



EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

## **WHAT CAN WITHSTAND THE TEST OF TIME?**



RIMINI 2019



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On the cover: *Christ in limbo restores life to the elect.*

The image of the descent into limbo belongs to a cycle of frescos of the late 1400s in the chapel of Saint Sébastien in Lanslevillard, in Haute-Savoie, France. Christ the victor over death, represented by the devil crushed under the gates of hell, draws the deceased out of the kingdom of the dead, led by Adam. Some details stand out: the nakedness of the dead, the same nakedness of children when they are born. In contrast to the crying of newborns, their faces express gladness because they are aware that the life they are about to enter is eternal. Finally, there is the detail of Jesus grasping Adam by the wrist, not by the hand. The wrist is the part of the human body where one can perceive life, and Christ gives back life. Adam does not grasp Christ, but lets himself be grasped by Him in a gesture of total humility.

*“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises that has gathered in Rimini the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, accompanied this year by the significant theme, “What can withstand the test of time?” the Supreme Pontiff sends his cordial greetings, with the prayer that the memory of the sacrifice of Christ and His incarnation in history may be a concrete help offered by God the Father to overcome all the adversity and mediocrity of the present time. Pope Francis invites you to study the signs of the times and to recognize in the many stories of holiness the opportunity for building His dwelling place in the world. He gladly imparts, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the apostolic blessing you requested, to you and all those present, their families, and the entire Movement.”*

***Cardinal Pietro Parolin***, Secretary of State of His Holiness,  
*April 12, 2019*

# *Friday evening, April 12*

*During entrance and exit:*

*Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony no. 7 in A Major, op. 92,*

*Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker*

*Spirto Gentil n. 3, Deutsche Grammophon*

## ■ INTRODUCTION

**Julián Carrón**

Perhaps never before have we come here with such an awareness that our own strength cannot make lasting the beautiful things that happen to us in life. And maybe never before, as today, have we been so aware of how deeply we need someone who withstands the test of time, who responds to our boundless need for duration.

Therefore, let us ask for the Holy Spirit, who only is able to support and respond to all the desire for fullness that constitutes us.

### *Come Holy Spirit*

I'll begin by reading the Holy Father's message to us: "On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises that has gathered in Rimini the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, accompanied this year by the significant theme, "What can withstand the test of time?" the Supreme Pontiff sends his cordial greetings, with the prayer that the memory of the sacrifice of Christ and His incarnation in history may be a concrete help offered by God the Father to overcome all the adversity and mediocrity of the present time. Pope Francis invites you to study the signs of the times and to recognize in the many stories of holiness the opportunity for building His dwelling place in the world. He gladly imparts, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the apostolic blessing you requested, to you and all those present, their families, and the entire Movement. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State for His Holiness."

### **1. A question that cannot be eliminated**

I was amazed by the interest aroused by the question chosen as the title for these days together—"What can withstand the test of time?"—as seen in the number of contributions you have sent: two thousand. I am truly grateful

for the help you give me for our common journey. This was also true of the university students; they were also truly struck by this question. But for us adults the question takes on greater weight because we have lived longer and have more experience, and thus more data with which to respond. This is why we have decided to put this question at the center of the Fraternity's Spiritual Exercises, so that we, too, can make the same verification.

For many of you, receiving the question was a surprise that evoked, above all, gratitude. "I am filled with immense gratitude," wrote one person. Another wrote, "Allow me to thank you for this question you shared with each of us. It has restored our awareness that each of us is a piece of the charism that has impacted our life and causes us to be here, now, to take your question seriously." And yet another, "With immense gratitude I am waiting for the upcoming Spiritual Exercises. My heart, though often wearied, awaits. Awaits what? To hear Him speak again, because nothing fills my heart so much and nothing challenges my reason so much; that is, nothing exalts my humanity so much! What a grace has befallen me!"

The interest kindled in so many of you is the sign that the question was not perceived as something abstract, but as an existential question that touched a nerve in us, intercepted a crucial question about life that cannot be eluded. The interest demonstrated indicates how much we feel the urgent need for something that lasts. This is all the more amazing given that we live in a liquid society and should be accustomed to the fact that nothing lasts. In fact, one look at the situations and lifestyles that characterize many of our lives, young people and adults alike, which reveal instability, inconstancy, and a continual dance of contrasting perceptions. Often we are prey to a vortex of affections and feelings in which everything is hurriedly built and dismantled, and as a result, we are easily the victims of disappointment. Nothing seems to hold: time consumes and empties everything. Things that happened yesterday lose their fascination for and hold over us.

Gaber expressed this years ago in his song "Illogical Gaiety": "I know that the world and also the rest / I know that everything falls apart."<sup>1</sup> He is echoed by Vasco Rossi: "Nothing lasts, nothing lasts / And you know this."<sup>2</sup>

But if nothing lasts, why don't we settle? Why, instead, do we try to tame or anesthetize our urgent needs by taking some kind of drug, like the character in Houellebecq's most recent novel? Serotonin, he wrote, "is

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<sup>1</sup> "L'illogica allegria" [Illogical gaiety], lyrics by A. Luporini, music by G. Gaber, 1981–82, © Edizioni CURCI.

<sup>2</sup> "Dannate Nuvole" [Damned clouds], words and music by V. Rossi, 2014, © EMI.

a small, oval, white, divisible tablet. It neither creates nor transforms: it interprets. That which was definitive, it makes passing. That which was unavoidable, it makes contingent. It provides a new interpretation of life—less rich, more artificial, and imparts a certain rigidity. It gives no form of happiness, nor true relief. Its action is of a different kind: transforming life into a series of formalities, it makes it possible to scam it. Therefore it helps people to live, or at least not to die, for awhile. However, in the end death imposes itself; the molecular armor cracks and the process of undoing resumes its course.”<sup>3</sup>

The question echoing through these Spiritual Exercises cannot be suppressed. It returns in its absolute unavoidability. “This drama [of life] [...]—even though it can be treated as a game, and taken lightly by all kinds of skeptics and happy fools—is *the only one*. You cannot shun it without at the same time abandoning life. The drama is serious, and our life is not a farce, for the simple reason that it is unique, and your own part cannot be exchanged. You can only reject it.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Taking the question seriously is the first gesture of friendship

The first gesture of friendship for oneself and among us is not to censure this question, is to take it seriously. A sick person’s first gesture of friendship to herself is to take her illness seriously. It is simple. If you have a friend who is sick, the first gesture of friendship to her is to invite her to take care of herself. The opposite would be to let her go, which demonstrates a lack of affection for her.

For this reason, in the very first pages of *In Search of the Human Face*, Fr. Giussani warned us, “The supreme obstacle to our human journey is ‘negligence’ of the ‘I.’” The first point of a human journey is therefore the “opposite of this ‘negligence,’” that is, an “interest in your own ‘I,’” in your own person. This interest might seem obvious, “but it isn’t at all.” In fact, just look at our normal behavior, and you will see “what great chasms of emptiness open up in the daily fabric of our consciousness and what bewilderment of memory.”<sup>5</sup>

So the first thing to which Fr. Giussani calls us is affection for self, as the first gesture of friendship with ourselves. “If this [...] affection for the

<sup>3</sup> Michel Houellebecq, *Serotonina* [Serotonin] (Milan: La nave di Teseo, 2019), 331.

<sup>4</sup> Denis de Rougemont, *La persona e l’amore* [The person and love] (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2018), 57.

<sup>5</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In search of the human face] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995), 9.

human—not affection for the human as an aesthetic object, looked upon and treated poetically, but human affection as attachment, full of esteem, compassion, and mercy toward yourself, some of the affection your mother had for you, especially when you were little (but also now that you are big)—if we don't have a bit of this for ourselves, we lack the ground upon which to build.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, “the first condition [...] for the Movement as event [...] to be realized [...] is precisely this sentiment for your own humanity: ‘affection for oneself.’”<sup>7</sup> As Etty Hillesum wrote, the first step is “to take yourself seriously and to be convinced that it makes sense to find your own shape and form. And something you can do for your fellow man is this: keep turning them back towards themselves, catch and stop them in their flight from themselves and then take them by the hand and lead them back to their own sources.”<sup>8</sup>

Those who do not censure the question because of their affection for themselves are the only ones able to ask this of others. Therefore, true friends are those who ask the question, as Fr. Giussani did for us: “What can withstand the test of time?”<sup>9</sup> This question forces us to be ourselves and not slide away into nothingness. Many of you have written about this. I'll read just a few of your contributions. “Thank you for waking me from my torpor by sending me the question: ‘What can withstand the test of time?’” “I thought that the question you asked could truly be a question asked for me and not ‘just for the sake of...’ with the usual thought that, in any case, someone else will answer it.” “Thank you for your question, which has been ‘persecuting’ me since I read it, never giving me peace. Thank you for how you provoke our freedom and how you invite us to get to the bottom of our circumstances.” “Before I say anything, I would like to tell you that this question has dominated my days; it has kept me company when I open my eyes in the morning and close them at night.”

This question is inevitable. All it takes is for a friendship or love relationship to falter or end, and the question emerges, even if it is formulated

<sup>6</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983)* [People without a homeland] (Milan: Bur, 2008), 291.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>8</sup> Etty Hillesum, *Het Werk*, 418, June 8, 1942. In William McDonough, “Etty Hillesum as Moral-Philosophical Guide: From Fear to Love’s Givenness and At-Riskness,” in *The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Second International Etty Hillesum Congress at Ghent University*, ed. Klaas A.D. Smelik, Meins G.S. Coetsier, and Jurjen Wiersma, January 2014, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Julián Carrón, Luigi Giussani, “Alive Means Present!” *Traces*, October 2018, “Page One,” 2. Available at <https://english.clonline.org/traces/page-one/alive-means-present>.

in skeptical terms: “Well, if even this friendship or love collapses, what truly lasts?”

“Farewell,” Francesco Guccini’s song about the end of a love story, describes this phenomenon. “It was easy to live then, every hour, it seemed to us we had found the key / the secret to the world, seeing each other was like being born again. / But every story the same illusion, its conclusion / and the sin was in believing a normal story to be special,” in “time that wears us out and crushes us.”<sup>10</sup>

Some of your contributions also documented this experience, for example, this one: “Age has hardened me, maybe as a form of self-defense so I won’t suffer from things that happen. The truth is that time consumes us. It is a merciless examiner that shows what has not been preserved, and it causes me deep fear to discover that not enough has been saved. So I lay out layers of forgetfulness, I cover, confuse, even refuse to enjoy the good, so the unconsolated pain will not emerge and open chasms that I will never be able to close again. A sort of languor prevails. I curl up in rites and habits, like the elderly, so that parts of my life remain carefully excluded. Even my experience of the Movement, over time, has become that of an ‘old aunt’ for whom I feel affection. It sadly resembles Linus’s blanket, an anesthetic that over time allows me to tolerate things but then no longer works. I know this is the point: the more I seek control, the more I keep for myself, the less is saved, the less is resurrected. I know I have to learn to offer precisely the thing that hurts most, that I can’t fix and can at best manage to hide, like dirt under a carpet.”

This same bitter conclusion is expressed in the poetic genius of Baudelaire. “When I was young I lived a constant storm / Though now and then the brilliant suns shot through, / So in my garden few red fruits were born, / The rain and thunder had so much to do. / Now are the autumn days of thought at hand / And I must use the rake and spade to groom, / Rebuild and cultivate the washed-out land / The water had eroded deep as tombs. / And who knows if the flowers in my mind / In this poor sand, swept like a beach, will find / The food of soul to gain a healthy start? / I cry! I cry! Life feeds the seasons’ maw / And that dark Enemy who gnaws our hearts / Battens on blood that drips into his jaws!”<sup>11</sup>

This is the fear that deep down everything becomes nothingness, everything is a trick and only appearance, as Montale says: “Maybe one morn-

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<sup>10</sup> “Farewell,” words and music by F. Guccini, 1993, © EMI-BMG.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “The Enemy,” in *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. James M. McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 29.

ing, walking in air / of dry glass, I'll turn and see the miracle occur—/ nothingness at my shoulders, the void / behind me—with a drunkard's terror."<sup>12</sup>

Guccini, Baudelaire, and Montale do not allow us to return to things as they were before because they set us in front of the urgent need of life: with their skepticism or nihilism they force us to deal with the question even more because otherwise we live in desperation. As Houellebecq described it: "Lacking both desires and reasons for living [...], I kept the desperation at an acceptable level. You can live, being desperate; deep down most people live this way, maybe every so often you wonder whether you can give way to a breath of hope [...], only to respond in the negative. Even so, they keep on, and it is a touching spectacle."<sup>13</sup>

But friends are not only those who ask the question; rather, they are also those who do not retreat in the face of its import, escaping or seeking distraction—they are not only those who ask the question, but also those who take it seriously. We have come to the Spiritual Exercises for this, to be helped to live in the truth, without having to look away because everything terrifies us with the fear of nothingness.

"Who supports me in my weariness and solitude?" one of you asked. "Who accompanies me in a difficult choice? How can my instant be saved? After thirty years of experience enriched by the gift of faith, over time, all the partial objectives I have set for myself and am setting for myself (I have even achieved some of them) are inexorably leaving space for me to ask myself these questions. Now, I have no desire to even lift a finger for anything less than these questions [without taking them seriously], not for my family, nor for my work, nor for friends, much less for people I don't know."

### 3. Expectancy

In coming here, we want to support each other in the battle each of us has to fight between no longer expecting anything and being unable to stop the desire to be happy that constitutes each of us, the desire for lasting happiness that does not fade away in a day or a season.

How burning and how widespread is the drama of those who think there is no answer to the human question and yet cannot get rid of it! As Tolstoy described it, "He looks around, searching for an answer to his

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<sup>12</sup> Eugenio Montale, "Maybe One Morning," in *Cuttlefish Bones*, trans. William Arrowsmith, rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1993), 67.

<sup>13</sup> Houellebecq, *Serotonina*, 221.

question, and finds it not. He finds around him doctrines which answer questions that he never asks; but nowhere in the world around him is there any answer to his own question [...]. And man recognizes himself alone in the world face to face with these terrible questions which torture his soul."<sup>14</sup> Alone.

At times even in our friends we sense the fear of certain questions, as a person wrote me. "Notwithstanding everything I have lived, felt, and seen, now that you are asking me the question, I try to distract myself in order not to despair, because life weighs too heavily; above all there is the fear that things are not eternal, that they slip away, that time passes and nothing remains. When I talk about these things with my friends they look at me as if I were a Martian, someone who beats himself up about the meaning of life and is afraid of death. So I step back and keep to myself; it seems nothing can withstand the test of time."

It is precisely this soul-tormenting question that leads Borges to search ceaselessly for what can answer it. "I do not see it. / and I will keep on searching for it / until my last step on earth,"<sup>15</sup> in this way committing to remain loyal to himself to the end.

At times it may even seem crazy to ask this question. And yet the urgent need we are talking about is so integrally a part of our nature that in spite of all apparent good sense, a person who is loyal to herself cannot fail to ask it. It is for this reason that Camus rebelled and affirmed, cried out, the truth of this unavoidable urgent need, through his *Caligula*: "I'm not mad; in fact I've never felt so lucid. What happened to me is quite simple; I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That's all. [...] Things as they are, in my opinion, are far from satisfactory. [...] Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That's why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life—something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn't of this world."<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty in finding an answer to this question leads us to wonder whether we are seeking a dream. The Spanish poet Antonio Machado not only had the audacity to ask himself this question in all seriousness, but indicated the condition for being able to grasp the signs, should they arrive, of an answer: a heart that is alert and awake, that watches and listens. He wrote, "Has my heart gone to sleep? / Beehives in my dreams, / have you

<sup>14</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *On Life* (Guildford, UK: White Crow Books, 2009), 41–42.

<sup>15</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, "Christ on the Cross," in *Selected Poems*, trans. and ed. Alexander Coleman (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 471.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Camus, *Caligula*, act I, scene IV, in *Caligula and Other Plays*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 39–40.

stopped working? Is the waterwheel / of thought dry, / its buckets empty, / spinning and filled with shadow? / No, my heart is not asleep, / It is awake. Awake. / Not asleep or dreaming, it looks / with open bright eyes / at far signals and listens / on the shores of a great silence.”<sup>17</sup>

When it is taken seriously, life takes us there, to the shores of the great silence, or in other words to the Mystery, in front of whom we can only remain with open eyes, bright and clear, waiting for some signal from the Mystery itself, listening for some sign. Only those in this position of original openness can grasp the irruption of an answer to the desire of the heart when it happens, can recognize the signs of its manifestation. Asking the question, allowing it to be unleashed, makes us attentive to grasping any crumb of an answer, wherever it may be.

This is expressed well in a poem by Patrizio Barbaro. “The eye looks. [...] It alone can become aware of beauty [...] beauty is seen because it is alive and thus real. To put it better, it can happen that one sees it. [...] The problem is to have eyes and not see, not look at the things that happen. [...] Eyes closed. Eyes that no longer see. That are no longer curious. That no longer expect anything to happen. Perhaps because they do not believe that beauty exists. But in the desert of our roads She passes, breaking the finite boundary and filling our eyes with infinite desire.”<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The unforeseen

Beauty passes by, happens, without asking our permission, challenging all of our skepticism and nihilism. If you are attentive, you can perceive it. All that is asked of us is to be attentive to discovering it when it passes. In fact, as Camus wrote in his *Notebooks*, “It is not with scruples that a man grows tall. Like a beautiful day, height is given according to God’s will.”<sup>19</sup>

Our whole life is gambled on perceiving the moment when beauty passes in front of our eyes. How can I recognize that I’ve perceived it? I see it in the fact that suddenly it opens my eyes wide, reawakening my desire.

What is the most necessary beauty? It is the happening of a preference, the ultimate preference all of us are waiting to experience. Preference is the

<sup>17</sup> Antonio Machado, “Has my heart gone to sleep?” in *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, trans. Willis Barnstone (Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2004), 89.

<sup>18</sup> Patrizio Barbaro, “*Ah uno sguardo*—dedicata a Pasolini” [Ah, a gaze—dedicated to Pasolini] in “Una domanda a cui non so rispondere [A question I don’t know how to answer], ed. F. Pierangeli, *30Giorni*, 2000, no. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, trans. Ryan Bloom (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2008), 26.

method of every reawakening, every redemption, every generation of the human, of the “I.”

One of us recounted, “A year ago we hired a young woman to teach in the elementary school. She shares the same condition of confusion of many young people, in particular the anguish generated by never being up to the circumstances. The other day she came to me and said that since she started at school she has gotten worse than before, because many questions and wounds are opening up. I told her this means she is in the best time of her life, because questions and wounds open up when there is something that to some degree already offers us hope. She said no, the wounds were very painful, and that before she at least had armor, while at school she had lost it. At that point she told me her story, with all the anguish she had suffered. Then for a brief period she went to the Newman School, where she also worked two days. When she returned, she told me, “At the Newman School something happened to me but I don’t know what. People notice it and tell me so, saying I’m happier and calmer. Friends and family tell me this. I, too, see that something has happened to me. What? Don’t tell me it’s God, because I can’t accept that.” I told her not to worry about God, just to be loyal deep down to her experience. She asked me, “Why did this thing happen to me? Here there are many who do not believe, and to whom nothing has happened. Maybe it’s because of the need I have, because of the open wound I have?”

