

“In what circumstances have you felt yourself truly loved?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

12. The experience of the gift

by Luigi Giussani*

In the Liturgy, the communication of God’s Spirit is called “Donum Dei Altissimi” (Gift of the Highest God). This is not a human construct, conquest, or even foresight, and even less a human right. It is a pure *gift*.

And so the Spirit of God is a pure event within us, a total surprise, an absolute gift that has only one analogy: the total gratuitousness of our being, our very existence. However, a bestowal whose meaning has not been revealed to us cannot be considered a gift. We could not recognize life and the universe as gifts if we did not await the revelation of their meaning.

Thus the Spirit of Pentecost is *the gift par excellence*, because it is through the Spirit that we are drawn into the mystery of Christ and understand the experiences of that person who fully explains and resolves our reality. “Faith is the light of the world.” Human solitude dissolves with the advent of this gift. Human experience is no longer a lonely, disconsolate powerlessness but awareness and vitality, as the flame indicates the sign of the coming of the Spirit, “forcefully and gently.”

The fearful darkness that the apostles experience is transformed into a courageous lucidity (note their confrontation with civil and religious authorities).

Existence becomes an immense certainty: “This is the victory over the world—our faith.”¹ They are no longer alone; they experience the promise of Christ: “I shall not leave you orphans.”²

Truly man is no longer alone, because by now the most authentic cry of the battle of existence is Saint Paul’s: “There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength.”³ We cannot strip ourselves of our weakness and of that which confines us. Rather, an Other accompanies us, “like a giant on the path.” A new existence is realized. The irresistible impetus of God’s presence mysteriously enters the fragile human makeup, at the source of this “new creature.”⁴ Our strength is an Other. Our certainty is an Other. Existence is a profound dialogue. Thus solitude is abolished at its very roots in every moment of life.

To exist is to be loved definitively (“He is faithful to his love”)⁵ and to abandon oneself definitively to this love (“Life to me, of course, is Christ”).⁶ Human existence is an inexhaustible, supremely powerful friendship.

¹ 1 John 5:4.

² John 14:18.

³ Philippians 4:13.

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:1; Galatians 6:15.

⁵ 2 Chronicles 5:13.

⁶ Philippians 1:21.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 71-72.