

“According to you, what are the most meaningful moments of our experience?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

15. Our Father

by Luigi Giussani*

The unexpected gift of the Spirit renews us, and the supreme fruit of this renewal is our capacity for a new word and a new gesture that express the way we feel, face, and engage ourselves with reality.

The urgency of human needs and the inexhaustible attempts to satisfy them, the inevitable and intolerable final perplexity—all of this inspires, shapes, and continually stirs up a human cry for a committed human gesture, which our nature demands. Such a cry and commitment may be expressed uncertainly and vaguely but, if guided by violence, may also take on the morbid incomprehension of madness. The human person knows not what he or she reaches out to and awaits. The gift of the Spirit and the discovery and acceptance of Christ as the center of all things finally give definitive terms to man’s commitment to word and action, endow him with an awareness that fulfills reason’s thrust and a promise of complete freedom, which is a specific, unambiguous goal.

The new cry, “the redeemed word,” is *Christian prayer*. “For when we cannot choose words in order to pray properly, the Spirit Himself expresses our plea ... and makes us cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’”¹

Saint Paul’s observation recalls the wonderful human and Christian document that is the first part of the eleventh chapter of Saint Luke:

Now once He was in a certain place praying, and when He had finished one of His disciples said, “Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.” He said this to them, “Say this when you pray:

Father, may thy name be held holy,
Thy kingdom come;
give us each day our daily bread,
and forgive us our sins,
for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us.
And do not put us to the test.”

He also said to them, “Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, ‘My friend, lend me three loaves, because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him’; and the man answers from inside the house, ‘Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you.’ I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it him for friendship’s sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants. »

¹ Romans, 8:26, 15.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 75-77.

» "So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!"²

Our aspirations are translated into a deeply personal "you," as particular and familiar as a mother, and into a very clear, exhaustive plea, an awareness of the relationship between the two participants in the dialogue: "Our Father ... thy Kingdom come ... forgive us our sins ... free us from evil ... No one can say: Lord Jesus, if not in the Spirit."³ And the redemption of the gesture is the *Sacrament*. With the Sacrament the existential commitment no longer runs the great danger of losing control, of veering from the path to true reality by falling prey to the appearance of things. In the act of the Sacrament, the visible sign that engages the human person leads him or her to touch divine reality with an indescribable confidence. Thus no human action meets so serenely and comprehensively that expectancy that calls man to action.

There is a marvelous consequence of this redemption of the human word and act: the communal dimension emerges from the very heart of the new word and gesture of prayer and the Sacrament. There can no longer be a true pleading with God or a commitment to Him that is not, at least implicitly, open to the entire community of His Kingdom. The openness to the community determines the truth of the word and the rightness of the act. "When you will pray, you will pray like this: Our Father, thy kingdom come... We form a single body because we all have a share in this one loaf."⁴

On our common path our inability to be happy is the most powerful motive to share our lives; but, much more profoundly, it leads us to discover that each individual's happiness is a Reality common to all; one thing: "one Spirit, one Lord ... one God."⁵

The Liturgy is the greatest expression of the freshness of prayer and action with which the Spirit imbues us. Liturgy generates the supreme form of the earthly community, where the individual is enhanced in all his aspects by accepting the universal communion of the children of God. Here, even the material world—time and things—is assumed in a sole gesture that truly represents the beginning of the redemption of that same physical nature to which Saint Paul refers: "From the beginning till now the entire creation, as we know, has been groaning in one great act of giving birth."⁶

Because of its completeness the Liturgy becomes the unique locus of a genuine, complete education in receiving the Spirit and following His transforming power.

² Luke 11:1–13.

³ 1 Corinthians 12:3.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:17.

⁵ Ephesians 4:5, 6.

⁶ Romans 8:22.