So you see, the beauty that passes by in the desert of our streets is perceived by those who are truly in need, by those who have this wound and this purity.

How easy it is to recognize beauty—that is, the evidence of a preference that reawakens our “I”—when it happens! This being chosen makes us become ourselves, as described in a poem by Pedro Salinas, “When you chose me—/ love chose—/ I came out of the great anonymity / from everyone, from nothing [when you appear it is as if you pull me out of the void] [...] / But when you said: *you*, / to me, yes, to me singled out, / I was higher than stars, / deeper than coral [you bring me to the stars]. / And my joy / began to spin, caught / in your being, in your pulse. / You gave me possession of myself / when you gave your self to me. / I lived. I live. How long? [...] / I’ll be one more—like the rest—/ when you are lost,”<sup>20</sup> so crucial are you in order for me to become myself.

So then, my friends, the great question in front of us is whether there is something, whether something has happened, in our lives that stands out

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<sup>20</sup> Pedro Salinas, “62,” in *Love Poems by Pedro Salinas: My Voice Because of You, and Poems to Katherine*, trans. Willis Barnstone (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 113–14.

from all that fails to last and loses its hold over us. As Kierkegaard wrote in his diary, “What really counts in life is that at some time one has seen something, felt something, which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if he forgot everything he would never forget this.”<sup>21</sup>

So it is a matter of looking at everything that has happened to us to see whether something has shown itself able to last, to withstand the emptying caused by the passage of time. Has something or someone that happened in our lives shown itself able to bear the test of time? Has there been something able to moor our lives stably? This is the great question each of us must face, looking at our own personal experience, if we do not want to see everything fall apart.

Montale calls this “something” of which we speak “the unforeseen.” “Something unforeseen / is the only hope.” But many hold that “it is foolishness to say so,”<sup>22</sup> and at times we think so too.

However, nothing can keep something new from appearing before our eyes, because, as the great Shakespeare put it, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”<sup>23</sup>—something that “cannot not be and [yet] is here,” as Fr. Giussani said in 1968, something that “could not be because we never would’ve thought of it, we couldn’t imagine it [cannot even think of it] and [yet] it’s here.”<sup>24</sup>

If we have come to Rimini, it is because at least once, at least at a certain moment, this “unforeseen something” happened to us. It caught and moored our life to the point of making us participate in a gesture like this. If we have come here, it is because we are still open to the possibility of encountering that “you” that caused us to emerge from anonymity and has made each of us truly ourselves, unique. Many of us are waiting for the renewal of this encounter.

At least once, at least in a certain moment, something happened to us that we now miss. One of you described it this way. “I’ve been thinking about the question we were sent, ‘What can withstand the test of time?’ Good question! Family situations that never change, or rather, seem like they are slowly digging us a bigger hole to fall into. Relationships and

<sup>21</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, note 1068, in *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1, A-E*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967).

<sup>22</sup> Eugenio Montale, “Prima del viaggio” [Before the journey], vv. 22-27, in *Tutte le poesie* [Collected poems] (Milan: Oscar Mondadori, 1990), 390.

<sup>23</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act I, scene V.

<sup>24</sup> Carrón, Giussani, “Alive Means Present!”, 11.

structures that seem solid but actually provide us no security. Nobody can guarantee that he will not hurt someone so badly that he will be refused forgiveness or that, in the natural course of things, even the deepest friendships will not sooner or later wound or disappoint or abandon us. There is no structure that our violence or that of others cannot rip to pieces according to one's own idea of revolution or justice. Basing everything on your own human energy or goodness verges on the ridiculous. Honestly, every so often I look at my life and see it as one immense sepulcher. Lately, there are entire days I feel this way. It seems equally ridiculous to say, 'Ah, how nice. Now I'll go to the Spiritual Exercises and they'll tell me what withstands the test of time, and then I'll come back home and everything will be different.' Well, then, why do I come? I believe I come for the one thing I think I can define as a constant: the ultimately indestructible attraction of something that lives in the Movement and from which I can't detach myself. I come to search for the one thing I truly miss."

For this reason, friends, let's pray that each of us, whatever our situation, will be reached again by the Lord's gaze, by that preference that caused us to be reborn, so that we can experience how precious our lives are, and know that they are not condemned to slip into the void.

Therefore let us pray to be enveloped once again by that ultimate preference that our being awaits. "You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you."<sup>25</sup> You, not another, not someone different from you. You now, just as you are, not when you change in the future. Now! You are not condemned to slip into the void! You are so precious in His eyes.

The instrument of the commitment we ask of each other in these days is silence. Therefore, let's help each other to be serious, first of all by respecting silence. In fact, Fr. Giussani said, "We have practically a day or a little more together for a moment of greater truth for our lives. We have made a lot of sacrifices, a great many among you have made big sacrifices to come. Let's try to get as much as we can out of this time together, the joy of a moment of familiarity with the Lord that is so complete that not even the best days in our year can compare. It's a commitment [...] that we must make to ensure a truly good outcome [...]. The instrument for this commitment is silence. [...] In fact, silence is not nothingness. [...] It's prayer, the awareness of being in front of God, [...] an entreaty." For this reason, "even

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<sup>25</sup> Is 43:4.

the books that are proposed can be bought in silence,”<sup>26</sup> as a way to support each other. “We encourage silence especially during transit to and from the hall. Absolute silence should be kept as you enter the hall, where memory will be supported by the music we will hear and the images we will see. In this way we will be disposed to look at, listen to, and hear with our mind and heart what the Lord in some way will propose to us.” It is significant that “what we do together in this day and a half is nothing other than an aspect of the great loving gesture with which the Lord—in any way you perceive it—moves your life [and mine] toward that Destiny that is Himself.”<sup>27</sup>

Silence, therefore, serves for looking at these things well. If you have a stomach ulcer, you do not cure it by ignoring it. You still have it. Not facing the problem just makes life harder and more unbearable.

We have the opportunity to be together, to look at everything without fear, like the publicans who went to Jesus because they could be themselves with Him. They did not need to be good enough. They were embraced just as they were.

At least once a year, let silence penetrate us down to the marrow of our bones! The silence, prayer, songs, and the directions we will give are not formalities, but suggestions so that all of us can live this gesture with the seriousness it demands.

We can live life brilliantly, friends, but to do so you must want to.

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<sup>26</sup> Luigi Giussani, *La convenienza umana della fede* [The human advantageousness of faith] (Milan: Bur, 2018), 211–13.

<sup>27</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Dare la vita per l'opera di un Altro* [Giving your life for the work of an Other], Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, May 8–10, 1992, supplement to *Tracce-Litterae Communionis*, June 1992, 5.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Jer 20:10–13; Ps 17 (18); Jn 10:31–42*

## HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

If we are sincere, we have to acknowledge that in our lives we, too, have moments when we gather stones to hurl at Jesus, the stones of pride, of bitter nostalgia, of instinctiveness, of gossip. Each of us can recognize clearly this possibility in front of Christ's gaze, which expresses His relationship with the Father. This is the scandalous thing: this man is the Son, the Son of the Father, of our destiny.

We have before us the opportunity to resist with our reasons, "our" reasons, or to relive the experience of those who went to seek Him. Many went to Him, like us this evening, reliving that same experience, starting from the acknowledgement of the great work of the Father through Him; that is, reliving our heart as thirst for happiness within every possible circumstance, within every trial, within every disappointment, the heart as a burning thirst for happiness and to be able to encounter that beauty, as was just mentioned.

If we are here, it is to encounter and recognize this gaze, this face, the human face of the mercy of the Father, who draws us to Himself and waits for us.

# *Saturday morning, April 13*

*During the entrance and exit:*

*Ludwig van Beethoven, String Quartet in A Minor, op. 132*

*Quartetto Italiano*

*Spirto Gentil n. 49, Decca*

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayers*

## ■ FIRST MEDITATION

**Julián Carrón**

*“Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God” (Mt 5:8)*

In front of the question, “What can withstand the test of time?” the answer cannot be our feelings or moods, our thoughts or lines of reasoning, which “no longer stop anyone in their tracks.”<sup>28</sup> Therefore, let’s look our question straight in the face! We are not afraid to take seriously the most challenging questions that can emerge in our lives: we do not want to turn aside or settle for hackneyed consolations. We want to be women and men able to look at everything.

A university student at a gathering of leaders asked me a frank question that helps us understand the problem. “Last weekend we did a two-day live-in to welcome first year students. It was really beautiful for me, and it happened at a very difficult and tiring time in my life. At the end of those two days together, I realized I was different. The point is that when I returned home, in the space of twenty minutes some little thing happened and I was right back to my normal irritability, as if the beautiful thing that had happened in those two days and changed me could not last. So my question is, what happened there, and what can hold up in the face of the demands of daily life?”

Simplifying greatly in order to clarify, we can say that often we come from an experience A (in this case, a very difficult time in her life) and then

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Gloria: Una estetica teologica*, vol. 1, *La percezione della forma* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1975), 11. In English, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1, *Seeing the Form* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

B happens (she went to the live-in and something happened that changed her), but after awhile, as if nothing had occurred, as if B had never happened, we return to A and are back where we started from. It seems that what happened to us disappears, that it lacks the strength to last, to endure in time, and to continue to change us.

Maybe the university student's description is a bit simplistic, but the substance is the same as what Fr. Giussani described at the Beginning Day. A radical new thing happens to us, unforeseen and unforeseeable, an incomparable encounter, a beauty that changes us, but then it seems that this event is confined to a moment, like a wave of the sea that touches the shore and withdraws, and everything goes back to the way it was before. We are tempted to attribute this event to our previous experience, our previous wisdom.<sup>29</sup>

This is our dramatic situation. Well then, let's face it straight on, as that girl did so directly! What factors are involved in this apparent disappearance of the newness that has happened to us? Why are we suspicious and wavering?

## **1. Something from which you do not turn back**

In order to face the question of what stands up to the test of time, the first thing to do is to look at our experience.

The Kierkegaard quote from last night offers us the criterion for grasping the answer. "What really counts in life is that at some time one has seen something, felt something, which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if he forgot everything he would never forget this."<sup>30</sup>

Has something happened in our lives that we have never forgotten, something so great, so magnificent, that it was able to challenge time, circumstances, and our moods, and to accompany us even in the most dramatic moments? As expressed in one of the letters I read last night, "Why do I [still] come? [...] I come for [...] the ultimately indestructible attraction of something that lives in the Movement and from which I can't detach myself. I come to search for the one thing I truly miss."

The endurance and indestructible nature of the attraction that caused our friend to come here is the sign that makes us understand the import of what has happened to us.

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<sup>29</sup> Carrón, Giussani, "Alive Means Present!" 9.

<sup>30</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, note 1068, in *Soren Kierkegaard's Journals and Papers, Volume 1, A-E*, trans. and ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1967).

As Ugo di San Vittore said, “Eternal misery pursues those who live every day if they do not find a love that lasts every day.”<sup>31</sup>

a) *The encounter*

The first clue of the answer to our question, following the criterion offered by Kierkegaard, is the very fact of our being here. If we are here, as our friend wrote, it is because we have come across people who made us experience a unique preference, totally gratuitous, a fullness, a human vibration that revived us, made us be ourselves, removed our fear and filled us with hope and joy. This happened in an encounter in which we had at least the presentiment of something new and different, something that brought forth what we are in truth.

This is the experience we have had. The love that God showed me through certain faces “makes me what I am in truth and [...] makes me unique, too”<sup>32</sup> as Balthasar said. You could be a hundred times more fragile, more incoherent, more encumbered than you are, but there is someone who makes you experience this absolutely free preference. “You are precious in My eyes.”

This is evident, incomparably evident. We are here because, to use once again the words of the Beginning Day, we have been reached, each in our own particular circumstances, by a presence charged with a proposal and meaning for life, and at the same time charged with affection for ourselves through this preference.<sup>33</sup> This threw us wide open and engaged us as nothing else could have done. We have seen a different kind of relationship among people, a more human way of engaging, a shared life, a life that contained a newness and promise that filled us with wonder. We were attracted and drew closer because we were curious.

The beginning of everything was “*an encounter* with an objective fact [...]. The existential reality of this fact is a tangible community, as with every wholly human reality. The human voice of authority in the judg-

<sup>31</sup> Hugues de Saint-Victor, *De arra anime: L'inizio del dono* [Soliloquy on the betrothal gift of the soul] (Milan: Glossa, 2000), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, “Significato dell’antica Alleanza” [The meaning of the ancient covenant], in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, *L’impegno del cristiano nel mondo* [*The Christian’s engagement in the world*] (Milan: Jaca Book, 2017), 38.

<sup>33</sup> “They didn’t believe because of the way Christ spoke, saying certain things; they didn’t believe because Christ worked miracles; they didn’t believe because Christ quoted the prophets; they didn’t believe because Christ raised the dead. [...] They believed because of a presence. A presence neither transparent nor opaque, not a faceless presence: a presence with a very specific face [...] A presence charged with a proposal is, then, a presence charged with meaning.” Carrón, Giussani, “Alive Means Present!” 8.

ments and directives of this community constitute its criterion and form. There is no version of Christian experience, no matter how interior, that does not entail, at least in the ultimate sense, the encounter with the community and the reference to authority.”<sup>34</sup>

This may have taken the form of an encounter with a living Christian community or a person who demonstrated a perceptible difference of life,<sup>35</sup> but an encounter happened that attracted us and, as Kierkegaard says, we cannot forget or erase it even if we wanted to.

A university student wrote me, “By nature I’ve always loved a life of retreat, playing to the lowest common denominator, the tranquility of my four walls, of studies used to escape from the world. It may be convenient to think that life is disgusting and that there are no reasons for getting involved, but you can do so only as long as you haven’t had the grace of meeting people who live full of reasons, full of gusto and meaning. [This is what makes the difference, and once you have seen it, everything is different.] For me, meeting the Movement has meant this. It was an encounter with people of dazzling humanity, a meeting that gave me no peace, but tormented me, and brought me back to a certain restlessness for my life that I had long neglected.” So, the encounter brought to her life an affection for herself that she had been unable to feel. Once she met this different humanity, she could not help but feel restlessness for her own life. But then she added, “For this reason, I feel afraid when one of these friends of mine writes me and seeks me out, because I know that just one hour with this person would undermine my position and make me feel that by now very recognizable sensation of looking at something enormous and very beautiful and feeling that it could be mine, too.” This is amazing! As Fr. Giussani told us many times, this is a resistance to beauty.<sup>36</sup> We are afraid of the beauty of what we have seen. Her letter continues, “Certainly, my fear has remained the same. I’ve forgotten a lot of things, but not those eyes that looked at me, because they held all the good that would be offered to me in the years to follow and that insistently returned to seek me out, to draw me back with a faithfulness beyond all logic, the one last bulwark against the temptation to let things go.”

An encounter with a phenomenon of different humanity: this is how everything began. Like John and Andrew, we have found ourselves in front

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<sup>34</sup>Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Mariangela Sullivan (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 87.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, trans. Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 17–18.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Affezione e dimora* [Affection and dwelling place] (Milan: Bur, 2001), 66–67.

of an exceptional presence charged with a proposal, charged with meaning for life.<sup>37</sup>

b) *The meaning of the encounter*

But it is not enough for the event to happen. We have to recognize its meaning; otherwise, as often happens, we return to our previous wisdom, our usual way of looking at things, the common mentality. So now the main point comes to the surface: when we return to A after having seen B, we think everything has vanished because we have failed to grasp the import of what has happened to us. In fact, to truly gain something in our experience, we have to understand its meaning.

This is true for everything. “What characterizes experience is *understanding* something, discovering its *meaning*. Thus, experience entails an intelligence concerning the meaning of things.”<sup>38</sup> A reality is never truly confirmed and grasped until its meaning is confirmed.

Here is what one of you wrote:

“In the last six months, I have been devastated by a very big change that has completely overturned my life and caused me great pain. The thing that really disoriented me was that this pain originated in one of the most beautiful things that has ever happened to me, so it was a real paradox. As the months passed and I was still unable to see the meaning of what had happened to me, gradually and almost without my realizing it, I was taken over by a total nihilism, apathy, and absence of meaning. One day, a dear friend invited me to participate in the School of Community. I went for a few months without any particular reason, but I continued. I realized that the School of Community said something absolutely true about my life, and also showed me a road toward things that seemed prepared for me, that would have made me happier. It’s as if my eyes were opened for me. For the first time, I realized that I followed things that seemed comfortable, attractive, and full of promise, but were actually closed in on themselves. I followed them because I was anesthetized by the modern mentality and thus didn’t ask myself too many questions. Instead, in recent months I’ve begun desiring things that stand firm in the face of the adversities of life, things that are not void of meaning, and true faces. Thanks be to God, I’ve encountered the Movement. This new awareness has made me feel full

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<sup>37</sup>“The first chapter of St John’s Gospel documents the very simple and profound manner in which Christianity emerged in history: the happening of a human event, the encounter with an exceptional presence.” Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 8.

<sup>38</sup>Giussani, *Risk of Education*, 84.

and truly happy for the first time, giving me a long-lasting happiness, not limited to the afternoon of the School of Community. Evidently Someone knows better than I what my heart desires, and has planned everything so that I can live up to the stature of my questions.”

So then, we have to realize the nature of what has happened to us, because if we do not grasp deep down its differentness, the reason it is different, then we treat it like any of the things that happen in life that promise so much and then disappoint because they end, as if Christianity were one of the many gods in the pantheon of the common mentality, one of many attempts destined to fail.

Understanding the import of something we have experienced does not necessarily happen, and is not to be taken for granted. This is seen when the event that has happened to us does not shape our self-awareness and action. There is no growth of our consciousness, the “I” does not mature, and the encounter does not become crucial for our relationship with reality. For this reason, we continue to start out from A instead of from B. It is like a student solving a math problem by chance without understanding why. The next time she will not face the new problem with increased awareness and will find herself back where she started from. Having solved the problem by chance, without understanding why, will have done no good. Life is the same way: amazing things can happen to us but we can fail to learn anything. If we do not grasp the meaning of an event, and if it does not shape our self-awareness, then no matter how sensational it may be, it will not serve any purpose. Think of the nine lepers healed by Jesus, or the scribes in front of the blind man He had healed.

Instead, how entirely different it is when you grasp the import of something that enters into your life!

