

9. Imitating God: we desire to be like Him

by **Julián Carrón***

The experience of forgiveness and mercy that changes the features of our life, causes us to desire to do good. Fr. Giussani recounts, “When I did something wrong, my parents, God rest their souls, did not scold me or punish me. They forgave me. When this happens, whether you are a child or an adult, you feel the desire to do good.” You feel the desire! “The forgiveness that we already have within must manifest itself. It manifests itself from within us, from that depth in which we are born from Him, are born as freedom; it must manifest itself in my love for you. This will be the last day, when an unfathomable evidence will persuade everyone: immense pain will become eternal love.”¹

The testimony of a friend in prison shows us that this is possible. “Dear friends, you have no idea how much you helped me one morning when I was returning to prison. I went in and like always, they searched me, a search that has little to do with being human, with dignity. They stripped me. What enabled me to stay in front of this trial was also your face, your good, and I told myself, ‘If what you shared with your friends is true, then even this trial, or better, this circumstance, is for me. There can be no circumstance that can rob me of the most important thing I carry inside me, that is, a gaze of gladness.’ So, in that moment you were my salvation. I embraced all of reality, even if it made me sad, not just for me, but above all for those who did it to me. But I understood that it wasn’t their fault. Where’s the fault in someone who has not had an encounter, who has not had someone to love him gratuitously and consequently taught him to love? How can he manage without a guide like this?! Where’s the fault in someone who doesn’t have a witness to follow who makes him understand what man is and above all why life is worth living? I looked at them with great tenderness, not because I liked being strip-searched or treated this way, no, not this. I looked at them with tenderness because if someone is always treated this way, he will consequently treat others the same way. His dignity was hurt first, and he acts accordingly with those he encounters!”

This is what happens, Fr. Giussani observes. “Through our astonishment at His mercy, He makes us desire to be like Him.” The Pope has invited us to live a Year of Mercy so that we will desire more and more to be like Christ. Fr. Giussani continues: “Even people who have no interest in the Church or in morality desire to be like Him! They begin really to forgive their enemies, those who do them harm; so we can understand how Job, before the enemies who had destroyed everything he had, could say, ‘The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ When we get up in the morning, feeling the forgiveness that renews our lives, we also feel like saying, ‘Lord, help me to be like You!’ For Jesus had already told His disciples, ‘Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.’ [This is the theme that the Pope has chosen for »

* From the booklet of the Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2016.

© 2016 Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione for the texts by J. Carrón “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness”.

» this Holy Year of Mercy—“Be merciful as your Father is merciful.”] This seems to go against good sense, but only up to a certain point, because it is desire that defines the soul of the new man. We are not truly human if we do not wish to be merciful like our heavenly Father. The question is whether or not we really desire it.” It is not whether we make mistakes or not: it is whether we desire to be merciful like our heavenly Father. “So the miracle of mercy is the desire to change. And this implies acceptance, because otherwise it would not be desire for change, but pretension and presumption, and it would never become entreaty to an Other, it would not be trust in an Other. This desire defines the present, the instant of the man who is a sinner. The miracle is accepting oneself and entrusting oneself to an Other present so as to be changed, standing before Him and begging.”²

For this reason, Fr. Giussani concludes, “Entreaty is the whole expression of man [...]. So there is no need to be afraid of anything, not even of yourself. And we feel like children whom the Father bends down to pick up. Man becomes truly a child held in his Father’s arms. A person in his poverty, astonished by the mysterious perfection of God, Father, Son and Spirit, asks to be like Him. And this is not a bold presumption, but a realistic, simple supplication like that of a child that is fully aware of itself.”³

How do those who have lived an experience like that incarnated and described by Fr. Giussani understand their being in the world, their task in history?

In 1993, in the midst of the political and social crisis provoked by the *Tangentopoli* phenomenon, in which it seemed that everything in Italy was collapsing, Fr. Giussani was asked, “*What is the task of the Christian today? Rebuilding the world in the name of Christ?*” He responded, “The task is to communicate to the human nature that surrounds us the mercy with which Christ treats us.”⁴

It is surprising to see how Pope Francis’s attitude agrees completely with this. “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy.” And again, “The Church’s very credibility,” that is, the possibility of justifying herself to the world and us, “is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church has an endless desire to show mercy.” Perhaps “we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”⁵ As we can see, the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy offers a wealth of instruction for achieving our task in the world, according to the nature of Christianity.

¹ *Guardare Cristo*, “Esercizi Spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione. Appunti dalle meditazioni” [di Luigi Giussani] [*Looking at Christ. The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Notes from the Meditations (by Luigi Giussani)*], suppl. To *Litterae communionis-CL*, n. 4, 1990, p. 28.

² Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 137-38.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴ Luigi Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere* [*The “I,” Power, Works*], Marietti 1820, Genova, 2000, p. 227.

⁵ Francis, *Bull of Indiction*, April 11, 2015, ¶ 10.