

A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE

Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

Rimini, April 24, 2015

Notes from the Introduction by Julián Carrón

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

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

Come Holy Spirit

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

As the Holy Father’s telegram points out, at the beginning of our Spiritual Exercises we are still immersed in the light of the night of Easter. The whole night of Easter was dominated by the light of

the Paschal candle, by the light that the Risen Jesus introduced into history forever. It is in the light of this fact that the Church looks at everything, can look at everything, because only when the light of the resurrection of Jesus appears definitively can we comprehend what we are unable to understand without it: the ultimate meaning of everything. Therefore, in that night, precisely starting from the present, from that moment in which the light of the Resurrection dominated (that dictates the method for looking at everything), the Church has us look at all of history which, starting from creation, acquires all its luminosity; in this history we finally see revealed before our eyes the ultimate positivity of reality.

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

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

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

When do these words truly acquire meaning, if not with that fact, the powerful fact of the resurrection of Christ? Otherwise they would remain beautiful words for sentimental consolation, but

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

² *Is.* 54:6-8.10.

deep down would not constitute a crucial, decisive turning point, would not introduce something truly new into life. Only the fact of the Resurrection casts on them all the light needed and fills them with meaning. So we can understand why Jesus told His disciples, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I say to you, many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it.”³ The prophets were part of this history, had lived part of this history, desired to see its fulfilment, but did not see it. Therefore Jesus tells us, “Blessed are you who have seen it!”. He says it to us who have seen, who have seen the fulfilment of His design!

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

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

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

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

³ Lk.10:23-24.

⁴ Easter Exsultet, in the *Roman Missal*, <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm>.

⁵ *Ibid.* Easter Exsultet, in the *Roman Missal*, <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/easter/easter-proclamation-exsultet.cfm>.

Easter? Only a fact: the event of a people, like the one we saw in Saint Peter's Square, a people that confirms and proclaims the reality of the Resurrection.

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

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

Peter responds to this question, to its urgency, to the question that arises from the stunning fact of Pentecost, with his speech reported in the *Acts of the Apostles*. "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem. Let this be known to you, and listen to my words. These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning [a bit early to be drunk!]. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'It will come to pass in the last days,' God says, 'that I will pour out a portion of my spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams. Indeed, upon my servants and my handmaids I will pour out a portion of my spirit in those days, and they shall prophesy. And I will work wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below: blood, fire and a cloud of

⁶ Acts 2:1-13.

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

smoke. *The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord, and it shall be that everyone shall be saved who calls on the name of the Lord.*' You who are Israelites, hear these words, Jesus the Nazorean was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through Him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify Him. But God raised Him up, releasing Him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for Him to be held by it. For David says of Him, *I saw the Lord ever before me, with Him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.* My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would see one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was He abandoned to the netherworld or did His flesh see corruption. God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. Exalted at the right hand of God, He received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured it forth, as you see and hear. For David did not go up into heaven, but he himself said: *The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'* Therefore let the whole house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.' Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and they asked Peter and the other apostles, 'What are we to do, my brothers?'. Peter said to them, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"⁸

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

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

For this reason, friends, the days of Easter are the paradigm of Christian living. Try to imagine how the appearances of the risen Jesus, one day after the other – as the liturgy reminds us – must have bowled over the apostles! What was life for them, if not the assertion of His living presence, if

⁸ Acts 2:14-38.

not living with His presence in their gaze? They could never erase this from their minds.