I’ll give an example that can help us understand better, an episode that happened to Fr. Giussani. Listening to Donizetti’s *La Favorita* during a music lesson in his first year of classical high school, something happened to him that stayed with him, such that even recounting it years later, you could see that it still influenced him. “When this marvelous tenor sang ‘Spirto gentil, ne’ sogni miei ...,’ when the very first note vibrated on the air, I intuited, heartrendingly, that what is called ‘God’—by which I mean the inevitable Destiny for which a person is born—is the ultimate end of the need for happiness; it is the happiness that the heart irrepressibly needs.”<sup>39</sup> In that moment, hearing those notes and words, Giussani had the intuition

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<sup>39</sup> Luigi Giussani, “What you are looking for exists,” notes accompanying CD *Spirto Gentil*, Milan: Cooperativa Nuovo Mondo, 2002, no. 23 of the *Spirto Gentil* series, 17.

of something that did not vanish the next morning. He had such a sharp, clear, unique, and evident perception of that “something,” that from then on he could not live without being determined by that instant and that discovery.

There are some moments, encounters, and events that are different from others, not because of any din or clamor, but because they have an incomparable power to reawaken our entire “I” through the crucial thing they bring to our life.

Fr. Giussani described it in a fascinating and realistic way. “What led us here today may have been a fleeting, subtle presentiment of promise for life, without any earth-shattering self-awareness or insight. But there was a day in your life when an encounter happened that encompassed all the meaning, all the value, all the desirableness, all the justness, all the beauty, and all the pleasantness.”<sup>40</sup>

These unique moments make us discover what lasts, something that has the unmistakable accent of truth. Speaking of the encounter, Giussani said, “At times it seems like ‘a beacon in the fog,’ but still this fleeting appearance leaves us with the confidence of having discovered ‘something that has something within.’”<sup>41</sup>

In order to see this “something” within the something we come across (such and such a person, such and such a community, an objective fact), no particular intelligence is needed on our part, though we often think otherwise. You just have to follow the enhancement of the “mind’s cognitive capacities” that the fact itself kindles or generates, “tuning the penetration of the human gaze upon the exceptional reality that has provoked it.”<sup>42</sup> We can understand it by analogy with our many experiences of encounters with certain people who open and broaden our gaze, allowing us to see the reality of things more acutely and deeply.

What does it mean to follow this experience? It means purity of heart.

Think of the Unnamed in Manzoni’s novel, *The Betrothed*. He had directed his life in a certain way, made his choices, taken his position regarding Christianity, and seen people go to church often without being influenced in the least. But in a particular situation in his life, listening from the room of his castle to the festive crowd welcoming Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, he began to feel the goad of torment, and some-

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<sup>40</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985)* [Here and now] (Milan: Bur, 2009), 426.

<sup>41</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi with the assistance of Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2006), 96

<sup>42</sup> Giussani, *Risk of Education*, 87.

thing moved in him. He let himself be attracted by their joy and joined them. When he found himself in front of the cardinal and was enveloped by his gaze and held in his embrace, his heart yielded. He followed the power of that gaze and the warmth of that unexpected tenderness. “The Unnamed freed himself from that embrace, put one hand over his eyes, and raised his face, saying: ‘O truly great and truly merciful God! Now I know myself, now I understand what I am!’”<sup>43</sup> The cardinal’s gaze, like that of Jesus upon Zacchaeus, freed him from pride, gave him back a true awareness of himself, and opened him to a poverty of spirit. At the end of their dialogue, the cardinal said to the Unnamed, “You must not think that I shall be satisfied with this single visit of yours today,” and asked him, “You will come back, won’t you, with this worthy priest?” “Do you ask if I will come back?” the Unnamed responded, amazed. In this moment, his new self-awareness and poverty of spirit surged forth. “If you turn me from your door, I shall wait outside as obstinately as any beggar. I need to talk to you. I need to hear your voice and see your face! I need you!”<sup>44</sup> His desire to see the cardinal again was the sign of what had happened to him.

For each of us, who is our cardinal? Who is the cardinal who makes us truly ourselves, who throws us wide open, the person without whom we cannot live? In fact, Jesus is not abstract, a mere name. Jesus is alive and present. He reaches us now through the precariousness of flesh, through a certain real gaze and a certain real embrace. “Alive means present!” we cried out at the Beginning Day. Only something present can make us poor. We have no need of an organization. We have no need of a strategy. We need someone who gives us back to ourselves, someone who makes us poor, who enables us to see what we have in front of our noses and do not see.

It is necessary to become aware of the essential nexus between knowledge and poverty. Ratzinger wrote, “From this perspective, we can understand why the Fathers of the Church regarded the basic formulation of religious knowledge as such this teaching from the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Happy are the pure in heart: they shall see God’ (Mt 5:8). Here it is a question of ‘seeing.’ The possibility of ‘seeing’ God, that is, of knowing Him at all, depends on one’s purity of heart, which means a comprehensive process in which man becomes transparent, in which he does not remain

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<sup>43</sup> Alessandro Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, trans. Bruce Penman (London: Penguin Classics, 1972), 418.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 422.

locked in upon himself, in which he learns to give himself and, in doing so, becomes able to see.”<sup>45</sup>

Fr. Giussani said this and bore witness to it in front of the whole Church in 1998, in St. Peter’s Square. “It was a simplicity of heart that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain promptness that marks the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierce us to the heart.”<sup>46</sup>

This simplicity of heart that enables a person to be wide open to the unique reality in front of her is what enables her to see the unassailable evidence. “The entire existence of a Christian, one could say, has this goal: to become simple.”<sup>47</sup> And only this willingness to open totally to the event of the encounter enables us to perceive its meaning adequately.<sup>48</sup>

### *c) Awareness of the correspondence*

Why did we choose to adhere to and follow the encounter that, in the final analysis, brought us here today? Why did we never forget it? Because the presence encountered corresponded uniquely to the deep needs of our heart.

It was the same way for John and Andrew with Jesus. They found themselves in front of an exceptional presence, one that finally corresponded to their heart. With Him, there was an unimagined, unimaginable, never before felt correspondence to the heart that made it easy to recognize Him in His unique and incomparable value as “divine.”<sup>49</sup> “Someone who came across Him would never go away again—and this is precisely the sign of an experience of correspondence. An encounter means coming across such an exceptional presence.”<sup>50</sup> Exceptional; that is, divine. The same thing hap-

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Principles of Catholic Theology: Building Stones for a Fundamental Theology* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 350. “To ‘cling to God’ is nothing but to see God, and that is given as a special happiness only to the pure in heart. David had a pure heart (Ps 50:12). He said to God ‘my soul clings to you’ (Ps 62:9) and again, ‘My joy lies in being near to God’ (Ps 72:28).” Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermons on the Song of Songs,” in *Selected Works, Classics of Western Spirituality* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987), 235.

<sup>46</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, x.

<sup>47</sup> I. Silone, *L’avventura d’un povero cristiano* [The adventure of a poor christian] (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1968), 126.

<sup>48</sup> “God honors His reason-endowed creature, predisposing her to welcome the gift that He gives her of Himself. This faculty of welcoming is also a gift: it is the very essence of reason.” François Varillon, *L’umiltà di Dio* [The humility of God] (Magnano (Bi): Qiqajon, 1999), 45.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

pens for us, as well, two thousand years later: the divine passes through an ephemeral face, “something within which there is something.” That “something” that passes through the something ephemeral is what withstands the test of time and endures because it is divine. But if we do not grasp the nature of the presence encountered, we will end up mistaking it for some other thing.

This is a fact we must look at well.

The important point is to understand the content and the origin of the differentness we have come across that causes us to be here today. Maybe in other moments we could have gotten by without reaching this point, without the need to recognize the nature of this unassailable evidence that has come into our lives, but in today’s chaos in which everything is in doubt, we will not be able to remain Christians for long if we do not have evidence whose permanent meaning we recognize. During the student protests in 1968, Giussani said, “Now, however, it can longer be passively accepted, the times will not permit it.”<sup>51</sup>

I am enthusiastic about living in this period of history, even with all its difficulties. I say this for myself, and do not want to be spared these difficulties. It is not enough to live in an illusion, in a bubble, thinking that everything is fine, closing myself in my comfort zone and coming here every year to spend some time among friends and enjoy a bit of peace. That would be useless for living.

It is a good thing that we are challenged by all this confusion, by the skepticism that surrounds us, by the nihilism that makes it seem that nothing can last! Yes, because in this way we can understand from within our experience, as perhaps nobody in history has been able to do, how different Christianity is. You see that no relationship lasts and suddenly you find yourself in front of a relationship that *does* last, in front of someone who truly loves you, and you think: “Well, this *is* different!” In that moment, it is very easy to recognize the difference.

When we do not recognize this “something” that has the unmistakable accent of truth, we return to A after having seen B. The cause is not our weakness: it is a lack of recognition. Our fragility has nothing to do with it. The problem I set forth is not one of ethical coherence. It is a problem of reason, of simplicity of heart. “It is in you that things must become clear,”<sup>52</sup> Etty Hillesum wrote in her *Diary*.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Carrón, Giussani, “Alive Means Present!”, 12.

<sup>52</sup> Etty Hillesum, *Diario: 1941-1943* [Diary] (Milan: Adelphi, 1985), 57.

## **2. The challenge of acknowledgement**

Through concrete, specific encounters, we have today been reached by the same event that happened two thousand years ago. Not only that, but we are also involved in the same experience, challenged to journey the same path, to live the same acknowledgement. Chekhov's short story, "The Student," beautifully describes the nexus between the initial event and the present event, between the experience of Peter and the first followers and our own.

On his way home from hunting on a cold, dark evening, Ivan, a young student, finds hospitality in the home of two widows, a mother and daughter, who are warming themselves by the fire. He joins them and begins telling the story of Jesus's passion, the Last Supper, the anguish Jesus felt in the Garden of Gethsemane, Judas's betrayal, Peter's denials, the crowing of the cock and the moment in which Peter "remembered, recovered, went out of the courtyard, and wept bitterly." Ivan realizes that as he related these things, the mother, Vasilisa "suddenly choked, and big, abundant tears rolled down her face," while the daughter "flushed, and her expression became heavy, strained, as in someone who is trying to suppress great pain." Chekhov continued: "The student wished the widows good night and went on. [...] Now the student was thinking about Vasilisa: if she wept, it meant that everything that had happened to Peter on that dreadful night had some relation to her... [...] if Vasilisa wept and her daughter was troubled, then obviously what he had just told them, something that had taken place nineteen centuries ago, had a relation to the present, to both women, and probably to this desolate village, to himself, to all people. If the old woman wept, it was not because he was able to tell it movingly, but because Peter was close to her and she was interested with her whole being in what had happened in Peter's soul. And joy suddenly stirred in his soul, and he even stopped for a moment to catch his breath. The past, he thought, is connected with the present in an unbroken chain of events flowing one out of the other. And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain of events flowing one out of one another. And it seemed to him that he had just seen both ends of that chain: he touched one end, and the other moved. And when he crossed the river on the ferry [...] he kept thinking how the truth and beauty that had guided human life there in the garden and in the high priest's courtyard, went on unbroken to this day and evidently had always been the main thing in human life and generally on earth; and a feeling of youth, health, strength—he was only twenty-two—and an inexpressibly sweet anticipation of happiness, an unknown, mysterious

happiness, gradually came over him, and life seemed to him delightful, wondrous, and filled with lofty meaning.”<sup>53</sup>

The connection that Chekhov intuited is surprising: “If the old woman wept, it was [...] because Peter was close to her and she was interested with her whole being in what had happened in Peter’s soul.”

We are here because of the same experience as those first people who encountered Jesus. Like them, we have been challenged to recognize the nature of the encounter that has happened to us, the presence that has bowled us over. The first ones were not spared this challenge, and their journey shows us the road to travel today as well. Therefore, let’s return to the moment that the challenge was so great that it forced them to recognize the different nature they saw in front of them.

The day He multiplied the loaves and fishes and the crowd wanted to make Him king, Jesus said things that scandalized everyone and not even the disciples were able to understand. Giussani described it this way: “There was a deathly silence. Jesus Himself takes the initiative and breaks it: ‘Do you too want to go away?’ And it is here that Peter, with all the vehemence of his nature, summarizes their whole experience of certainty: ‘Lord, we do not understand what You say either but if we leave You, to whom do we go? You alone have words which explain, which give meaning to life.’ [...] Peter’s attitude is profoundly reasonable. Because they shared their lives with the exceptionality of Jesus’ being and his attitudes, that small group of men could only have trusted his words. They would have had to deny evidence [just as we would have to deny evidence] more persuasive than that of their own eyes: ‘If I cannot believe in this man, I cannot believe in anything.’ By sharing his life, by constantly experiencing the sensation that Jesus was exceptional, it became highly reasonable to trust in Him.”<sup>54</sup> This judgment is like that of someone who, after years of living with his mother, if he has had a normal relationship with her, says, “No matter what happens, I can be angry or sad, my mood can change, the world can collapse around me, but I cannot deny that my mother loves me.” Living together brings him to a judgment that can challenge any mood.

“Judgment requires facing an experience, taking into account the time of its ‘duration.’”<sup>55</sup> We need this time to reach certainty. This is the dramatic thing about life. Jesus treats us like adults. “Do you want to leave too?”

<sup>53</sup> Anton Chekhov, “The Student,” in *Selected Stories of Anton Chekhov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (New York: Random House, 2000), 265–66.

<sup>54</sup> Luigi Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, trans. Viviane Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press 1998), 57–58.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

Instead, we often want Him to come and extract us from our difficulties, to decide for us.

“This is why, in answering the question of his friends and enemies alike: ‘So who are you?’ [what is that “something” that is in you that we cannot define?] Jesus waited until time had made his disciples certain of their attachment [until the certainty of the reason for which they were attached to him had grown] and his enemies persistent in their hostility. This is to say, Jesus clarified his own mystery when men had definitively determined to recognize him or not.”<sup>56</sup>

Jesus does not want to take advantage of or abuse His power, nor does He want to impose Himself. He waits for our freedom to yield and for us to follow Him with full awareness. He knows full well that the acknowledgement of His presence will never truly become ours if it does not involve our freedom. Therefore, He is in no hurry. He does not want to rush things. He gives our freedom space and waits for our recognition of Him to grow and mature.

Since reason is the affirmation of reality in the totality of its factors, we cannot avoid questioning the origin of the different nature that has come into our lives. If the fruit we see in terms of humanity and intensity of life is different from everything that surrounds us, then we have to face this alternative: either this fruit can be fully explained by the special abilities of the people in whom we see it, or, since these people are fragile like us and make mistakes like us, they reveal, they demonstrate, something else that is beyond their abilities, something else that is at work in them. (“The tree can be told by its fruit.”<sup>57</sup>)

My reason cannot say or define what this “something else” is, but, as Fr. Giussani said, “[Reason] cannot *not* admit that He is here. [...] Because there is a factor within, a factor that decides about this companionship, certain outcomes of this companionship, certain resonances of this companionship, a factor so surprising that if I don’t affirm something else I don’t give reason to the experience, because reason is to affirm experiential reality according to all the factors that make it up, all of the factors.”<sup>58</sup>

I was deeply impressed recently by our friend Mikel Azurmendi, a Basque sociologist who we met two years ago. He was amazed by and so honest about the repercussions of what he saw that he spent

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?* trans. Vivianne Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 210.

<sup>58</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* vol. 2, *Hope* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 104.

two years visiting all our communities in Spain, going to the vacations, charitable works, and schools, because he wanted to understand. In a sense, he has given back to us what we sometimes no longer see. Ten minutes after his arrival at EncuentroMadrid, looking at the difference in the way people treated each other and interacted—"certain resonances of this companionship"—he asserted that "something is happening here." He could not see those things without acknowledging that in their way of being together, of treating each other, of looking at each other, of seeking each other out, of being interested in everything, there was something else, and was led to say, on the basis of what he had been told years ago when he was a boy in the seminary: "It is Him. Only the divine can be the origin of all this."

The greatest miracle is the change in the human that Mikel, like each of us, discovered. "A miracle may be defined as an event, an experientiable fact by which God forces man to pay heed to him, to values in which he wishes man to participate, and by which God appeals to man to take notice of his Reality. A miracle is a way for him to make His Presence felt."<sup>59</sup> This is not something we imagine that vanishes a moment later.

In front of a miracle, the miracle of a different, more fulfilled humanity, our position comes to the surface and the struggle between openness and closure, transparency and obtuseness begins. The Mystery does not spare us this struggle, for here freedom reveals its crucial role in the journey of knowledge, in the discovery of reality and its meaning. "Now, if reaching destiny, fulfilment is to be free, freedom must 'play a role' even in its *discovery* [...]. Freedom, then, has to do not only with our movement towards God as coherence of our lives, but, even before that, the very discovery of God."<sup>60</sup> In this struggle, Giussani said, what we often call a "critical approach" is actually a preconceived idea, what we have already "secretly decided in the beginning,"<sup>61</sup> an "aridity" that does not allow us to see.

The prize for those who engage in this struggle with honesty is a recognition of the presence of Christ and familiarity with Him.

So then, friends, we must not stop at the threshold of this recognition, but instead must reach the ultimate source of what we see, what we have come across, what has brought us together.

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<sup>59</sup> Giussani, *Why the Church?*, 222.

<sup>60</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 121.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

“We risk living such a great grace as this house [as this companionship] assuming the final step (‘Ah, yes, yes!’), admitting the final step, acknowledging the final step, which is for Christ, but not living it [...]. You can live your companionship in such a way that you are kind to each other, attentive to each other, that you enjoy living in such an environment [...]; you can live all that is positive about this companionship, and yet you can stop on the threshold of the recognition of the adequate reason, of the true factor that put you together in the first place [...]. You can live all this without clarifying for yourself the ultimate source, as if you arrive at the threshold of the thing, saying ‘Yes, there is Christ; it is for Christ.’” But in “saying ‘We are together because there is Christ,’ how much existential and profound emotion, recognition, and gratitude do you obtain?”<sup>62</sup>

Christ loves our freedom so much that He even lets us leave Him, waiting for us to discover freely how different He is. Von Balthasar described God’s attitude toward us in this way: “Where a person decides to leave his own self, his own narrow-mindedness [...] there My reign grows. But since men do so unwillingly [...], I must travel long, wide roads with them, an entire life, so they will become convinced of the truth.”<sup>63</sup>

Simone Weil said, “God waits patiently until at last I am willing to consent to love Him. God waits like a beggar who stands motionless and silent before someone who will perhaps give Him a piece of bread. Time is that waiting. Time is God’s waiting as a beggar for our love. The stars, the mountains, the sea, and all the things that speak to us of time, convey God’s supplication to us. By waiting humbly we are made similar to God.”<sup>64</sup>

Think of Our Lady when the angel left her. It is as if the Lord left the scene in order to leave space for her freedom.

Think of the prodigal son in the gospel parable. The father certainly was not indifferent to his son. On the contrary, precisely because he loved him and knew well this child to whom he had given life, he knew that only through freedom would his son discover the value of being his son.

Reflecting on the parable of the prodigal son, the German Catholic philosopher Ferdinand Ulrich wrote, “The father did not keep his own son bound to himself [...]. He set the other free from himself and made him

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<sup>62</sup> Giussani, *Affezione e dimora*, 361–62. “We cross through miracles like blind people without seeing that the smallest flower bud is made up of thousands of galaxies.” Christian Bobin, *La vita grande* [Great life] (Otranto (Le): AnimaMundi, 2018), 41.

