

“WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!” (Mk 2:12)

LESSON - 1

“You will weep and mourn” (John 16:20)

by Pierluigi Banna*

The truth to which the song *Non son sincera* introduces us is striking. We can live, we can try to do something good in life, we can even decide to spend our Easter vacation not at the club, but at the GS Triduum, and yet there is a voice deep within us that tells us that we are not sincere. “My time goes by, I’m not sincere, / I love the people, I’m not sincere, / I love the present, I’m not sincere” (page 27 of the Booklet).** We can even fall in love, live the good life, touch the stars, and yet those same errors and same incoherence returns, even in front of all the greatest emotions, all the enthusiasm we have for life. We have even said, in some rare moments, “We have never seen anything like this!”, but then it seems like the tables turn, and our expiration date comes; the effect vanishes, and we return to the normal life we had before.

We feel the temptation to no longer say that “cursed” phrase, “We have never seen anything like this!”, because sooner or later the effect ends, vanishes. One of you writes: “The phrase: ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ I no longer want to pronounce. Because I know from experience that, once the present emotion passes, in the long run, this position does not hold.” The poetess Alda Merini wrote something similar (on page 28 of the Booklet): “That which is passed [however great] / is as if it never existed [...] / That which has already been seen / counts for nothing” (*Il mio passato*). The question now arises that many of you shared in your contributions: “Is it worth it to be happy, if we are not sure that it lasts for ever?” Or: “How can we have a thirsty gaze that is not extinguished in front of the first difficulty?” Another one of you writes: “It scares me to think that the 17 years of my life have been an indistinct and un-influential series of beautiful and ugly things; this makes me scared. How do we know if this beauty really exists? How is it possible to understand it effectively? Where is this thing that gives sense and order to all the confused anecdotes of life?” This is our question today. Try to focus on it in your life. Are we really condemned to the dictatorship of feelings, by which, once the emotion passes, any beautiful thing becomes an old memory?

Just think, even the disciples of Jesus had the same problem: on Thursday evening they were full of affection for that man: “Even if everyone falls away, I will not!”, Peter says, »

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** The booklet “*We have never seen anything like this*” contains the quotes cited throughout the Triduum and is [downloadable in pdf format](#).

» and adds, "I will even die for you"; and the others, "We will too!" (cf. Matthew 26:33-35). But, a few hours later, they get tired and they can't keep Him company while He goes through the most dramatic moment of His life. On the Mount of Olives, His disciples fall asleep. And when Jesus is arrested, they all flee. Anything but dying for Him! They run away and abandon Him. As you see, we are like them. After the initial emotion—which makes us exclaim: "We have never seen anything like this!"—, any little thing makes it all crumble.

The feelings of the Apostles are the same as ours: we have seen, been struck, made promises, but then we run away. Let's listen attentively to the words of the Gospel. In the end, does everything have an expiration date? Are we all condemned to the dictatorship of feelings?

"They went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, 'You will all fall away, for it is written, *I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.' Peter said to him, 'Even though they all fall away, I will not.' And Jesus said to him, 'Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.' But he said emphatically, 'If I must die with you, I will not deny you.' And they all said the same. He came the third time and said to them, 'Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.' And they all left him and fled." (Mark 14:26-31, 41-42, 50)

"They all left Him and fled." But how could they abandon the greatest thing, the greatest person they had ever met? Yes, under the wave of fear, of uncertainty, they abandoned Him. It seemed like a great friendship, that man seemed like the greatest friend they had ever known, and did it take so little to make them flee? It would seem like the song *A beautiful disaster* (page 29) is right, a song you may or may not like, but which says something important: "I take those pieces of life that I lived by mistake [because living them by mistake has to be justified] and change them into small emotions." The dictatorship of small emotions! Sudden fear, anguish, rage, incomprehension shatter even the most beautiful things in life, just like for the disciples of Jesus. So many of you spoke about it in your contributions. The love you have been waiting for has finally arrived: she is just right and things are going well, also for her. What intensity! What understanding! "It seems like she has known me from the cradle. I have never seen anything as beautiful as this!" But one morning, everything goes wrong in an instant. Everything goes wrong: the alarm clock didn't go off, your dad has already left, so you have to take the bus and don't get to school until second hour, you're in a hurry, everything in a hurry! Then you get interrogated and "she" starts sending you messages: "But where are you?", "I'm waiting for you!", "What happened?", "Why didn't you come?". In the meantime, you think that maybe you should take the bus more often, because there is this beautiful girl, she is much simpler, she doesn't attack you with messages, demanding to know where you are, what you are doing; one look and you understand each other. While responding to "her" is not so spontaneous, and then "But who does she claim to be in my life?" So, we think that it's over. Small emotions are enough to topple even the greatest promises. Leopardi would say: "But if a discordant / note assails the ear / that heaven turns to nothing in an instant" (*Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna [On the portrait of a beautiful woman]*). That paradise vanishes, shatters. So it seems that we are constrained to this dictatorship of emotions, to change our mind from moment to moment, not to have true affection for anything, to be slaves, thrown about by feelings. Father Giussani asked himself what was the enemy of friendship: "The enemy of friendship is mood," because mood is the immediate reaction (sadness, boredom, anger), "it is like the flowers of the field [...]: in the morning they are there, and in the evening they are dried out" (page 28).