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

Fr. Giussani emphasizes forcefully, “The living God is the God who revealed Himself in the Incarnation: in the death and resurrection of Christ. The true God is He who came among us, made perceptible, touchable, visible, audible. The Mystery [...] made Himself experienceable, made Himself presence in the history of humankind. [...] The Resurrection is the culmination of the Christian mystery. Everything was done for this, because this is the beginning of the eternal glory of Christ: ‘Father, the hour has come. Give glory to your Son.’ Everything and everyone has meaning in this event: the risen Christ. The glory of the risen Christ is the light, the color, the energy, the form of our existence, of the existence of all things.”¹⁰

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

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

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

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

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

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

Don Giussani does not mince words. “Without the Resurrection of Christ there is only one alternative: nothingness. We never think of this. Therefore we pass our days with that cowardice, that small-mindedness, that thoughtlessness, that obtuse instinctiveness, that repugnant distraction in which the ‘I [...] disappears, such that when we say ‘I’ we say it to affirm our own thought, our own measure (also called ‘conscience’) or our own instinct, our own desire to possess, our own alleged, illusory possession. Outside the Resurrection of Christ, everything is illusion: it is a game. Illusion is a Latinate word whose ultimate root is ‘play, mock or jeer’: we are the objects of mockery, mocked within, fooled. It is easy for us to look at the endless flock of people in our society: it is the great, endless presence of the people who live in our cities, of the people who live near us [...], of the people closest to us at home. And we cannot deny that we experience this small-mindedness, this narrow-mindedness, this thoughtlessness, this distraction, this total disappearance of the ‘I,’ this reduction of the ‘I’ to the fierce and presumptuous affirmation of the thought that

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72, 76.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 78.

comes [...] or of the instinct that claims to grasp and possess a thing that it decides is pleasing, satisfying, useful. [...] The word ask, pray, entreat is never so decisive as it is in front of the mystery of the risen Christ.”¹⁴

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

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

This gaze can also help us understand all the density of what we experienced in Saint Peter’s Square. As many of you have written, there are many signs of the event that Rome was for us. You, like me, know this well. “As we were returning in the car together with some friends,” one of you says succinctly, “there was a different atmosphere: it was patently clear that something had happened to all of us during that day.” There are many signs that March 7th did not leave merely a sentimental repercussion, but that it gave a new gaze on life.

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

I noted in some a certain amazement at this call to conversion. But friends, it would be presumption in us to think we have no need of conversion, that there is nothing in us that needs to change. Who of us does not need conversion? Listening to the various reactions, I thought of a passage from the letter to the Hebrews that quotes Proverbs. I think it can help us read the Pope’s speech with the right attitude. “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 78-79, 81.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 81.

¹⁶ Saint Augustine, Expositions on the Psalms, 38:13. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1801038.htm>

of the joy that lay before Him He endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken His seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how He endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding blood. You have also forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as sons: *'My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord or lose heart when reprovved by Him; for whom the Lord loves, He disciplines, He scourges every son He acknowledges.'* (Prov. 3:11-12) Endure your trials as 'discipline'; God treats you as sons. For what 'son' is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. [...] He does so for our benefit, in order that we may share His holiness. At the time, all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain, yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who are trained by it."¹⁷

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

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

¹⁷ Hebrews 12:1-11.

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

The complete documents can be found on the CL website at:

https://www.fraternita.comunioneliberazione.org/Documenti/Statuto_ENG.pdf and

https://www.fraternita.comunioneliberazione.org/Documenti/decretoRiconoscimento_uk.pdf

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

Why is it that the Pope and Fr. Giussani do not have this fear? Their certainty lies in something different from what they do and have. Listen to what Giussani says. It seems to me a crucial judgment for beginning well these days of Spiritual Exercises and for looking at everything in the light of the resurrection of Christ. "Normally [...] we seek [our] substance [...] in what we do or in what we have, which is the same. Thus, our life never has that sentiment, that experience of full certainty, that the word 'peace' indicates, that certainty and that fullness [...], that full certainty, [...] without which there is no peace [...], no joy. At best, we reach smug satisfaction in what we do or in ourselves. And these fragments of satisfaction in what we do or in what we are bring no gladness or joy, no sense of sure fullness, no certainty and no fullness." This is what we miss! "The certainty is something that occurred in us, happened to us: [...] the substance of our person [...] [is] something that happened to us [...], 'One who happened to us.' [...] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me'." ¹⁹

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

So then, the censure of ourselves, the fear, the lack of audacity confirm how far we have shifted from Christ, how distant we are from Him and how centered we are on ourselves: Christ is not the center of our life! In fact, only those who have not distanced themselves from Christ have no fear of looking at everything, even their own evil. How much we need to be decentered from ourselves so that He may return to being the center, and so be able to look at everything, truly everything! "Jesus Christ always precedes us, and when we arrive, He is already there waiting."²² Who could imagine a greater gift for oneself than this, for one's life, anything more useful for beginning these days?