<sup>63</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Il cuore del mondo* [The heart of the world] (Milan: Jaca Book, 2006), 119.

<sup>64</sup> Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks: Supernatural Knowledge*, trans. Richard Rees (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1970), 141

responsible for the future risk of a loving process of becoming himself, beginning from the abyss of his own *freedom*.”<sup>65</sup>

How does the father show his love for his son’s freedom? By “simply letting the son go.” The father lets his son go, respecting his freedom, grounded in the certainty that his son will not depart without his sense of sonship. Ulrich continued, “Thus the father so to speak withdraws in the complete calm of his own being himself, and does so not *against* his son, but *for* him. His paternal hiding away, his silence, is the mercy of his accompaniment. *That* son described by the parable is the mercy of the Father made person: far off without his father. We understand the parable only if we listen to *Him* in a spirit of piety and forgiveness! The father remains, ‘rests,’ on his land and lets his son go. In this remaining, in this *apparent* not-acting, he shows himself as freedom that bears witness and is present ‘only through its existence.’”<sup>66</sup>

In this space of freedom given by father, the prodigal son recognizes that his father is different, and perceives the accent of truth in him; this causes him to return home. “There is a dreadful emptiness in this spiritual fatherhood. No power, no success, no popularity, no easy satisfaction. But that same dreadful emptiness is also the place of true freedom. It is the place where there is ‘nothing left to lose,’ where love has no strings attached, and where real spiritual strength is found.”<sup>67</sup>

The father’s attitude reveals his true nature as father. As one of the documents from the Second Vatican Council stated, there is no access to the truth but through freedom.<sup>68</sup> Christ respects, loves, and supports our freedom by challenging it.

We need to become aware of the import of what has entered into our existence, because otherwise we will be condemned to live in the fear that everything ends in nothingness. If Christ does not enter into the depths of our being through the evidence that each of us has perceived (given that we are here), we will be fearful like everyone else, because “if Christ is not a

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<sup>65</sup> Ferdinand Ulrich, *Gabe und Vergebung: Ein Beitrag zur biblischen Ontologie* [Dono e Perdono: Un contributo per un’ontologia biblica] [Gift and forgiveness: a contribution to a biblical ontology] (Freiburg: Johannes, 2006), 455. [Editor’s Note: the English translation of this quotation and the next is from our Italian translation of the German original].

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 452, 457–58. “You let me go when I wanted to and when I did not want to, and even so you did not distance me from yourself.” Guglielmo di Saint-Thierry, *Preghiere meditate: Opere 3* (Rome: Città Nuova, 1998), 214. In English, William of Saint-Thierry, *On Contemplating God: Prayers and Meditations*.

<sup>67</sup> H. J. M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 132.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*, I, 2.

presence now (now!), I cannot love myself now and I cannot love you now. If Christ is not risen, I am finished. Even if I have all His words, even if I have all His gospels, at best, I could even kill myself [Giussani dared to say even this!], but with the presence of Christ, no [because He is not just an event in the past], with the recognized presence of Christ, no!”<sup>69</sup>

Why is it worthwhile to be here in these days? What can we gain? The awareness that something has happened to us that can overcome the anxiety and insecurity that everything will end in nothingness. This is not overcome by thinking, “Now I’ll try to make a bit more of an effort.” It is only overcome by an awareness of what has happened, something that you have not produced, that I have not produced. “With age-old love have I loved you; so I have kept My mercy toward you.”<sup>70</sup> Only His presence is the substance of our “I.”

### 3. The need for verification

“Sooner or later, those who come because of a vague intuition or presentiment of a value and then are not stimulated or do not make the effort to verify, will leave.”<sup>71</sup> Fr. Giussani’s warning to university students holds for us, too, no exceptions. “If Christ is truly the answer to life, this must be ‘seen’ in some way. [...] Therefore, I told the students, ‘We have to watch all the activities of our life so we can see and experience, understand and live, how the presence of Christ truly responds to the urgencies and needs of our human experience that are expressed in those activities.’”<sup>72</sup>

During the presentation of the *Acts* of the Lugano Convention on Giussani at the Ambrosian Library in Milan, Fr. Franco Manzi, the director of studies at the Venegono Archdiocesan Seminary, observed, “Thus we could say that as he himself journeyed in the sequela of Christ on the ‘way of God,’ as the Acts of the Apostles defined Christianity, Giussani on the one hand verified whether the experience of Peter, Andrew, and the other disciples was authentically humanizing for himself as well, and also invited the young people he encountered on the train, not just in the Berchet classrooms, to travel this road with him. Fr. Giussani traced the criterion of authenticity of their ‘movement’ following Christ in the expe-

<sup>69</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 77.

<sup>70</sup> Jer 31:3.

<sup>71</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979-1981)* [Certain of a few great things (1979–1981)] (Milan: Bur, 2007), 158.

<sup>72</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [An event of life, that is, a history], ed. C. Di Martino (Rome: EDIT-Il Sabato, 1993), 341.

riences of faith reported in the Gospels and the rest of the Bible. In this way, he came to believe that if his experience with those fellow travelers was humanizing like that of Peter, Andrew, and the other apostles, then it meant that the risen Christ continued to be effectively present in history, to save the humanity of our era as well.”<sup>73</sup>

The Church does not want acritical adherents. I have to verify whether what has entered my life enables me to challenge every darkness, doubt, fear, and insecurity. As we should have seen in the School of Community, the Church does not take us for a ride or cheat us.<sup>74</sup>

This is the challenge. You understand, then, the insufficiency of the association, the sheepfold, the comfortable places where we think we are living as Christians. We will not survive in this way. Those who propose this to you do not have your best interests at heart. Jesus did not close His disciples in the sheepfold, but gave them a method for challenging the world and verifying His promise: “If you remain in relationship with Me, you will realize that you are living in a way that has no compare.”<sup>75</sup>

One person wrote me, “What stands up to the test of time? I’ve often thought that this question was due to latent depression, raging cynicism or in any case lack of faith. But recently I’ve come to understand that this isn’t the case at all. No, this question isn’t the fruit of depression, because over time it has transformed and become a constitutive part of my relationship and daily dialogue with Him. I often find myself asking, ‘Christ, how do You withstand the test of time? How do you endure in my marriage, friends, the relationship with my growing children, in the challenges of daily life, in the fears that grip me, in the things that I used to like and now leave me indifferent? How?’ He always makes me find other things than those I would have expected (this is a characteristic trait of His happening), and they bring me new life. There was a long period in my life when Christ was a kind of knick-knack on the shelf to call upon in cases of need and urgency, while I could easily handle the rest on my own. But now, without even having experienced too many big shocks, I have come to the clear awareness that it was no exaggeration for Him to

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<sup>73</sup> Franco Manzi, “Punto di vista di un biblista sugli *Atti* del Convegno della FTL: Giussani: Il pensiero sorgivo” [The point of view of a biblist on the acts of the FTL conference: Giussani; at the sources of his thought], in *Rivista Teologica di Lugano*, anno XXIV, 2019, no. 1, 200.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Giussani, *Why the Church?* 204–5.

<sup>75</sup> “The Church repeats with Jesus that it can be recognized as credible because of its correspondence to man’s elementary needs in their most authentic flourishing. This is what Jesus meant by the expression [...] a ‘hundredfold’ on this earth [not in the great beyond] and it is as if the Church is also telling man: ‘With me, an experience of fullness of life that you will not find elsewhere will be yours.’ It is on the razor-edge of this promise that the Church puts itself to the test, proposing itself to all men as the prolongation of Christ.” *Ibid.*, 206.

say ‘Without Me you can do nothing.’ In any case, after hearing Giussani at the Beginning Day wish us the ‘tenacity of a journey,’ and after a lot of vacillation, my husband and I decided to get back on the road, first of all by returning to a participation in the gesture of charitable work. It was one of the most beautiful moments of our marriage, because in our deciding together to do this again, He was among us again. Mysteriously, by adhering to an educative proposal of the companionship that apparently had nothing to do with it, we found ourselves together again, united on the road in a way that hadn’t happened for a long time. What an unexpected gift! Charitable work has been like a tsunami in my life because right away it lay bare my reduced position in front of life.”

This superabundance of life is what enables you to verify the truth of the message the Church offers, her proposal of herself as the continued presence of Christ in history. The experience of a fullness that cannot be experienced elsewhere is the “verification” of what the Church says about herself: “I am the Body of Christ, the face of His presence here and now.” In this way, you will be able to say, adhering with increasing reasonableness to what the Church says of herself: “Christ is here.”

In order to reach this certainty, people must choose to live in that place through which the life of the Church comes to them, because the Church “is life and must offer life.” This is why a person decides to come here over a weekend, in order to be submerged in this life. In fact, Fr. Giussani continued, “But neither can man attempt to make such a portentous verification without a commitment that engages his entire life.” For this reason, “If the Church cannot cheat, then neither can man [each of us].”<sup>76</sup>

Time is crucial for this verification, for the difference of Christianity to emerge in front of our eyes, to see what truly stands up to the test of time, circumstances, challenges, and disappointments. Never fear: we just need to be loyal to the needs of our heart. They are so impervious to our manipulations that they can unmask any idol we have built! Only time and a comparison with our heart is needed to see what is true, because only what is true lasts over time. We all know that the truth has an unmistakable accent and lasts over time. Why does it last? Because, as we said at the beginning, it corresponds to the needs of our heart. None of the promises of the idols last because they do not correspond to our heart. “They have mouths but do not speak,”<sup>77</sup> as the prophets of Israel said. Idols have no substance; they are nothing. After a while, poof, they disappear.

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 208.

<sup>77</sup>Pss 115:5

To travel a certain road, we have at hand instruments that are impervious to our manipulation. This is the challenge each of us must undertake.

So, to conclude, here is a documentation of the verification of the proposal that we are all offered continually in the Movement and that enables us not to return to A after experiencing B.

“I’m experiencing very concretely the definitive passage to the maturity of my faith. I’ve been in the Movement for thirty-four years, but in this recent period I’ve been given the grace to experience a leap in my self-awareness of faith. I’ve come to see the disproportion between what I’ve received and my humanity. For a long time I lived with the Gnostic presumption that I understood, and I tried, in a Pelagian way, to apply what I thought I’d understood. Today everything appears new to me and I find myself in a completely different position from the one I had when I met the Movement. I’m beginning to be moved by everything. Words I’ve read thousands of times and that gave me intellectual satisfaction but didn’t change my position an inch now leave me disarmed. I’ve come to realize that I’ve been following Giussani in an abstract way, without concretely engaging my intelligence and heart. I’ve begun to understand the meaning of affective intelligence and attachment to Giussani’s person, and consequently to his words. Giussani is no longer someone external to my humanity; now he has begun to judge it from within. The real meaning of what I’d learned and almost knew by heart from chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, and 10 of *The Religious Sense* is beginning to be revealed for me. I’m fascinated because I’m returning to being a child. I discover I have everything to learn, not so much in order to accumulate knowledge as to ‘live reality intensely.’”

In a relationship with all our circumstances, the more we carry out a personal verification of Christ’s capacity to change our lives (“Those who follow Me will have the hundredfold here on earth”) and cause it to be reborn, the more charged our acknowledgement of His presence will be, the more charged will be our yes to Him and the concrete way He has chosen to reach us and win us over: the Movement.

Thus, verification is the great road of personalization of the faith, of the maturation of the certainty of the presence of Christ in our lives.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Ez 37:21–28; Jer 31:10–12b.13; Jn 11:45–56*

## HOMILY OF ARCHBISHOP MATTEO ZUPPI METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF BOLOGNA

These Spiritual Exercises bring us into the Holy Week of the passion and resurrection. They are days that illuminate all our days. We prepare to follow with deep emotion the Son of Man in His love, all the way to the end. His passion always questions and orients us. In fact, He gives all of Himself to us and helps us understand where we are. We will betray Him out of commonplace presumption, thinking that the opposite of fear is courage and not love; we will be able to weep and then start fresh from His word, like Peter; we will see the cowardice of the powerful and the furious tenacity of the men of the law who condemn Him; we will be dismayed by our murderous stupidity, hidden amidst the manipulated crowd that screams for the condemnation of its savior; we will remain with Mary at the foot of the cross, and will choose to grow, taking as our own this mother entrusted to us, and learning to cherish her in order to be responsible children and not distant orphans.

Loving and following Jesus, we also become saints: not perfect, as we are forced in reality to worry about outward appearances, to curb our desire for the best seats and the humble greetings of beggars, made great only because they were loved by Jesus. Jesus is the encounter, the ever new encounter, who with sweetness urges us to continue running, above all when our strides become a bit heavy and lazy, and with firmness asks us not to be afraid to be with Him and to love Him, not to leave Him and waste our life and its gifts.

Time is short and fleeting. There are a limited number of Easters and opportunities! We are poor little ones. Actually, what a joy it is to understand this and be told this, learning to laugh at ourselves. (Sometimes we take ourselves so seriously that nobody can offer us even a small correction, but a sense of humor and good spirits help us to relativize our “I” and not relativize the Lord, something that is decidedly easier for us to do!) Remembering our fragility is not frustrating at all, as the idolatry of the “I” would have us believe.

During Lent we have returned to ourselves; we have not gone outside ourselves. We are poor little ones who stretch out our hands to the one hand that saves, as in the very beautiful image of this year’s Easter poster.

“I remain the same poor beggar, but with Christ I am certain, I am rich. [...] It is only in a companionship with Him that a person loves himself. Only a person who carries this message can claim an affection for himself, can love himself and therefore love others,”<sup>78</sup> said Fr. Giussani. This is not something to be taken for granted at all for a generation like ours, which theorizes and lives a self-love, but one reduced to individualism; this individualism may be guaranteed by all the protections of human rights, but it is without the other, and in the end is without love.

As we have heard, we are the people promised by the prophet, a people made up of the humble and the poor (“I will make them one nation on the land”), a people that is also His sanctuary. I believe (at least this is the case for me, but I think it is for you, too) that seeing you, seeing each other, in this way, that being together physically and seeing this sanctuary, helps us in our days of solitude and difficulty to remember that we are part of this people, a people that we discover to be much bigger than we thought (and this is a grace!), but that asks us for a continually new and personal belonging. This people is not made up of protagonists whose interaction ends up causing division and exhaustion, but of sisters and brothers always called to serve and cherish communion, which is not necessarily a given and is not achieved once and for all.

Being saints is our one way of being protagonists; it enables us to be truly ourselves and is revealed in love for others, not in lording it over them or using them. We are a people who does not act out of the hubris of the just or the negative harshness of the doomsayers, a people who fails to recognize the signs of grace and sees nothing other than ruin and trouble because they do not read history or believe in providence. What a joy to be part of this people of poor little ones, to have been part of it for so many years, as I believe to be the case for many of you, part of a faithful and sweet friendship that seeks and helps sustain the good, united with what Pope Benedict called a “trustworthy companionship,” part of a caravan that has never stopped journeying and has accompanied many of us practically our whole lives.

The unity and concord of this people, which is always delicate, always to be served and never to be exploited, is entrusted to each of us. When Giussani spoke of the Church as “the place in which all these people are enriched,” he was visibly moved. This is the opposite of the way of the world, where the few become rich and the others remain truly poor. Here, “all these people are enriched, they give of themselves and receive the rich-

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<sup>78</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 68.

es of the gifts of the others.” Giussani continued, “It is moving how the Church is a place of humanity, the place of humanity, where humanity grows, increases, continually removing spurious things that enter, because we are people; it is human, therefore women and men are human when they remove what is spurious and love the pure. The Church is something truly moving.” He also said, “The battle with nihilism, against nihilism, is this lived sense of profound emotion.”<sup>79</sup>

As we heard in the Gospel, in some ways these days are a purification for Easter, for living Easter, but they are also a great foretaste. In fact, Holy Week is the most opportune time for removing what is spurious in our heart and in our Fraternity because we are made to love and to be saints, not because we are perfect, but because we are loved. We ask to be able to remove what is spurious and ask for forgiveness and forgiving, and we choose to love and open ourselves to such a great love.

In a generation like ours without bonds, which is afraid of bonds and yet ends up bound to and dependent on many things, let us give thanks for being part of a people like this, one who continues to sing its liberation; that is, its love for the Lord who restores us to ourselves. We have not lost our wonder at an encounter that renews itself. The Easter of passion and resurrection (you do not have one without the other!) helps us find our first love again, so that we do not become lukewarm and avaricious stewards, at times bitter because of inevitable disappointments. It drives us to seek not enemies, but people. It heightens our gusto in speaking with everyone, and the enthusiasm to not settle for mediocrity or being lukewarm and discontented witnesses.

Each of us is entrusted with a piece of this charism, of this people, as we heard in the prophet Ezekiel’s words, of this promise that passes through our life, as Fr. Carrón said earlier, that becomes concrete and perhaps you recognize only much later—“Finally I understand!”—a promise we must bring to the world and give to many with the intelligence and patience of friendship and love because it is a gift. A gift is lost when we make it a possession, and actually, we only possess what we give. May many people come to see the beautiful, the true, and the good not in abstract categories or as a distant truth, but in each of us, in our concrete humanity, poor as it is, in the beauty, truth, and goodness of our personal life. Let’s cherish it.

This is why we have no nostalgia for the past: Christ is a presence that we feel to be true today, a human presence that has safeguarded us and is

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<sup>79</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio: Dio e l'uomo* [Time and the temple: God and man] (Milan: Bur, 1995), 74.

renewed without losing itself or its value. His presence becomes our own presence, which has known sin but not become cynical or resigned. “They will be My people, and I will be their God.” This presence moves us to go forward “happily,”<sup>80</sup> as we have sung, on the road to encounter the poor and the people. “They will be My people, and I will be their God. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them. My dwelling shall be with them,” and be His sanctuary.

This is what stands up to the test of time. What lasts is the love that does not suffer corruption because it is the holiness of God, personal and of the people, mine and ours. What lasts is love given and service to sisters and brothers and to the poor, who are the littlest siblings of this same fraternity, bending over to wash their feet. What lasts is the communion that unites us and that sin cannot break. What lasts is His love that responds to the question in today’s Gospel, which is basically the question of our expectancy, which is at times desperate. “What do you think? That He will not come to the feast?” Yes, my and our Lord comes, and comes only for love. He comes and His faithfulness lasts even when everything seems to be over. He comes to the feast, giving His life, to prepare for the feast that will never end.

“A total positivity in life must guide the souls of Christians, no matter what their situation, no matter what remorse they feel, no matter what injustice weighs on them, no matter what darkness surrounds them, no matter what hostility, no matter what death assails them, because God, who made all living things, is for the good, God is the positive hypothesis on everything that women and men live.”<sup>81</sup> May these words of Fr. Giussani become our prayer, in the certainty and joy of having found what lasts forever: the love that only wants our good.

Easter makes us rise again with Him, and lasts forever.

