

YOU ARE THE LIVING FOUNTAIN OF HOPE

Luigi Giussani, *Perché la Chiesa* [Why the Church?], Milan: Rizzoli, 2003, 307–10

Christianity is the announcement of the Christ event, of God who has come into the world as man. The mystery is no longer the “unknowable.” In the Christian sense, “mystery” is the source of being, God, in as much as He makes himself available to experience through a human reality. This concrete mode can no longer be eliminated, and remains crucial for everyone and forever. The Church is the continuity of the event of the Incarnation in history, and it is what makes it possible for man today to relate with Christ. We cannot however speak of the Church without looking at the woman from whom it is born and continues to be born, Mary, Mother of Christ.

Our Lady was chosen to be and to create the first dwelling, the first temple of God in the world, of the true, living God. She was chosen to be the first house of God, the first context, the first milieu, the first place in which everything belonged to God, to the God who was coming to live among us.

When, in Palestine, in Nazareth, I saw the small grotto, the house where Our Lady lived, and I read a rather plain plaque on which is written, *Verbum caro hic factum est*, Here the Word was made flesh, I was astonished and, as it were, petrified at the unexpected evidence of God’s method, who took nothing, really nothing, so as to enter history. The Word was made flesh in the entrails of a fifteen- or seventeen-year old girl, just like each one of us was flesh in his mother’s womb.

Through Our Lady’s motherhood God became part of human experience, of the experience of the human “I” and of its every action. It is through Mary that all the renewal of the world passes. As the election of the chosen people passed through Abraham, so the new definitive people of God, to which Christ has called us to belong, passes through a girl’s womb, a woman’s flesh.

So Mary is the mother of the living, and for all men happiness passes and will pass through her flesh and, even before that, through her heart, her yes, her *fiat*.

Mary’s *fiat* is abandonment to the Mystery, and it marks the perfect justice of a creature before its Creator, the acknowledgment of a Presence greater than itself – this is faith. In Mary faith is expressed by her *fiat*, which is like a breath, like nothing, just as that little girl was nothing. This enormous feat, without which the whole history of the universe would be quite

different, was like a breath! *Fiat*, the breath of freedom. And freedom is the capacity to adhere to being, to the Mystery that invades our life. *Fiat*, “yes.”

In the impenetrable intimacy of this act of free acceptance lies the keystone in the mysterious encounter between God and Mary, and the gigantic stature of this Woman “blessed amongst women,” of this victorious voyager on the human journey, *ut gigas ad currendam viam* (Ps 18:6 *Vulgate*). *Fiat*: I adhere to You, Lord. What freedom Mary had before the absolutely extraordinary thing that was happening to her, and on which the whole world’s destiny depended!

What is most striking when one reads the Gospel account of the Annunciation is when the Angel finishes speaking and Our Lady says, “Yes, let it be done to me according to your word.” “And the Angel left her” (Lk. 1:38). Just think of the loneliness, even psychological, that girl had put her, with no one else knowing what had happened, and with nothing to cling to, no common human evidence to support her. She had no apparent motivation but fidelity to her memory. She could have said, “It was an illusion, it was only my imagination.”

“And the Angel left her.” Faith is precisely that strength, full of attention with which the soul adheres to the sign that God has used, and clings steadfastly to this sign, despite everything. In this we grasp the summit of faith, made of the truth of reason, of faithfulness to one’s own history (to what had just happened) and faithfulness to God’s greatness, a hint of which had reached her with evidence.

Man’s greatness is in faith, in acknowledging the great Presence within a human reality.

Since she said yes to the mode with which the Mystery was acting, her life is a light of dawn for all of us and for all men till the end of time, as Dante summarized wonderfully in his Hymn to the Virgin: “Here you are for us the midday torch of charity, and below among mortals you are the living fountain of hope.”

She was able to say yes, and so the Word was made flesh and became a Presence.

Our Lady introduces us into the Mystery, that is, into the meaning of our days, into the meaning of time as it runs on; her watchful care guides us on our way, her example educates us, her figure is the pattern of our resolution. A generous Mother, she generates the great Presence of Christ for us. We are consoled, forgiven, comforted, fed, enriched and gladdened by that Presence

felt in the new circumstances in which the Lord which is reborn from Our Lady’s flesh. This is why we ask her every day to give us a share in her freedom, in her promptness, in her path.

The most synthetic and suggestive formula that expresses the Church's self-awareness as the ongoing presence of Christ in history is: *Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam*. This invocation affirms God's chosen method and expresses the ardent desire for a coincidence between the relationship with Christ, who is generated in the Spirit, and reality, which is that woman's womb. *Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam*: what happened two thousand years ago is recomposed and repeated in all the relationships that fix the pattern of men's lives and the pattern that is in history, that is, the history of God within the history of the world.