We can even try to defend ourselves by our own strategies, but even these don't last: we try not to be overwhelmed by the wind of emotions, we try to repeat to ourselves and convince »

» ourselves that it is useless to be enthusiastic and delude ourselves, because the emotion will pass, because we have seen it all before and we know that in the end we will not be happy! We say, "I am a piece of ice, no emotion can touch me. Because I know that it all passes, I will not let myself have affection for anyone." We try to be cynical, like stones, flat-lined, deflecting everything that happens. I exploit every relationship that interests me, because I have already tried everything, I know how it's going to end and I try to be like a rock in front of situations. "Are you going to the Triduum? But you know they do it every year? Everyone arrives and exclaims: "Beautiful, beautiful!", then they go home and it's all over. Calm down. You're in your first year, eh! Wait until you get to your fifth year. You'll understand that it's a wheel." Like one of you wrote, very poignantly: "What use is the stupor given by this embrace that has been given to me, if tomorrow morning I will live my life exactly like yesterday and the day before, without anything having really changed in me?" This is truly inhuman: to be cynics already at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old! To think that nothing can really change, to know already that it will all come to an end.

So, should we just get rid of all our emotions? No! Listen to how Father Giussani continues, "Friendship is not against emotion" (*Avvenimento di libertà*, page 28 of the Booklet). Because a man without emotions is a dead man. If you renounce the stupor of the beginning, how could you fall in love? Who would renounce "that most sweet, and tender, and surprising sense of panic" (*Is It Possible to Live This Way?*) that grabs hold of us when someone attracts us, in front of a person that finally understands us? But who would renounce this? It would be truly inhuman not to be enthusiastic, not to get upset, not to be sad. Reality, by the very fact that it happens, awakens a feeling, provokes emotions that break open the heart.

True friendship is not against emotion, but "true friendship is against emotion without reason" (*Avvenimento di libertà*, page 28 of the Booklet), because an emotion without reason makes you taste a thousand things, but their sense escapes you, you cannot grasp their meaning. Like Eliot says: "We had the experience but missed the meaning" (*Four Quartets*, page 29 of the Booklet). What is an emotion without reason? I will give a very banal example. You will say: but this is too simple! And yet, it happens like this. I go into a forest and I see a beautiful mushroom, really beautiful, it seems to come from the world of the Smurfs, the top has symmetrical dots, some bigger, some smaller. Beautiful! What a beautiful mushroom! It will be the best mushroom I've ever tasted. I can't wait to eat it. I'd even eat it raw. A little bit of oil on top: incredible! In front of me there is an old sign that says, "Attention: poisonous mushrooms!" No, but this is too beautiful to be poisonous! Come on! It is so beautiful! I am moved. I take it. I should follow this emotion. I take the mushroom, I have to eat it. It is so beautiful that it has to be good. It is so good that... it kills me! This is the emotion that confuses the heart, without reason. On the wave of this emotion without reason, we behave a thousand times a day with different mushrooms (and it has happened to us), but above all with friendships, which is the most serious thing: "But she brags a lot, what's wrong with that?" Use your reason! You are a man, thanks be to God. When we follow our emotions without reason—you know it well—, what we talked about last night happens: we fool ourselves and we can't blame anyone else. Like the song that we are about to sing says, everything turns to dust in our hands, having wrecked even the most beautiful experiences. Just like what happened to the disciples: dust in our hands, names with no reason. What had they done to their relationship with Jesus? "What remains is the regret of wasted time / and maybe, the expectation of you." Let us sing together *La guerra*, on page 29.