#### BEFORE THE BLESSING

***Julián Carrón.*** Dearest Excellency, together with all of those present I would like to thank you from the heart for having accepted our invitation to preside at this Eucharist during our annual Spiritual Exercises. Thank you for what you have said, your Excellency. At this time of a change of era, a

<sup>80</sup> Cf. “La canzone della Bassa” [The song of the Bassa], in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Cooperative Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 234.

<sup>81</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In search of the human face], The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, May 3–5, 1996, supplement to *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, July/August 1996, 12.

time that is far from simple, thank you for your witness of a total and heartfelt identification with and following of Pope Francis. This is what each of us desires to live, ever more united with Christ and His church, going out to meet our fellow men, above all the poor and needy. Thank you!

*Archbishop Zuppi.* I should be the one to express thanks, obviously, for the invitation. I was told that there would not be many of you in Rimini... In any case, thank you. I am deeply aware of what a gift our journey together is, what a gift this communion and Fraternity are. I also must thank those of you who are from Bologna. I thank you very much for your service and testimony. But I think together we must also thank the Lord who comes. One might wonder, "Who knows if He will come?" He will come! These days help us open our hearts and not be like those Pope Francis describes, with his sense of humor, as "Christians who live Lent without Easter." Truly, these days are a preparation for removing what is spurious in us, as I said before, following Giussani's very beautiful expression, because we are made for this people, for this sanctuary, and truly, our poverty already finds Easter and the resurrection in our being together, in journeying together. Let us thank the Lord for this and ask for His blessing so that this Easter may find us with Him, facing evil with Him and not escaping it, having with us the power of love, which is stronger than any adversity, and aware that giving one's life means that it lasts forever.

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*Salve Regina*

# *Saturday, April 13, afternoon*

*During the entrance and exit:*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Piano Concerto in D Minor no. 20, K 466*

*Clara Haskil, piano*

*Igor Markevitch—Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux*

*Spirto Gentil n. 32, Philips*

## ■ SECOND MEDITATION

**Julián Carrón**

***“The victory that conquers the world is our faith” (1 Jn 5:4)***

The first step we took this morning was to make an observation: there is “a different type of relationship among our people, a more respectful and true climate,” a newness of life that we perceive in many around us and that the pages of *Why the Church?* have helped us grasp. As I travel around the world visiting the communities of the Movement, this is one of the things that most amazes me: in the most remote places, there are simple people, not flashy and hardly known to others, who live a marvelous experience that fills them to overflowing with gratitude. In the most diverse of situations, infinitely more dramatic than we can imagine, many begin to experience the newness, the blossoming and an intensification of life, of a different way of facing circumstances, difficulties included.

This is possible everywhere and to anyone. It’s what leaves me speechless every time. Listen to what Aliona from Karaganda tells us about herself: “I met the Movement at school in 1997 when Fr. Edoardo came to our history class to tell us about Italy. A friendship began, and he came to our house for dinner. He struck us very much, and after a while, he invited us to the vacations. We had never seen anything of the kind, and we were won over. We began going to the School of Community, met new friends, and continued to participate in the vacations. Then I enrolled in university and two years later, caught up in student life, left the community, because [pay attention to this passage] it seemed I had already received the faith, and so I could go to church on my own. I felt the community had stopped helping me. I got married and had two daughters. About when my second child was born, the elder was diagnosed with a strange illness. Obvious, this was a great trial for me. I began to look for meaning again and felt an enormous void in my relationships with my husband and children. It seemed

that life had become a dead end and something was always missing. Seven years later, my younger daughter had to go to school. Outside the building I met my former teacher, who had encountered the Movement with me. Speaking with her, I asked, 'Is there still the School of Community and all the rest?' perhaps with hope for myself. She replied, 'Certainly! We're here.' Then she looked at me and asked me how I was. When I told her about my older daughter, she said, 'A child like this should be loved much more. Come with us on the vacation.' During that vacation I saw again people I had met years ago. I saw how they lived. Their eyes were full and shone with joy. Their families were happy with their lives. I understood that I was so closed that my life was a race [based] on myself, without meaning. Once again, I felt my heart fill with enthusiasm. Five years have passed since then, and I still feel this is the one place where I truly live, where I am myself, where I can love my daughter the way I wish I had from the beginning, where I can love my husband just the way he is. Nothing else is able to respond to my questions, only Christ. The School of Community and charitable work have restored me to myself."

What made possible this different way of living? I'll respond with the most immediately evident factor: the involvement of her own life with the proposal of the Movement, that is, of the Church in the way it has persuasively reached us. It was a faithfulness to this proposal. Those who choose to become involved with the life that the Church proposes to us through the Movement have experienced a newness that we can observe in many signs and that communicates itself to us. Nothing in life is mechanical, including Christianity. For this reason, in the same community there can be people who live a faithfulness to it, and people who remain indifferent.

This renews the question that is the title of our Spiritual Exercises: What can withstand the test of time? The more evident the fullness of life and the newness we have experienced, the more acute the question becomes: How can this change last?

## **1. The problem of duration**

How can the gaze that we sometimes find fixed upon ourselves and that causes us to burst with joy become ours? How does that beauty become mine? How can what I experience through living immersed in the Christian community reach all, truly all, aspects of my life?

We have the great fortune that years ago at a certain stage of his experience with the university students, Fr. Giussani faced the same question ("What lasts?"), and so we can be accompanied by him, step by step, in

responding to the urgent need we have sensed in these days. Fr. Giussani tells us that there is only one road: since faithfulness to the proposal produced that change, we must be faithful, must “continue being faithful!”<sup>82</sup>

But here our difficulty begins, because the moralism that characterizes the world in which we are immersed begins to emerge in us, too. There is a way most people understand being faithful, and Fr. Giussani warns us that “this faithfulness is entirely given over to your ability to conform to ethics.” We are tempted to interpret faithfulness in terms of moralism and willpower, and tend to read everything in the light of our ability. In other words, we have discovered a certain newness of life, experienced an unexpected change, and now must work hard to make it last, to prolong it and achieve it in everything. “Just think,” Giussani said then, “of the boredom of the pressing repetitiveness of having to tell each other continually, ‘We have to change our relationships, we have to treat each other with respect during this vacation, we have to love each other as sisters and brothers, we have to be true friends, we have to respect order....’ We have to!” Consequently, “how to go forward” is understood as “a phenomenon of an effort of willpower,”<sup>83</sup> as if constantly reminding each other were sufficient for keeping the soul from falling away, for keeping the morale of the group high, as if with our exhortations we could generate what we desire.

“But I believe,” Giussani continued, “that I would not be a bird of ill omen or a pessimist if I predicted that as time passes, constantly repeated reminders will be met with a certain falling off of your attention, a certain cooling in your enthusiasm, because enthusiasm is a response to newness.”<sup>84</sup> The newness is the truth, the divine that manifests itself, attracting and moving our being.

The duration of our change cannot come from our will because we all know from the start that our efforts cannot hold. “Ultimately this will and commitment of ours, this ethics cannot help but remain very fragile,”<sup>85</sup> above all in a society that says exactly the opposite of what we propose to each other and try to live.

There is no use trying to hide it. “Our endogenous, structural fragility makes us like leaves blown in the wind; it makes us easy prey to the powers that be, the secular, social, and civil powers. Just try to stably withstand the mentality that surrounds us, the mentality that determines the paths and

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<sup>82</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985)* [Here and now (1984-1985)] (Milan: Bur, 2009), 55.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 56.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

roads for a university career, for a profession, the mentality of your home about what you should do, the mentality of everyone! Just try to withstand this! Not only to withstand secular power, but also ecclesial power: if our experience were to be boycotted, opposed, or fought in the reality of the Church, the communicative energy and the creativity of our belonging would grow thin and everything would become increasingly limited; it is too easy to foresee the incapacity of our effective resistance. But an experience becomes history when it cannot be stopped by the powers that be.”<sup>86</sup> This is even clearer for all of us today than it was a few decades ago.

Thus the invitation to faithfulness is “not an invitation immediately determined by hope in our willpower, nor is it founded on our ethics.”<sup>87</sup>

So then, if faithfulness does not depend on our willpower, what does it depend on? In order to respond, first we have to ask ourselves: How did Christianity become history? In fact, the answer to this question embraces all its newness and exceptionality, which are the foundation of faithfulness, and of which we need to become more aware.

## **2. “The claim of Christ’s contemporaneity in history”**

What enabled the beginning of the experience lived by the disciples to continue over time? Did Christianity continue in history and become history through the willpower of the first followers? Were they so good that they were able to ensure its permanence from the beginning? They, too, were hard-pressed by the collapse of everything, even of the One who had elicited such great enthusiasm. In fact, after His death, the two disciples returning home said, “We were hoping that we had finally seen the arrival of Him who could fulfill the promise we had received when we encountered him, that promise that corresponded to the expectancy of the heart, but now, everything is finished.”<sup>88</sup> The two disciples of Emmaus were returning home disappointed. When a few women ran to the apostles to bring them the announcement of the resurrection, some thought, “São loucas,” as it says in the song,<sup>89</sup> “they are crazy.”

So then, what enabled the initial phenomenon to become permanent, if it was not their efforts—and realizing this is already liberating—and attempts at organization? What explains the fact that it lasted?

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<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–57.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Lk 24:13–35.

<sup>89</sup> “Barco Negro,” music by Caco Velho and Piratini, lyrics by D. Mourão-Ferreira.

This question dogs historians and anyone who studies the Gospel stories. Reading the Gospel texts, which did not at all hide the dismay of the apostles, we find ourselves in front of this paradox: all the disciples had abandoned Him and fled, but a few days later they were gathered together, united, enthusiastic, and willing to do anything. Historians do not know how to explain this. And yet this change must have an explanation! So they turn to the same word we have been using in these days: “something” must have happened. These bewildered and disappointed people returned home skeptical because the promise had not been kept. But soon after they were united again, enthusiastic, willing to do anything, overflowing with energy.

Even Strauss, the rationalist historian who denied the historicity of the resurrection, had to admit that the change in the disciples must have been due to “something” that happened to them. A lie invented by the disciples would not adequately explain the rapid change in them. “A spontaneous falsehood [i.e., fabricated stories of His resurrection and subsequent appearances] on the part of the disciples could not possibly have animated them to so unflinching an announcement of the resurrection of Jesus amid the greatest perils; and it is a just argument of modern apologists that the astonishing revolution from the deep depression and utter hopelessness of the disciples at the death of Jesus, to the strong faith and enthusiasm with which they proclaimed Him as the Messiah on the succeeding Pentecost, would be inexplicable unless in the interim [that is, just a few weeks after His crucifixion] something extraordinarily encouraging had taken place—something, in fact, which had convinced them of His resurrection.”<sup>90</sup>

Christianity became history, a history that has arrived all the way to us today, to me, to you, because of what happened a few days after the crucifixion. What enabled it to become history? The fact that the divine manifested itself with an even greater power: the one thing that enabled this change and permanence over time was the fact that they saw Him alive. “‘Christ is alive’ means saying that Christ has lordship over time. He is the Lord of time. He conquers time.”<sup>91</sup>

Christ is present now! This is the exceptional nature of Christianity, and it makes Christ different from any other figure in the pantheon of religions. “The exceptional nature is the claim of Christ’s contemporaneity in history,”<sup>92</sup> a contemporaneity that no power in this world

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<sup>90</sup> David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, trans. George Eliot from the 4th German edition (London: G. Allen & Co., 1913), 739, available at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/g/genpub/AJH1242.0001.001/739?rgn=full+text;view=image;q1=Pentecost>.

<sup>91</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 63.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

has been able to stop, and thus it has reached us. It will never be stopped, ever, by any power.

So the faithfulness is faithfulness to Christ risen. What enables it to last, what withstands the test of time, is not our abilities, but that newness, His very presence, His presence happening again now, a presence now that has entered into our lives, that we have continually seen reappear, that we could never remove from our hearts. I cannot remove it from my heart; I cannot remove it from my history. I could leave, but I would take it with me. That “something” that historians like Strauss admit, even while they cannot recognize it or follow it personally, is nothing other than the fact of Christ risen. The faithfulness of which we have been speaking is faithfulness to this fact.

“The first disciples’ experience of fullness could be left in the distance, with melancholy and nostalgia [...] felt to be equal to other experiences in other spheres, in other moments of history. But the exceptional nature [...], as Eliot said in *Four Quartets*, the intersection of the timeless in time, lies in the fact that the change provoked lasts, lasts, becomes duration (‘duration’ means another reality, another way that reality proceeds, because duration is the substance of being, another being), or in other words, makes itself history. The exceptional nature is that the change lasts and makes itself history.”<sup>93</sup>

The permanence of the change, the fact that the beginning became history, requires my faithfulness, yes, but it is given, generated by something that is not me, that is, by a presence that dominates history, that has overcome space and time and is here, now. “He is here. / He is here as on the first day,”<sup>94</sup> said Péguy. He is happening now. There is “something that comes first,” before my faithfulness, which asks for and supports my faithfulness: it is His happening now.

“A year ago I was going through a period of great difficulty. I was not well at all, but tried to stay attached by a thin thread to a few friends who were not afraid and didn’t crumble. One day I went to see one of them, and I was in a really bad state. She said, ‘Our friendship is sacred because it opens questions that only an Other can answer.’ A few weeks later I was at dinner with another friend and as I was crying she looked at me and asked point blank, ‘Who are you?’ I said to myself, ‘the answer for me is not words, some Christian explanations, but His presence. Nothing less! He is

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>94</sup> Charles Péguy, “Il mistero della carità di Giovanna d’Arco” [The mystery of the charity of Joan of Arc], in *I misteri [Mysteries]* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1997), 56.

the answer, and in my encounter with Him, He wounded my heart forever with His beauty. In the details of my life, which is a history within His history, I see that the one thing that lasts is God's faithfulness, His continuing to wait for me, desire me, seek me out: His being there!" Christ comes to us through friends who do not crumble, who are not afraid.

So then, what is the mortal danger that we have often seen looming over us? It is relegating Christ, the event of His presence, our encounter with Him, to the past, and living a memory of, a nostalgia for the beginning (as the archbishop of Milan told us recently in his homily on the anniversary of Fr. Giussani's death),<sup>95</sup> in an attempt—in our presumption—to develop the consequences of our encounter ourselves. It is a Kantian temptation. In this way, Christ becomes a nonpresence, a presence in the past, a background premise that we use for inspiration for commitments and projects. This is not just a Protestant attitude. It can be our attitude toward our crucial encounter with the reality of the Movement, which has marked the lives of all of us here.

"There is a danger," said Fr. Giussani, "and we have experienced it. How many of us have fallen prey to it!" What danger? "Just as humanity has always somewhat thought of the golden age as the beginning of human time, as the earthly paradise, so many people have felt the beginning of our Movement or the beginning of their participation in the Movement as a kind of golden age, as a kind of wondrous fascination that over time, however, has lost its attractiveness: [...] Protestantism has set up this gaze upon the figure of Christ as a system. That 'was' the moment. Why did it happen? It happened so that in the memory of that moment, people of all times could have reason to hope for the future, for the afterworld, for their destiny, while they pass through this life, so full of disappointments of all kinds and above all disappointment in themselves, moral disappointment!"<sup>96</sup>

Pope Francis recently wrote in his apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit* that "we can risk seeing Jesus Christ simply as a fine model from the distant past, as a memory, as someone who saved us two thousand years ago. But that would be of no use to us: it would leave us unchanged, it would not set us free."<sup>97</sup>

<sup>95</sup> Cf. Mario Delpini, "Dimorare in Cristo" [Dwelling in Christ], Omelia per l'anniversario della morte di don Giussani e del riconoscimento pontificio della Fraternità [Homily for the anniversary of the death of Fr. Giussani and the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity], February 11, 2019, [chiesadimilano.it](http://chiesadimilano.it)

<sup>96</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 60–61.

<sup>97</sup> Francis, postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Christus vivit*, 124.

“For this reason,” Fr. Giussani continued, “I insisted that the exceptional nature lies in the fact that the change lasts, that it becomes duration, that it becomes history, that the fact becomes history, is permanent, and after two thousand years, the content of the first poster [the announcement that God became flesh, became a human presence in history] is still true, in the sense that it is experienced, renewed, made new, lived, and two thousand years from now, if the world still exists, it will still be so. The divine is the victory over time, but not time understood eschatologically (look at Protestantism: the victory of God at the end of time, the victory of God at the end of your life, the God who judges you after death); it is the victory of God in time, over time, within time.”<sup>98</sup>

The true challenge is whether what began can continue, whether it can become ours, or in other words, whether Christ risen can generate a new creature, a witness in whom one sees that a relationship with His presence is not deferred until after death, in the beyond, but exists now, so that we can touch His presence now.

So then, the permanence of the newness is not ensured by the “tenacity of our coherence,” nor is it guaranteed by our willpower, by an “imperturbable constant repetition of reminders,”<sup>99</sup> by the intelligence of our attempts. No! “The exceptional nature that makes the change become history, become duration, and last [...] is something objective that already exists. It is clear: the permanence of my change, of your change, either comes from something that is in you, or it comes from something objective that already exists. Either it depends on your will or it depends on something that already exists—already exists!—on a reality that dominates the reality that is in motion. This is the message of the second poster: Christ is risen. God has put history in that man’s hand!”<sup>100</sup>

We can say it again with the words of Pope Francis: “The one who fills us with His grace, the one who liberates us, transforms us, heals and consoles us is someone fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead, filled with supernatural life and energy, and robed in boundless light.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 61.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 62–63. “For me, it is enough that Christ is alive. If He is alive, I am alive, because my soul is suspended in his; even more, He is my life, what I need. In fact, what do I lack if Jesus is alive? Even should everything of mine go lacking, this would be of no importance to me, as long as Jesus is alive.” Guerrico d’Igny, “I Sermone per la Resurrezione del Signore” [Sermons for the Resurrection of the Lord], in Scuola Cisterciense, *Pensieri d’amore* [Thoughts of love] (Casale Monferrato (AI): Piemme, 2000), 257.

<sup>101</sup> Francis, *Christus vivit*, 124.