But it does not end here; it is not just this, because without the experience of mercy not only do I fail to find peace, but above all I do not truly know Christ. "Honest people," says Péguy, "do not

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

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

²¹ *Ivi.*

²² *Ivi.*

present that opening produced by a terrible wound, by an unforgettable wretchedness, by an insuperable regret, by a stitch of suturing eternally badly tied, by a moral unease, by an invisible hidden anxiety, by a secret bitterness, by a perpetually masked fall, by a scar that is forever poorly healed. They do not present that opening to grace that is essentially sin. [...] ‘Honest people’ do not let themselves be bathed by grace.”²³

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

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

“A Pharisee invited Him to dine with him, and He entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that He was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind Him at His feet weeping and began to bathe His feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this he said to himself, ‘If this man were a prophet, He would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching Him, that she is a sinner.’ Jesus said to him in reply, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Tell me, Teacher,’ he said. ‘Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred day’s 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 has anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.’ He said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ The others at table said to themselves, ‘Who is this who even forgives sins?’ But He said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you; go in peace.’”²⁵

Who knows Jesus more? Who can experience a greater love and live the morality of which the Pope spoke? The one who has been greatly forgiven, greatly loves. How could that woman love so intensely? It was her awareness that she had already been forgiven, because she had met that man. What audacity! The audacity that came to her from being forgiven enabled her to enter that house

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

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

²⁵ *Lk. 7:36-50.*

and make that unprecedented gesture. There was a place where she was welcomed with all her evil; she felt embraced by a gaze full of mercy, and so she was not afraid to look at her own sin. Decentered from herself and her sin, entirely determined by the gaze of Christ, that woman could no longer look at anything without Christ in her gaze. This is the liberation that Christ brings to our life, no matter what our sins may be.

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

A gesture of these dimensions is not possible without the contribution of each of us. “How?”, asked Fr. Giussani at the 1992 Spiritual Exercises, “With only one thing: silence. At least for a day and a half [...] may we discover and let ourselves sink down into silence! It exalts thought and heart, the perception of what surrounds us and therefore the fraternal, friendly embrace of people and things. In a day and a half out of the whole year, may we allow ourselves the effort and the toil of this silence!”. We will miss the best if we do not allow the space to let what happens to us penetrate deep down to the marrow of our bones. “Silence is not merely not talking; silence is our hearts and minds being filled with more important things, those to which we normally never give a thought, even though they are the secret driver for everything we do. Nothing of what we do is sufficient for us, satisfying [...], or provides an exhaustive reason for doing it [...]. [Instead] silence [...] coincides with what we call memory,” to let this gaze enter. “This is why we insist that silence be respected in its nature [...], but also in order to save the context in which silence can be useful: not speaking uselessly. We encourage you to observe silence above all during the travel to and from the hall,” because in this way, when we enter the hall, “memory will be enhanced by the music we will hear or by the paintings we will see; in this way we will open ourselves to look, to listen, to feel with the mind and heart what in some way the Lord will propose to us.” He concluded: “We must have great compassion for what is proposed to us and the way it is proposed. The intention is good; it wants your good, it wants the best for you. It would be very melancholy not to be able to do otherwise, but what we do together in this day and a half is nothing other than an aspect of the great loving gesture with which the Lord – however you realize it – moves your life toward the Destiny that is Himself.”²⁶

²⁶ L. Giussani, *Dare la vita per l'opera di un Altro*, Esercizi spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione. Appunti dalle meditazioni - Rimini 1992, suppl. a *CL-Litterae Communionis*, n. 6, 1992, [*Giving Your Life For The Work of An Other*]. *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Notes from the meditations*], pp. 4-5.