one that cannot be reduced to our measure—to witness in the world to faith’s pertinence to the needs of life.

The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro
Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Filippo:

Your message helps us to be more aware of the grace we have received in having Fr. Giussani as father in the faith.

With the will to follow Pope Francis, we return to our homes more certain that nothing and nobody will be able to separate us from the love of Christ if we continue to have the simplicity to be amazed by the event of His presence that happens again among us now.

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 journey of Peter in following Christ—from his calling on the shore of Lake Genesareth, to his renewed life striving for full union with Him in missionary drive, to sharing His death on the Cross—shows us the full expression of an existence entirely given to the love of Jesus, which nothing can take away.

1. Eugène Burnand, *Peter and John Running to the Tomb*, Paris, Musée d'Orsay
- 2-4. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Calling of the Apostles Peter and Andrew*, full picture and details, Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art
5. Giusto dei Menabuoi, *The Calling of Peter and Andrew*, Padua, Baptistery
- 6-10. Masaccio, *The Tribute Money*, full picture and details, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
11. *The Healing of Peter's Mother-in-Law*, mosaic, Monreale, Italy, Cathedral
12. *Peter Saved from the Waters*, mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
13. *The Encounter of Christ with the Woman of Canaan*, mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
14. Pietro Lorenzetti, *The Washing of the Feet*, Assisi, San Francesco, lower Basilica
- 15-16. Giotto, *The Washing of the Feet*, full picture and details, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
17. Andrea de' Bartoli, *Prayer in the Garden of Olives*, detail, Assisi, San Francesco, lower Basilica
- 18-19. Duccio da Boninsegna, *Prayer in the Garden of Olives*, full picture and details, on the side of the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum
20. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Capture of Christ*, detail, toward the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum
21. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Denial of Peter*, toward the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum

22. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Appearance of Christ to the Disciples behind Closed Doors*, detail, toward the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum
23. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Appearance of Christ to the Disciples on Lake Tiberias*, toward the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum
24. Duccio da Boninsegna, *The Appearance of Christ to the Disciples on the Mount*, toward the *Maestà*, Siena, Cathedral Museum
- 25-26. Giotto, *Pentecost*, full picture and detail, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
27. *Pentecost*, miniature from the codex *Collectaneus Ottobeuren*, 11th century, f. 28, London, British Library
28. *The Resurrection of Tabitha*, mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
29. *Peter Heals the Lame Man*, mosaic, Palermo, Palatine Chapel
30. Masaccio, *Peter Heals the Lame Man*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
31. Masaccio, *The Resurrection of Tabitha*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
32. Masaccio, *The Resurrection of the Son of Theophilus*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
33. Masaccio, *Peter Heals with His Shadow*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
34. Masolino da Panicale, *The Preaching of Peter*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
35. Masaccio, *Distribution of Alms and the Death of Ananias*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
- 36-37. Filippino Lippi, *Paul Visiting Peter in Prison*, full picture and detail, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
- 38-39. Filippino Lippi, *Peter Being Liberated from Prison*, full picture and detail, Florence, Basilica of Santa Maria del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel
40. *Peter Being Liberated from Prison*, mosaic, Palermo, Palatine Chapel
41. *The Meeting of Peter and Paul*, mosaic, Palermo, Palatine Chapel
42. *The Meeting of Peter and Paul*, mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
43. *The Dispute with Simon Magus*, mosaic, Palermo, Palatine Chapel
44. *The Fall of Simon Magus*, mosaic, Palermo, Palatine Chapel
45. *The Apostles Peter and Paul*, bas-relief, Aquileia, National Archaeological Museum

46. *The Apostles Peter and Paul*, carving on the tomb of the child Asellus, Vatican City, Vatican Museum
47. Maestro of Soriguera, *The Apostles Peter and Paul*, Vich, Bishop's Museum
48. *Crucifixion of Peter*, fresco, Papal Chapel of the Sancta Sanctorum, Rome, Basilica of Saint John Lateran
49. Masaccio, *Crucifixion of Peter*, predella of the Pisa Polyptych, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemaeldegalerie
50. Caravaggio, *Crucifixion of Peter*, Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo
51. *Saint Peter Enthroned*, mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
52. *Face of Peter*, mosaic, Rome, Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls
53. *Face of Peter*, fresco, Vatican City, Fabbrica di San Pietro
54. School of Vecchietta, *Peter*, wood statue, Montemerano (Grosseto), San Giorgio
55. *Bust of Saint Peter*, marble, Vatican City, Saint Peter's Basilica
56. *Saint Peter on His Throne*, bronze, Vatican City, Saint Peter's Basilica
57. Saint Peter's Square, from the Loggia delle Benedizioni

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