Tolstoy wrote: “It is long since Christ died; his carnal existence was short and we have no clear idea of his carnal individuality; but the strength of his life of reason and of love, his relationship to the world [...] exercises today an influence on millions of men who accept this relationship to the world and conform their life to it. What is it that acts thus? What is this thing which, joined formerly to the carnal existence of Christ, produces the continuation and the expansion of this same life? We say that it is not the life of Christ but its consequences. And in saying these words, which have no meaning, it appears to us that we have said something much more clearly and precisely than if we had said that this force is the living Christ himself.”<sup>102</sup>

Christ is risen means Christ is present, that He is here, as on the first day. “There is a reality within the world, there is a reality that has touched our flesh and bones with Baptism, there is a reality that can make itself heard and seen through our companionship [...], there is a reality that penetrates time, creating a flow, a people that will never end, to which all women and men are called; there is a reality that is God made man. He who made all things identified with the precariousness of flesh, identifies with the precariousness of flesh, makes Himself heard and tangible with the precariousness of flesh. That for which the human person is made is this Man who is among us.”<sup>103</sup>

In 1984, going back to the memory of the beginning of our history, Giussani said, “The initial fascination of the Movement was precisely this. From the first day we spoke, the message was Christ’s victory over the world, Christ’s victory over history: ‘Jesus Christ is the center of the cosmos and of history.’”<sup>104</sup>

Christ is contemporaneous in history. He makes Himself heard and tangible through His companionship, through the precariousness of flesh, and thus can be lived now, by me, by you, by us. He is “to be lived in his rehappening, and none of the powers that be, of any nature, whether civil or ecclesiastical, will ever be able to stop this contemporaneousness, ever!” Fr. Giussani added an observation that holds for us today as well, at times so desirous to count our numbers because of our existential insecurity: “At the end of the world, we do not know whether there will be twelve, as Solovev supposed and imagined, or twelve billion. It doesn’t matter. It is extraneous. What matters is that this contemporaneousness of Christ in

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<sup>102</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *On Life* (Guildford, UK: White Crow Books, 2009), 136.

<sup>103</sup> Luigi Giussani, *La verità nasce dalla carne* [Truth is born of the flesh] (Milan: Bur, 2019), 115.

<sup>104</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 64.

my story will never be suspended or blocked, never [...]. So then, faithfulness must be the experience of what Christ is in the first poster: faithfulness to this fact that happened. Thus faithfulness is the experience of change as duration in history, experience of the change produced [...] by a reality that already exists: faithfulness to this thing that already exists”<sup>105</sup> and changes me now, generating in me a new creature that lasts over time.

Here is an example of faithfulness to this something that already exists:

“I realize that it takes little or nothing (an illness, an ill-considered decision, or ‘just one of those things’) to set my back to the wall and make me lose my grip on what I thought I had under control. This has already happened a couple of times and it could happen again. To answer your question, I can only draw upon my personal experience. What helped me escape from what seemed literally like a prison whose bars were the lack of substance of my actions and thoughts? The turbine in which I found myself did not stop me from remaining attached to the gestures that our friends of the Fraternity continued to propose, simple gestures, discreet, but proposed with unbounded faithfulness. I went to the School of Community with my head elsewhere, but I went. I followed a gesture of charity they had organized with disarming simplicity. I watched and listened. From my ‘prison’ I looked at the faces and listened to the songs with an attention I’d never had before. I repeated the words and marveled at how they seemed aimed right at me: ‘Be not afraid,’ ‘You are a faithful God,’ ‘He will take everyone’s shoes off,’ etc. I’m almost afraid to say it, but life became even more life through that simple and faithful presence evoked by the gestures and the songs sung a thousand times. What was evoked, if not a present presence? A ‘You’ who knows my thoughts, who lives in me.”

### **3. “This is the victory that conquers the world: faith”**

But “the experience of change as duration in history,” as Fr. Giussani led us to see it, questions our image of change. “The problem is to overcome a psychological image of change.” Look at the delicacy with which Giussani pointed it out. “A psychological conception of change is when someone says, ‘Yes, I have to be more this or that... I have to love and not exploit others...’ [...]; but then remains in the community resigned or disappointed because he does not change.” Why are we often disappointed? Because we identify the change with something we measure. “How many of us have seen this as an objection! The promise wasn’t kept, nothing changed! How

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 64–65.

often have I heard, ‘But nothing changes!’ This is a psychological conception of change, which you measure with your conscience, with the observation of your conscience. I had an irascible temperament before, and I still do now. I had kleptomaniac tendencies before and now in my pocket I have something belonging to my friend. I finished university and began my profession [...] and I don’t know what to do, everything is the way it was before. Nothing moves, or moves as I expected.”<sup>106</sup> We conceive of our change according to the image we imbibe from our surroundings as something we create; that is, as an increase in our abilities, an improvement in our performance.

But if change cannot be measured, what is it? Is it virtual? What is true change?

“The experience of change is determined, first of all, by the recognition of Christ as the victor over history. This is faith.<sup>107</sup> The point—the point!—is the certainty that the victory over history exists among us. Saint Paul said, ‘If Christ had not risen, our faith would be in vain, and we would be the most wretched of men.’”<sup>108</sup>

Therefore, true change that renews you with hope every morning, no matter what situation you have to face, no matter what difficulty you are going through, is the certainty that the victory of Christ over history exists among us. It is a metanoia, a change of mind-set. Thus the true change is faith, the recognition of His presence now. This is the victory in history and over history, “this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.”<sup>109</sup>

This is testified to in this letter:

“Thank you very much for the question you asked us for the Fraternity’s Spiritual Exercises. Since the day you sent it I have lived every moment of my day with a desire to see in my circumstances what truly responds to the

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 65, 62.

<sup>107</sup> “The first task of Christians is to bear witness to the Resurrection. They, too, are rebels who cannot resign themselves to the human condition. But they know that Someone has passed alive to the other side of things, and has opened the road for them.” Olivier Clément, *La rivolta dello Spirito [The revolt of the Spirit]* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1980), 169–70. “It is unthinkable that Christ risen should keep me just as I am, without transformation. He is alive in order to transform me. Believing in Christ is believing that there is a dynamic principle of transformation, that is, of liberation. In fact, I am not free, because I am a sinner, and I know this all too well. I cannot become free if I am not transformed. This is the Resurrection. It is not the reanimation of a cadaver. It is the passage to freedom, the freedom to love. This passage to freedom involves a radical transformation.” François Varillon, *Traversate di un credente* [Crossings of a believer] (Milan: Jaca Book, 2008), 149.

<sup>108</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 66.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. 1 Jn 5:4.

provocation you made. In this period I have come to realize that the only thing that withstands the test of time is the recognition that Jesus continually reappears and is my companion here and now. The one thing that enables the continuity of the beginning and the present is continuing to see Him alive in our midst, encounterable in every circumstance that is given to me. Faithfulness to this recognition is what enables duration and allows me to be ultimately glad in every circumstance, even in the most difficult ones. In this period I have some friends who are going through problems because of difficult situations in their families, work, or with their health, and in my relationship with them I have come to see that the truest companionship we can provide is to follow together a place where we are helped to recognize Jesus present, because only this enables you to lift your gaze and not succumb to difficulty. Fifteen days ago a dear friend was admitted to the hospital for a serious operation and felt very fearful and anxious. Unexpectedly, one evening he called me to say he was very struck by a letter in *Traces* written by a young woman from Bologna because what she recounted was exactly the answer to what was burdening him in that moment. I said, 'That's beautiful! But this is Jesus for you!' The next day when I saw him, his face was truly different, gladder, more trusting. Just by recognizing Jesus present, his fear and despondency were overcome! [Does anyone believe this anymore?] Recognizing Jesus who is our companion, and helping each other to see the unmistakable signs of His presence are what enable us to stay in front of circumstances, any circumstances, with a new point of view. I understand more and more that the true change that withstands the test of time is a recognition of the victory of Christ here and now. Following you gives me the opportunity to be helped continually to recognize Jesus who manifests Himself in our lives. The outcome of this journey in faithfulness to authority (which historically has been the way the Mystery reaches me) is that every evening I go to bed glad, at peace, and grateful for all the gifts the Mystery continually gives me."

As you can see, this is a change that lasts over time.

"The point is the certainty that the victory over history exists among us. It is precisely this characteristic, which is called faith [...], that gives us the capacity for an inexhaustible moral effort."<sup>110</sup> But then [...] the moral effort becomes 'participation in a fact.'<sup>111</sup>

<sup>110</sup> "That person knew how to bind me to a discipline, a sacrifice, with the simple gift of self. [...] The gift of herself raised me to the intuition of new duties, gave them a *body*." Cesare Pavese, *Il mestiere di vivere* [The art of living] (Turin: Einaudi, 1990), 34.

<sup>111</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 66.

The “I” as protagonist in history is generated by Christ present, by the recognition of Christ present. This is the great difference between Catholicism and Protestantism. Giussani insisted, “The new historical subject, different from others, that is, us, is constituted by a fascination for the claim of the contemporaneousness of Christ in history, [...] a fascination for the historical import of Christ risen, the recognition of Christ risen. And in saying this ‘us,’ you understand with amazement the abysmal difference between this modality by which God goes forward in history and your own abilities, the outcome of your own abilities. The outcome of our abilities should make us withdraw immediately. Instead, there is another question: not ethics, but faith. Ethics are possible as a consequence of faith. [...] Therefore, [as you can read in this year’s Easter poster], the people who followed Him, the disciples who followed Him, [...] were poor wretches like you and me. All the newness of hope, the absolutely new certainty and new reality that they were, was that Presence. The contemporaneousness of that Presence with me, with my children, with those who will come after us in a hundred million years: this is the victory that conquers the world. This is the absolute newness. This is the divine in history! I remain the same poor beggar, but with Christ I am certain, I am rich. The attractiveness of my person, that is, what makes it possible to love my person, is the existence of this presence.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, it is only in a companionship with Him that a person loves himself. Only a person who carries this message can claim an affection for himself, can love himself and therefore love others.”<sup>113</sup>

The true resource of our life is a present presence that fills us with wonder because He exists! “Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way He brings youth to our world. [...] Christ is alive and He wants you to be alive!”<sup>114</sup> Because of this presence, I am not determined in the final analysis by my failings, failures, incapacity, or sin. Participation in the human reality in which Christ makes Himself present responds to our nihilism, our lack of faith and perception of our incapacity, more than a thousand speeches, a thousand chit-chats among us, a thousand projects. A fact: this is Christianity! Not our conversations, not our efforts, but a fact, backed up by unquestionable evidence.

The certainty of His presence, which is called “faith,” gives us an inexhaustible capacity to stay in front of everything. Therefore, the one true

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<sup>112</sup> “Finally, the Lord should be asked not only for mercy, but we should direct all our affection to Him: thus we will love ourselves for Him.” St. Bernard, *Sermoni III: diversi e vari* [Sermons III: various] (Milan: Fondazione di Studi Cistercensi, 2000), 159.

<sup>113</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 67–68.

<sup>114</sup> Francis, *Christus vivit*, 1.

morality is the poverty of spirit of those who recognize a fact. It is simplicity of heart, because after the disciples placed Him in the tomb, they would never have dreamed, would never in their wildest imaginings have thought to see what they saw: Jesus alive!

Of whom can we say, “Are you always with me?” “I know, my love / that you have not even left / because everything around me / tells me that you are always with me.”<sup>115</sup> Pay attention here: recognizing Him present does not come automatically. It involves a battle between the experience you have and the world that has not met Him, between the experience the disciples had with Christ risen and all the chatter unleashed around the women. “São loucas! são loucas!”—they’re crazy! People can say the same about us: “You are crazy!”

The true challenge to the reason and freedom of each of us lies in this recognition: there is no greater decision than faith. We have not come here to invent a question and answer it ourselves, as some say, thinking we have found what withstands the test of time as if by magic, like pulling a rabbit out of a hat. No, we are here to go to the heart of what has happened to us. And we see deep down what we have encountered and truly own the experience we have—tell me if it is not so—only to the degree that we recognize Christ at work in our midst. If we remove the fact of Christ risen, present, and alive in the Christian community, each of us would have to ignore all the signs of the newness we find within.

But once I have recognized Him alive and present, how can I rise in the morning without desiring to recognize Him again, to always see Him out of the corner of my eye? Put yourself in the disciples’ shoes for a moment: after seeing Him alive, how could they have risen the next morning to go fishing, to go like St. Paul around the world to communicate Christ, to go do normal things (for us, like catching the bus or cleaning the house), without keeping Him in their gaze? They could not help but be filled with His presence. For this reason, for those who have recognized and recognize Him, the Christian existence is summarized in these beautiful words of St. Paul that we have heard so often: “...as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me.”<sup>116</sup> This is the true change: I live full of that presence. I am not defined by my efforts to change, but by an awareness of what has happened in my life. Relax, friends, it is not up to us to “hang on.” It is not our effort that sustains everything. No, no, He is risen, and we do not have to sustain His resur-

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<sup>115</sup> “Barco Negro,” music by Caco Velho and Piratini, lyrics by D. Mourão-Ferreira.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Gal 2:20.

rection. The opposite is the case: the risen Christ sustains our life. When you acknowledge His resurrection, you relax, and the anguish and stress no longer dominate in you. We can begin to change, all of life can begin to change, almost without our realizing it, without willing it: we simply find it within dynamisms that are not ours and discover we are different.

The experience of the recognition of Christ leads to another step: beyond the recognition, “the permanence of the recognition. What is this called? Memory. In fact, what has Christ asked for? Memory. He asked us to remember Him. ‘Do this in memory of Me.’ What is ‘this’? Everything!” Memory, the “permanent recognition” of His presence is the “true duration of our person. If this recognition is the fascinating content of our person, if the recognition of You, O Christ, is everything that I am as substance, the permanence of this recognition constitutes—constitutes—our person as duration.”<sup>117</sup>

Certainly, you could still object, “How can one endure?” But the objection is radically undermined: “‘The endurance is already given’ [it is not up to you to endure] [...], because the endurance is Christ.”<sup>118</sup> He is the one who endures, and in doing so also enables you to. Once again, it is the opposite of what we thought, and it is profoundly liberating to discover this.

#### **4. A place that is a road**

In order to keep this memory alive, a place is given to us: “The place where this memory arises [...], the wellspring of this memory, or in other words, where the recognition is drawn forth and continually called upon, the sign of this victory of Christ in history, is the living community, the new companionship, that is, people who are together because Christ is there.”<sup>119</sup>

If we want to last, if we want to withstand the test of time, we can do so only in the one place that stands up. Our effort is not what holds. Fr. Giussani stressed that it is a matter of “spending time with the sign of the victory of Christ!”—that is, a companionship where He is “‘He who is among us.’”<sup>120</sup> So then, our practical duty is to spend time with the sign of this victory, just as the disciples sought Him out the next day, and the next day, and once more the next day, because they were aware that if they did

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<sup>117</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 68.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

not spend time with Him, the newness encountered would become distant and ineffective over time.

“Dearest Fr. Carrón, I would like to tell you about something that has happened to me. I have to start on May 1, 2012, with your letter to *La Repubblica*,<sup>121</sup> in which, to my way of seeing, you distanced yourself from CL members under judicial investigation. I scorned that letter, because I thought that a father would not write that way about his children, and that Fr. Giussani would never have written anything of the kind. Months later, I too was involved in an investigation, and my life changed from one day to the next, with the loss of my job and all the difficulties that arise in these circumstances. Notwithstanding the strain, I was immediately accompanied by the idea that what happens is for the change of the person, and beyond this, God has never left me without the essential: the true and deep companionship of my wife, and the help and support, even material, of friends. However, I was disoriented: my former life (public and occupational) no longer existed and my Fraternity group had broken up. Some important aspects of the last twenty years of my life were put in doubt, and my interest in the Movement was at a historic low. Everything seemed complicated, hard to understand, and far from me. The need for an answer led me to practices that had not been part of my history. I went to Medjugorje and prayed like I’d never done in my life, yet at the same time I felt something incomplete in this process of ‘starting again.’ Then for reasons of work, my wife became friends with a person in the Movement whom we only knew by sight. It was like a little hole in a dam that starts widening until the whole structure gives way. Once again, the newness began to make its way through the flesh and though I did not throw myself into it, at least I did not oppose it. Very slowly, naturally, almost imperceptibly, and also with some reservations, I found myself undergoing a change, being seized again. In February 2019, when I read the CL press release on the occasion of Roberto Formigoni’s painful sentence,<sup>122</sup> I thought it very beautiful. Even more beautiful was the article in the Catholic newspaper

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<sup>121</sup> Julián Carrón, “Carrón: da chi ha sbagliato un’umiliazione per CL,” *La Repubblica*, May 1, 2012, 1, 11. Available in English with the title “We Have a Long Way to Go” at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2012/01/05/we-have-a-long-way-to-go?hl=carron%202012%20repubblica%20>.

<sup>122</sup> “Formigoni: Statement from Communion and Liberation, February 28, 2019.

Available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2019/02/28/formigoni-statement-from-communion-and-liberation?hl=Formigoni>.

*Avvenire*<sup>123</sup> that commented on the press release, describing it as ‘infinitely Christian.’ I went home, greeted my wife, who was busy, and told her how beautiful I thought the press release and article were. Then I sat down at the table, and as I was having dinner she sent me a WhatsApp message with a letter from Carrón that seemed to explain and justify the press release. ‘I missed this today,’ I thought. It seemed like the letter clarified each part of the press release, in a more analytical and complete way. I read the whole thing and then at the bottom saw the date: May 1, 2012. It was the letter that I had scorned almost seven years before. Now, as I write these lines and reread your letter from seven years ago, I’d like to quote here all the lines that describe me, but it’s impossible to choose, because the whole letter describes these years of my rebirth. In my experience, the whole letter responds to your question, ‘What withstands the test of time?’”

All it takes is a little hole in the dam and beginning to follow.

Do you want to keep from losing what you have found? You know where you encountered it and where you can return, and it is waiting for you. This would not be a victory of your effort, because your effort, like mine, is fallible, unable to endure, unable to withstand time. Therefore, let’s not waste time concentrating on our own efforts. Do you want to withstand time? Look where you recognize something that holds up. If you have found it in the Movement, in its different way of being together, in its ability to correct you, in the persuasiveness with which it made you discover the faith, then the method for lasting is engagement in the Movement, with this companionship, the sign of His presence for you. The faithfulness is to Him, through a faithfulness to this companionship.

As Fr. Giussani said in 1989—you can find it in Italian in the most recent book collecting the texts of the Spiritual Exercises, *La verità nasce dalla carne*—our companionship “has this paramount and immediate function for each of us. The Lord is great. He could have established millions of other forms, and in fact the Church is full of the richness of these different forms. We have been struck by this form. If we had not been struck this way, what there is among us would not have been necessary. But since we were reached in this way, it is necessary, and to abandon, smash, forget, or not use it would be to betray God. You cannot say to the Lord, ‘You have come to me by this road, but I will go to You by another.’ No! Therefore, we go to the Lord through this companionship and friendship, fragile though it may be. My God, I would like to be able to journey with

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<sup>123</sup> Mauro Leonardi, “Ma non si è figli perché non si sbaglia” [You are not a child by merit of never making mistakes], *Avvenire*, February 26, 2019.

each of you, but I'm not able; I don't even have enough energy and time to answer all your letters! You must forgive me, because I swear that my heart is different from how it appears. Let's help each other: this is the road the Lord uses to call us to Himself, to vigilance. It is such a fragile road, so debatable from many points of view, but it is the pedagogical instrument, the educative modality the Lord has prepared for you. Otherwise, if I were not convinced of this, do you think I would be here talking? For the love of God, I would think of myself and withdraw to pray!"<sup>124</sup> Imagine how liberating it was for me, here on the stage talking to you, to read these words of Giussani's!

### 5. "The cultural weight of our change"

When you live the call to memory in the place that Christ has chosen to involve you, you are full of energy for always beginning again, indomitable, as happened for the disciples. I can err a thousand times and then another thousand, but I continually start again and can communicate a newness to others, inviting them to participate in our life. Many times they will say no, but I continually start again because my doing so does not depend on their reaction. "This indomitable character, which is as easy as recognizing and embracing and kissing the face of your own mother, is the real experience in yourself of the victory over time. It is the reverberation in myself of the victory of the risen Christ over time." This surprising and indomitable character is the sign in me, in you, now, not only on the last day but in history, in the current confusion, of the victory of Christ over time, of His resurrection. "So then, you risk your energy in the proposal, in the proposal to yourself and to others. Why? Because this victory is the the human coming true."<sup>125</sup>

One of you wrote me:

"About two months ago, in the school where I have been working for almost two years, one of our students died suddenly. The pain and bewilderment this caused generated unexpected dynamics and dialogue. In particular, there was a colleague with whom from the beginning I had sensed a strong compatibility, and we had a real 'encounter.' I have to preface this by saying that he is an atheist and detests everything that has to do with the Church. In one of the most painful moments following the loss of our student, he confessed to me that he felt dissatisfied and had for some time

<sup>124</sup> Giussani, *La verità nasce dalla carne*, 239–40.

<sup>125</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 70.

been seeking to calm the restlessness that accompanied him. He added that he felt inadequate to respond to our students' requests for help, and observed that for me this was not the case. In fact, he said, 'You are at ease with everyone. When you are with someone you accept him to the point of disappearing, so he becomes the center.' Then he added, 'You are always there. Always. But you are also always elsewhere.' He concluded by telling me that he perceived me to be 'realized, full.' We decided to meet to speak in a quieter moment because he wants to understand better what that 'elsewhere' he has seen means for me."

This is the the human which comes true. "This is the cultural weight of our change."<sup>126</sup> This is our contribution to the world. The majority feels disoriented and lives in chaos, and even someone like Ulrich Beck, who has dedicated his whole life to studying society, has been forced to conclude that he no longer understands the world.<sup>127</sup> But because of the grace we have received and receive every day, we are not disoriented, just as the disciples in the chaos of the Roman Empire were not disoriented. This is the cultural weight we bring, the cultural weight of the proposal with which we face history and the collapse of everything. All the forms that have supported everything to date can collapse, but our victory is not identified with the endurance of certain forms and remaining attached to them. For this reason we can start again, as the first Christians started again after the collapse of the Roman Empire. The barbarians came, but the Christians started again, and very well at that. Even if everything had collapsed, this did not cause them to collapse, because their foundation was not grounded in that crumbling world. We, too, are in a moment of passage, of travail, and we, too, can challenge this situation with a proposal full of meaning.

"The experience of change is," consists, is born, and blossoms "in the recognition of Christ." Our faith is in the presence of Christ, who changes us. "He permits the world to return true evil, because evil is the nonhuman, the nontrue," overcoming only that which passes and does not last. This is how we begin to participate in His victory, in the hundredfold we can experience in this world, in a gladness, peace, joy, and energy that cause us to ask, amazed, "Where does all this come from?" We have to under-

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> "The world is unhinged. As many people see it, this is true in both senses of the word: the world is out of joint and it has gone mad. We are wandering aimlessly and confused, arguing for this and against that. But a statement on which most people can agree, beyond all antagonisms and across all continents, is 'I don't understand the world any more.'" Ulrich Beck, preface to *The Metamorphosis of the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), xi.

stand well where it comes from, otherwise why should we return here? It comes from Christ alive. “The contemporaneity of Christ in history is a promise for the present, a hundredfold that can be experienced, even though it is always different from what we can imagine. How many people tell me, ‘The hundredfold is not here. Where is the hundredfold?’ Certainly, if you think of it according to your image, then it is no longer a newness, and you state again the terms of what you are missing. Redemption is a hundredfold that can be experienced, but it is always different from what you imagined, always.”<sup>128</sup>

If I imagine my change, I think, for example, “After all I’ve heard in these days, when I return home I won’t get angry again.” Then I get angry after just twenty minutes, and this alone casts doubt on all I experienced here.

Instead, my change happens over time according to a measure that is not my own. It is a real change and even others see it. It will take time for it to affect all the aspects of our lives, as we desire. But the origin of the change is there. It has already happened. It is a given, a living presence that can be experienced now. We experience that it spreads to all aspects of our lives and that everything we touch can be filled with the newness that has reached each of us.

We began this lesson with the observation that a change has happened, and in various ways we have said that it is necessary to look for its root, the reason for the human results that our companionship, our friendship, has wrought. By participating in this sign, spending time with this sign, we are continually called to a recognition and memory, a long-lasting recognition, that the presence is at its root and is the source of the fact that we were strangers and now are siblings and friends, of the fact that we poor ones feel a richness that has strangely become fervid in us, “strangely, because it was not according to our plans and projects.”<sup>129</sup>

I’ll conclude by reading a testimony:

“Dear Fr. Carrón, last year when I returned from the Spiritual Exercises, I found out I was pregnant. We had desired a second child, but already felt fortunate to have the first one after doctors had told us it was highly improbable we could have children naturally. But last May the second pregnancy came along. From the beginning, it was clear to us that this was an initiative of the Mystery for us and we were deeply moved and amazed. It happened at a particularly difficult moment—a little more than a month before my husband had lost his job and we

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<sup>128</sup> Giussani, *Qui e ora*, 70–71.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

had to begin to deal with the problem of unemployment. During the first prenatal exam everything was ‘perfect.’ My numbers were excellent and the fetus was correctly implanted; we even heard its heartbeat. It seemed like everything would go well. Later, however, I felt that something was not right and we went to the emergency room to discover that the pregnancy had ceased a few weeks before. I had a miscarriage at home the same day. In the subsequent days many tried to console me with their words. I felt absolutely powerless in front of what was happening, and I realized that, if I were honest, I felt the same powerlessness about my daughter. Though I can concretely take care of her, I can’t add one breath to her life. What fills each moment with meaning? What withstands the test of time? Only a presence, real and concrete, not an idea or a logical deduction, but a presence that has happened, an incontrovertible fact that no adverse circumstance can deny or disprove, provides this meaning. You, Christ, are the only one who withstands the test of time. However, without this companionship, Christ would be a mere name for me, not a certain presence. This is the one place that enables me to keep my questions alive and does not silence them with some pat answer, but keeps them truly interesting. In the experience of my miscarriage, I came to understand more clearly what it means to say that my relationship with the Mystery is personal. This relationship emerged in solitude in front of what had happened. It became evident that I cannot delegate my answer to Christ to anyone, not even to the companionship. I am there in front of the Mystery, and I am alone in my relationship with it. The emergence of this solitude made me see the value of this companionship for my bond with Christ. My friends do not have the job of consoling me or saying yes to my ideas; they cannot give me back my son, and our being together will not take away my problems or fears. But I need a place like this that keeps me in the correct position, or brings me back to it, that does not allow me to forget the questions provoked by reality. This history, these faces, the work and gestures of this journey, support my relationship with Him and over time have made Him familiar. “You do not stop fearing just because someone says to you, ‘Do not fear!’ This presence of God must have entered into the core of our being; it must have shown itself credible within a history. In fact, only a lived history can constitute an adequate basis for trust. Everything God has done and does is ‘so that you will know that I am the Lord’ and so that you can trust in Him.” (See, *I Am Doing Something New: Do You Not Perceive It?* Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity 2018, 26). This is the history that has made

God a credible presence I can trust, that challenges me and withstands the test of time. In anything He does.”

To close, let’s listen to “Cristo al Morir Tendea” because the dialogue with this presence determines life. Listening to it, accept it as a question posed directly to you: “Will you leave Him for another love?”

Song: “Cristo al morir tendea.”<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>“Cristo al morir tendea, / ed ai più cari suoi Maria dicea: / ‘Or, se per trarvi al ciel dà l’alma e ’l core, / lascieretelo voi per altro amore? // Ben sa che fuggirete / di gran timor, e alfin vi nascondrete: / ed ei, pur come agnel che tace e more, / svenerassi per voi d’immenso amore. // Dunque, diletti miei, / se a dura croce, in man d’iniqui e rei, / dà per salvarvi il sangue, l’alma e ’l core, / lascieretelo voi per altro amore?” (*Christ was going to His death and Mary said to His dearest ones: “Now if He gives His heart and soul to take you to heaven will you leave Him for another love? He well knows that you will run away out of great fear, and that in the end you will hide, and yet like a Lamb who dies in silence He will bleed for you in His great love. So, my loved ones, if He gives Himself up to the cross and to the hands of evil men, to save your blood, your souls, and your hearts, will you leave Him for another love?”*) Fra Marc’Antonio da San Germano, “Cristo al morir tendea”, trans. Patrick Stevenson and Jennifer Sofia Teodori, notes accompanying CD *O Cor Soave, Laude Filippine*, Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2009, no. 51 of the *Spirto Gentil* series, 26.

# *Sunday, April 14, morning*

*During entrance and exit:*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Sonatas for Piano and Violin, nos. 21, 24, 26, 18*

*Clara Haskil piano, Arthur Grumiaux violin*

*Spirto Gentil n. 46, Philips*

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayer*

## ■ ASSEMBLY

*Davide Prosperi.* Once again this year a great number of questions have arrived, over thirteen hundred, together with two thousand letters and emails that arrived in response to Carrón's invitation, making quite a large number. This and other factors are an indication that this gesture is increasingly one of great participation; we do not just listen, but each person contributes to build it with his or her own presence. At the Spiritual Exercises you understand well the meaning of gesture, which derives from the Latin *gerere*, which means "to carry." It is a fact that carries a meaning. We have come here to discover this meaning. It is essential for our education as adults. The older we get, the more we realize, as much or maybe even more than young people, that adults need to be educated to discover themselves, their human face. This gesture fully engages our humanity. In fact, this is seen in many of the questions you have sent, because in addition to seeking a better understanding of the words Julián used in these days, there is also an earnest attempt at verifying our daily experience and the trials we are called to face.

There are twenty-two thousand of us present and we are part of a certain companionship. But I must say that, starting on the first evening, the silence we have experienced and that has accompanied us in these days—an astonishing silence since there are so many of us, and also, as far as I can remember, more intense than in other years—is a sign that within this certain companionship each of us is here for herself or himself in order to acknowledge an ultimate solitude, a good solitude, in front of the Mystery.

This leads us to the first question.

"In reference to the last testimony in the Saturday afternoon lesson, what does it mean to be alone in front of the Mystery, and yet to need a

place? How can you deepen your relationship with Christ in a situation of solitude; that is, when you don't have the opportunity to spend time with people who are a sign of the victory of Christ for you? I don't understand well whether deepening your relationship with Christ is a matter of spending time in a living companionship of people or one played out on the personal level."

**Julián Carrón.** I think the first thing is to understand the nature of solitude. Years ago in Spain, when I read *Traces of Christian Experience* for the first time, I was immediately struck by the way Fr. Giussani faced the problem of solitude. "The more we discover our needs, the more we become aware that we cannot resolve them on our own. Nor can others, people like us. [...] This sense of powerlessness generates *solitude*." Thus, unlike what we often think, "True solitude does not come from being physically alone, but from the discovery that a fundamental problem of ours cannot find its solution in us or in others." The testimony I read yesterday made the point that nobody can give her back the son she lost. Therefore, "we can well say that the sense of solitude is borne in the very heart of every serious commitment to our own humanity. Those who believe they have found the solution to a great need of theirs in something or someone, only to have this something or someone disappear or prove incapable of resolving this need, can understand this." Consequently, if we place our hope in this or that thing, in this or that person, we will be disappointed. "We are alone," Giussani continued, "in our needs, in our need to be and to live intensely, like one alone in the desert. All he or she can do is wait until someone appears. And human persons will certainly not provide the solution because it is precisely their needs that must be resolved."<sup>131</sup>

This awareness is essential for understanding the nature of our solitude. If we reduce it to the fact of being physically alone, we can resolve the problem in many ways. But true solitude is generated by powerlessness in front of our ultimate needs, our need for existence and fulfillment, which many times we do not perceive. So the great question is, what can overcome solitude? Because neither on our own nor together can we answer our deep need to exist.

The prodigal son believed he knew himself and the nature of his need, so he thought he could resolve this question by leaving home with his part

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<sup>131</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, trans. John Zucchi with the assistance of Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 55.

of his inheritance. But soon the presumption in his thinking that he could make it on his own was revealed for the lie it was. At a certain point he understood that he needed something else that he could not give himself. Only when we discover who we truly are and the extent of our needs can we realize what is able to meet them. This is why I have always been impressed by Chesterton's famous expression, which I have quoted more than once: "The sages, it is often said, can see no answers to the riddle of religion. But the trouble with our sages is not that they cannot see the answer, it is that they cannot even see the riddle."<sup>132</sup> They do not understand the problem, do not comprehend the issue at heart. This is the origin of our presumption that we can make it on our own. Instead, when you realize the origin of your solitude, and thus of your powerlessness, you understand that the question about overcoming solitude can only be answered by an other who is different from us, greater than us, one who measures up to our human need. This is why Christ came! He is the only one who can overcome our powerlessness.

Now on to the second part of the question, about the connection between spending time with a living companionship and a personal relationship with the Mystery. It is essential to note Christ's own consciousness of Himself: He conceives of Himself as a relationship with the Father, as "the one sent by the Father." ("Whoever believes in Me believes not only in Me but also in the One who sent Me, and whoever sees me sees the One who sent Me."<sup>133</sup>) His mission is to lead each of us to a definitive relationship with the mystery of God, the Father, from whom everything receives substance, on whom my life depends in this instant. If Christ seeks to draw us to Himself, it is only to lead us to a relationship with the Father. ("I revealed Your name to those whom You gave Me out of the world."<sup>134</sup>) This pointing to an other is also what defines the Church, that is, us, who have been seized by Christ through an encounter and are here today: "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you."<sup>135</sup> Fr. Giussani demonstrated this with his life. In his homily at Fr. Giussani's funeral Mass, Cardinal Ratzinger stressed: "Having led people not to himself but to Christ, he really won hearts; he has helped to make

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<sup>132</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., 1934), 64.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. Jn 12:44–45.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Jn 17:6.

<sup>135</sup> Jn 20:21.

the world better and to open the world's doors for heaven."<sup>136</sup> Giussani did not bind us to himself, but led us to Christ.

Thus Fr. Giussani always proposed a place to us, spending time in a place, the companionship, the Church, but for the reason for which it exists: to enable us to experience Christ, to lead us into a personal relationship with Christ and through Him, to an acknowledged dependence on the Father. When even an atheist meets one of us, this encounter points to "elsewhere," as in the letter from a friend I read yesterday; that is, to something else greater than ourselves, which is the profundity of what he sees. If we are invited to spend time in a place, it is to be put in a relationship with Him who generates it, who alone can respond to our need for life. But if we do not "see the riddle," if we lack a lively awareness of our need, we cannot even open ourselves to recognize Christ and we do not understand the strange nature of our companionship. This is why we are often disappointed.

**Prosperi.** One of the passages that drew the most questions is the one in which, in recounting the story of Manzoni's Unnamed, you asked, "Who is our cardinal?" This raised the issue of authority in our lives. I'll formulate the question this way, among the many received.

"Can you clarify why authority is the way the Mystery reaches us? What and who is authority?"

**Carrón.** When I address this question, another passage from *Traces of Christian Experience* always comes to mind. Here, Fr. Giussani helped us understand the nature of authority and the source from which it flows. Each time we consider this question, we need to start from this point.

Having explained the meaning of solitude; that is, the sense of powerlessness, and dealt with the topic of community, he then concentrated on authority. How did he describe it? "In our particular milieu [in our community, aware of our powerlessness] some individuals have a greater sensitivity to the human experience; *in fact* they develop a deeper understanding of any given situation and of others; *in fact* they are more likely to influence the movement that builds a community. They live our experience more intensely and with a greater commitment. We all feel that they are more representative of us. With them we feel closer to, and stay

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<sup>136</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "In Love with Christ: In an Encounter, the Road," homily of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, present at the funeral of Luigi Giussani on behalf of the Holy Father, February 24, 2005. Available in English at <https://english.clonline.org/archive/altro/in-love-with-christ-in-an-encounter-the-road?hl=ratzinger%20homily%20funeral%20giussani>

more willingly in community with, others. To acknowledge this phenomenon is to be loyal to our own humanity, a duty spurred by wisdom. When we discover ourselves helpless and alone, our humanity spurs us to come together. If we meet someone who better feels and understands our experience, suffering, needs, and expectations, we naturally are led to follow that person and become his or her disciple. In that sense, such persons naturally constitute *authority* for us even if they do not carry special rights or titles.”<sup>137</sup> It is not first of all a question of roles, to which we often reduce the problem of authority. The point is to recognize people who help me live the human experience with greater fullness and to grow, as I desire.

For this reason, “Naturally, [...] it is one who most loyally lives or understands the human experience who becomes an authority. Thus authority is born as a wealth of experience that imposes itself on others.” A person becomes an authority because of the evidence of what she or he bears. “It generates freshness, wonder, and respect. Inevitably, it is attractive,” as was the case with Jesus: “This is one who has authority,”<sup>138</sup> unlike the scribes. This is how authority is born naturally, and in this way will always be reborn. This is why it is easy to recognize it.

Each of us is called to be honest about what we see emerge in our experience. Those who follow the suggestions that experience provides them will have no problem identifying authority, no difficulty in identifying their cardinal, because it will be clear. Being able to do so is directly proportional to an awareness of the nature of your need: the needier you are, the more aware you are of the extent of your need and the more easily you will recognize authority. Recognition of an authority is closely tied to the experience of your own powerlessness. In fact, if you are not arrogant, if you are aware of your own powerlessness, if you recognize that you are needy, it is easier for you to follow those who bear witness more persuasively to the existence of an answer and who can help you to live it.

On the contrary, if we think we can make it on our own, we will not recognize the answer even if it is right in front of us, with all the evidence possible or imaginable, as happened with those who found themselves in front of Jesus and did not recognize Him. Why? Because Jesus came for the poor, the sick, those who are honest about their wound and their structural incapacity to find a solution for themselves. As soon as they saw Him, they began to follow Him with simplicity, out of a love for themselves, not out

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<sup>137</sup> Giussani, *Journey to Truth*, 56–57.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

of submission to some rule. They followed because they did not want to miss out on their lives.

Fr. Giussani helped us understand things as they arise, making everything decidedly easier. In fact, if we observe how things happen in experience, everything becomes easier.

**During the Assembly of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Spain, a similar question about authority came up:**

“My experience of the correspondence that was born of the encounter binds me to the origin, to the historical reality of the Movement, and to the person who leads this reality, because at the origin these elements are united. When I was a student, this unity existed. I realize that the only way to continue to experience this correspondence is to follow the place where Christ happened for me. In fact, after twenty-five years in the Movement, I see that when I separate myself from the experience of this correspondence, when I separate myself from my true need, from the urgent need of my humanity, from my wounds, the community and authority change into something that no longer make me who I am. Instead, in the experience of the encounter, the community and authority do make me who I am. At times I’ve lived the Movement as if I could decide to live it or not, follow or not, agree or disagree, with a position of ‘like’ or ‘don’t like.’ (In the contemporary world, given that we are all children of Instagram, these are the criteria of judgment.) Many times I can be involved in CL and experience a kind of skepticism; and even following CL, I can become skeptical. I realize that the problem lies in judging the correspondence and in following the judged correspondence (the initial one and the current one). I see this in many spheres of the Movement, both in the students and in the adults. It can be a way of being in the Movement even though separated from this originating factor in which everything is united. In the experience of the encounter and the correspondence, the community and authority are united. I would like you to help us on this point.”

*Carrón.* I think what you have said helps us understand clearly the kind of experience each of us has because it is evident that when one of these elements is lacking, the experience is completely different. At times we solve the problem in an abstract way and not, as you explained very well, starting from the unity of experience. Therefore we think that authority is something added that is outside our experience. Why? Because, as I mentioned, not all experiences of Christianity are equal. In *Why the Church?*

Fr. Giussani described three attitudes toward the Christian fact, three methods for reaching certainty today about the fact of Christ, which lead to different consequences: the rationalistic attitude, the Protestant attitude, and the Orthodox-Catholic attitude.<sup>139</sup> The first considers Jesus a mere fact of the past, comparable to others, to be dealt with by means of “historical reason.” It reduces the content of the Christian message—that God became a presence in history—before even considering it. The second acknowledges the content of the great announcement, but limits it to a precise moment: God made Himself present in humanity only once: in the life of Christ. How can people today reach certainty about this presence? Through an exclusively interior experience, an illumination of the Holy Spirit. While profoundly religious, this attitude does not respect all of the facts of the Christian announcement. Instead, the third is coherent with the structure of the Christian event as originally proposed: in Christ, God became a wholly human presence and remains as such in history through the reality of the church, the companionship of those who believe in Him. The encounter with His presence today, an encounter uniting the exterior and the interior, the objective and the subjective, is the method for reaching certainty about Him.

The first two methods contain elements of truth, but lead to a totally different experience from that generated by the third. The experience of a person for whom Christianity is not a present event and who lacks the objective point of reference given by authority (Protestantism) differs entirely from that of a Catholic’s. But we must discover this difference in our personal experience of the community, or in other words, of a guided reality; otherwise, authority will seem extraneous to our faith and consequently Christianity will be prey to an ultimate subjectivism, the whim of our interpretation. A month ago, a young woman asked me for clarification about the pope’s authority. I told her, “If you speak with a person for ten minutes, you can understand from what he says about the Church whether the authority of the Pope is present in his experience. You don’t need to go talk with the Pope to verify whether what this person says about the Church is in line with papal thought.” You just need ten minutes to understand whether a person has a bond with the authority of the pope. All it takes is for him to open his mouth and we can understand whether there is a connection with authority in his experience, or whether authority is something extrinsic, added from outside his experience. The same

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<sup>139</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?* trans. Vivianne Hewitt (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001), 10–23.

thing happens in the life of the Movement. As Fr. Giussani said in the first chapter of *Traces of Christian Experience*,<sup>140</sup> authority is a constitutive element of human experience.<sup>141</sup> But how can you understand whether this authority is effective for you? From the kind of experience you have, which is printed on your face. “A tree can be told by its fruits”;<sup>142</sup> that is, by the experience of correspondence people live, it is possible to understand the truth of their source of origin. This method is absolutely infallible because only a certain tree produces certain fruits; they cannot be produced by a different tree. My way of living bears witness to the type of Christian experience I have in the Christian community. Fr. Giussani observed that no Christian community exists without an ultimate reference to authority, no Catholic charism without an ultimate bond with authority. This is not simply a theological problem, but something that goes to the root of our Christian experience. For this reason, each of us, in our way of living, sings in front of everyone our *Traviata*.

**Prosperi.** Two related questions were posed.

“What does it mean that experience involves an intelligence about the meaning of things, and that reality is not entirely grasped if its meaning is not affirmed?”

“You said that stupendous things can happen to us, yet we learn nothing, and that to grasp the import of what has happened in life you have to follow the enhancement of the ‘mind’s cognitive capacities’ generated by the fact itself. Could you explain this further?”

**Carrón.** We will continue by tying all the questions together.

How do I come to a realization that a certain presence is crucial for my life? This happens because it corresponds to the needs of my humanity like no other. But this involves a comparison between reality and my needs, and therefore a judgment of my reason. “There’s something here that finally corresponds to what I’ve been looking for.” In order to experience something, it is not enough that I come across it, that it provokes a reaction in me. I need to grasp its import, its meaning, its nexus with me. Experience is

<sup>140</sup> Giussani, *Journey to Truth*, 53–58.

<sup>141</sup> The same holds for the sphere of Christian experience: “There is no version of Christian experience, no matter how interior, that does not entail, at least in the ultimate sense, the encounter with the community and the reference to authority.” Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, trans. Mariangela Sullivan (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019), 87. See above, 19–20.

<sup>142</sup> Mt 12:33.

not merely the sentimental repercussion of things: in experience, I discover their meaning; otherwise, sooner or later, I'll forget them along the way. Therefore, I must understand the import of the presence encountered and grasp the nexus between that presence and my need; I need to discover that I grow in a relationship with it. This is the meaning of experience. If I do not realize the pertinence to my needs of the thing that happens to me, no matter how stupendous these things are, like some of the things we have often told each other about, they will be like flying debris—we have not discovered their connection to our needs. Having failed to grasp the meaning of the encounter, after awhile we drift away.

Giussani began everything only to demonstrate “the relevance of faith for the needs of life,”<sup>143</sup> so that we could understand—understand!—the relevance to our human desire of the event of Christ, of what Christ proposes to us, of what the Movement proposes to us. Otherwise everything becomes moralistic, something I ‘have to do’: I no longer follow what is proposed because I feel the need to do so, because I recognize that it is relevant to my needs, because the biggest thing that could ever happen came into my life. If I am not grateful that it happened, Christianity becomes an immense complication, an unbearable burden! Instead, if you understand its import, the more you cling to it, stick to it—Giussani talked about “coats of glue” in describing the disciples’ relationship with Jesus—the more you are grateful. “Thank goodness You are here, Christ. Thank goodness, because otherwise I would be alone with my nothingness.”

I am amazed that many times we pay no attention to the exceptional things we see happening among us (such as the letters I read). As we read in the School of Community, we can pass in front of holiness, the many fruits that participation in the life of the Church generates among us, and not see them, and consequently not understand their import.

Instead, coming to the second question, when you come across something that you perceive to be truly crucial for you, different from everything else, like the promise of a changed life, what happens? The fact provokes such great wonder that it expands your ability to see and understand. This is why Fr. Giussani said that “the same gesture with which God makes Himself present to humanity,” reaching out to help our helplessness, broadens and “enhances the mind’s cognitive capacities, tuning the penetration of the human gaze upon the exceptional reality”<sup>144</sup> in front of it. When a man falls in love, he encounters the presence that attracts him

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<sup>143</sup> Giussani, *Risk of Education*, xxxii.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

and makes him more himself. This event broadens his gaze, his capacity to know everything, especially the person in front of him, the value of that person for him. We all know how crucial this is: if we do not grasp the importance for our life of the person to whom we bind ourselves, even if she were in front of our nose all the time, it would be as if she were not there.

If this happens in a love relationship, imagine how deeply it can happen in the experience of the encounter with Christ, of which falling in love is only a pale reflection. What happened and happens? We heard it in the testimonies: “I’ve forgotten a lot of things, but not those eyes that looked at me.” From that moment on, that young woman could no longer see herself in the same way. Her way of perceiving things was changed. In an encounter with Christ, through the particular people He used to win us over, there is evidence that sweeps us away, that glues us and broadens our reason, opens us to understand, to recognize what has happened to us, not straining, like when you use a shoehorn to squeeze your foot into a shoe that is too small, nor by a logical conclusion that no longer convinces anybody. You just have to assent to and follow the action of His presence in us. “A person recognizes Christ’s presence because Christ wins the person over,” wins me over, with His initiative, His grace, reaching me through an incomparable human encounter. Therefore, as Giussani summarized, “Just as Christ gives Himself to me in a present event, He brings to life within me the capacity for grasping it and recognizing it in its exceptionality. Thus my freedom accepts that event, and acknowledges it.”<sup>145</sup>

**Prosperi.** “Quoting Ratzinger, you said that ‘the possibility of “seeing” God depends on one’s purity of heart,’ involving a purification of the heart and poverty of spirit. What is this purification? You also said that it is necessary to become aware of the nexus between knowledge and poverty, and then that the only morality is the poverty of spirit of this recognition. Can you come back to the nexus between poverty and knowledge?”

**Carrón.** Ratzinger observed that the Fathers of the Church emphasized the nexus between knowledge and poverty and that this is what the Gospel repeats continually: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [...] Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see

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<sup>145</sup> Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, trans. Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 22–23.

God.”<sup>146</sup> The Gospel places no other conditions for knowing and recognizing God than this poverty. For this reason, I emphasized powerlessness. We have been made for a destiny that is so boundless (“You have made us for You, O God,”<sup>147</sup> said Saint Augustine) that we cannot reach it by our own strength. We cannot respond to the need of fullness that constitutes us. This is why Christ came, because without Him we can do nothing, absolutely nothing, to respond to our thirst for happiness, for destiny. There is no use getting angry at reality, or at your wife, your husband, your work, or your circumstances, because nothing can respond adequately to our need for happiness. “All this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind,”<sup>148</sup> said Leopardi. For this reason, there is no use getting angry at life. The one thing we can do is wait for the happening of the One who bears the answer. So then, together with your recognition of your own structural powerlessness and your awareness that the answer can only come from an Other, you need the simplicity of heart to recognize Him and choose to follow Him. “Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it,”<sup>149</sup> and will lose it.

Therefore, the only thing to do in front of the incomparable gift of His presence is to embrace it. The more we know Christ and recognize what a gift He is for us, the more we realize that our first and original activity in front of Him, in front of the Being who has become a companionship in history, is passivity:<sup>150</sup> receiving and recognizing with a simplicity of heart Him who comes and continues to come to save us. I often meet people who live the Movement with a disarming simplicity that leaves me speechless. I wish all of you could see them. Life is not a problem of intelligence; it is a problem of poverty and simplicity of heart, which enable us to understand what has happened to us. We need to become ever more childlike. Being childlike does not mean being childish, as we often imagine. A small child is entirely spontaneous but has not yet conquered awareness. Being children as adults, this is the great question! For us it seems naive, or contradictory, that as adults we can be children. But this is the true wisdom, the only wisdom indicated by the Gospel, which we must have if we do not want to miss out on the best.

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<sup>146</sup> Mt 5:3–8.

<sup>147</sup> St. Augustine, *Confessions*, I,1.1.

<sup>148</sup> Giacomo Leopardi, *Pensieri* [Thoughts], LXVIII, trans. W.S. Di Piero (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 113.

<sup>149</sup> Mk 10:15.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 101.

In His earthly life, Jesus showed us how an adult can continue to be a child: “I always do what is pleasing to my Father.”<sup>151</sup> Giussani also showed us this, up to the day he died. He was amazed by everything, anything could give him joy, and his eyes shone like a child’s. Without this simplicity of heart we lose life. Our vocation is to conquer what the Mystery created us for, but what He wants to give us, the gift of His presence, is so disproportionate to our capacity and strength that we can only be open, like children, to receive it and to recognize and embrace it. Then everything becomes simple.

**Prosperi.** What you just said about the child regarding wisdom and knowledge holds true for the dimension of our affections as well. When a child’s relationship with her mother and father is clear, she has a certainty that adults often cannot have in their relationship with reality. In fact, adults tend to reduce their experience to its psychological aspects; that is, to how they feel things, beginning from themselves. At a certain point, you talked about change, and here is a question about that.

“What does it mean to say that we must overcome a psychological image of change and our attempt to measure it? Could you explain this further?”

Another question refers to another passage.

“You said that faithfulness produces change, but that it is not a matter of ethics or a problem of ability. Rather, it implies my being there, my movement, my freedom. How is it that faithfulness does not clash with my movement, ending up in an effort driven by some ethical obligation?”

**Carrón.** We’ll start with the second question and the simplest example—falling in love. Falling in love does not happen because you have made an effort of will to fulfill some ethical obligation. If this were the case, if you just had to will it, there would be a long line of those searching for someone who responds to their desire to be loved. Love is not something we can generate ourselves, but when it happens, we must choose to embrace it; our freedom must get involved. Faithfulness is the involvement of our freedom with a fact that has happened, one we did not produce. It is continually evoked and sustained when that fact happens again; that is, by the contemporaneousness of Christ, as I said in yesterday afternoon’s lesson.

Moving on to the first question, which is closely related to what I just said, yesterday I stressed that you cannot reduce change to its psycholog-

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Jn 8:29.

ical image, to something you can measure with a yardstick. I was irascible before and I am still irascible; I thought I would return home from these days changed and instead I get angry just like I did before because of my nasty character, so I think that nothing remains of what I saw. This image of change blocks us. We are always tempted to identify it with an enhancement of our capacities, with performing better, which is what many try to achieve through training.

No, this is not the change we are talking about and need. True change consists in recognizing Him who responds to our powerlessness. Just as no power of mine can generate this recognition, so I cannot generate my own change. As I said before, it is simply a matter of being open to Christ's initiative in my life. So then, this is the true change: living everything with that presence in your eyes, with the awareness of His faithful companionship. "As I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me."<sup>152</sup> This change is the passage from self-presumption to recognition of His presence.

This brings into our life a difference and newness that others note, too, but which does not correspond to our own images of it. It is not that we are flawless, free of defects, or superior as the fruits of our ability. A change in us is the reverberation in us of recognizing Him who responds to our powerlessness, of the certainty of His presence, which slowly but surely enters our innermost being. It is a fragrance of gladness, fecundity, and positivity that then slowly permeates all that we do, even though we remain fragile as always.

Fr. Giussani said very clearly that change is the recognition of the living presence that comes out to meet us, not something I measure. All the rest flows from this. Your desire to change your nasty character might even be fulfilled, but this is not necessary, and in any case, it will happen according to a time and plan that are not yours. At times this makes us crazy with impatience because we want to change at the times and in the ways we establish, instead of simply being grateful because He is present. He is the one who liberates us from measuring ourselves. It is like the life of a child: mother is there, father is there, and there is no need to measure. The change will arrive, but according to a design that is not mine.

***Prosperi.*** The next question is personal, but we chose it because in one way or another it concerns all of us.

"I am living the same dramatic situation of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. How could that father let his son leave, and not yield

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Gal 2:20.

to the temptation to go recover him from among the prostitutes and bring him home? Where did he get the strength to allow his son the freedom not to return, maybe never to be seen again? I'm not so interested in the position of the son now, but of the father. How could he wait so freely for his son's return without anger? If he were angry, he wouldn't have called for that big party to celebrate his son's return. How did he manage the waiting? I miss my son so terribly, and I can't live with this enormous absence."

**Carrón.** This is our problem. We cannot succeed on our own, and thus will never act like the father of the prodigal son. So then, how can God? The reason is rooted in the fullness of His divine life; that is, in the relationship of free and reciprocal love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God created a being, the human "I," made in His image and likeness—that is, free to participate in this overflowing fullness, and in this freedom to reflect the mystery of the one and threefold Being. God leaves us free because He loves us infinitely, as only God can love. Thus the parable of the prodigal son expresses the true nature of God: the father loves the son so much that he leaves him free, knowing that without freedom he would only be a slave in his own home.

Fr. Giussani wrote some truly stunning lines that maybe it would be good to read, useful for those of you who are worried about the freedom of your children. "Perhaps the greatest sacrifice for parents, the greatest after seeing their child die, is seeing their child, whom they have raised with love, to whom they have given everything they could, make decisions or take roads or formulate judgments different from those they believe to be right. This is the most terrible thing we feel in front of our kids at school. But for a father and a mother it is a hundred times clearer." However, in this attitude there is a possible temptation that Fr. Giussani wanted to illuminate, and that is "the power over souls, to possess them for their own good, ripping away their freedom in order to ensure their happiness," always for the good of the child, naturally! This is much different from the Christian perspective: "Christ died to leave us free!" Fr. Giussani continued: "The more powerfully we desire the freedom of our students [or our children], that is, that they reach their destiny, [...], the more painfully and miraculously the respect for their decisions grow, the respect for their actions. There cannot be for them a happiness they have not chosen, a destiny they have not recognized and accepted."<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Realtà e giovinezza: La sfida* [Reality and youth: the challenge] (Milan: Bur, 2019), 229.

For this reason, freedom plays a crucial role not only in the journey toward destiny but also in its discovery. “Certainly,” Giussani concluded, “We would rather grab them by the scruff and bring them where they should go. We would prefer to go against their freedom, in the sense of freedom of choice,” because of the anxiety that assails us. What can dispel it? The only thing that can dispel it and “that gives us peace is that there is One [with a capital *O*], an Other [capital *O*] who wanted them, who formed a covenant with them, giving them existence.”<sup>154</sup>

Considering these family situations, I always think of God’s trepidation. If you are so anxious about the destiny of your children, imagine God, who could do so many things we cannot even dream of, and yet does not do them: what trepidation! Why can He wait? What sustains Him? Only the fullness He lives. Therefore, the only way to truly respond to this anxiety is called “virginity”; that is, such a powerful relationship with the Mystery that I am free to allow my son his freedom. Not because I do not desire all possible good for my child, but because I want him to reach his good through freedom. I need to have such peace, such certainty that there is One who loves him, who gave His life for him and has formed a covenant with him, that I can wait for him like God does. What a relationship must you have, must we have, with Christ to be able to educate our children and our young people without yielding to the temptation to take the place of their freedom!

Now this does not mean that we do nothing. God certainly did not do nothing. He sent His Son to give His life for us, to make this experience of fullness possible for us. He did not send Christ to take away our freedom. Christ waited, as we said yesterday, for people to recognize Him. What can we do? What our children most need: live in front of them, rather than just tell them what they should do. We live in front of them! We put before them such an attraction that they can be challenged by the beauty they see in us, so that they can embrace it freely, not by using a shoehorn. Many times we worry about them following, but not about their freedom.

Are you worried about your children? Live as adults, bearing witness to all the attraction of your life. This is the one thing God did. He sent His Son to offer everyone such a powerful attraction that He would win them over to Himself. Without this, we will only generate places where our children suffocate, instead of places where they breathe freely with a desire to become involved and participate.

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

**During the Assembly of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Spain, a similar question came up about the role of freedom in the phenomenon of knowledge.**

“This morning you said that freedom not only is going toward God once you have discovered Him, but also is active in your discovery of Him. I don’t understand, because it seems to me that the discovery of God is something immediate: when it happens, you discover Him. So then what does it mean that freedom is involved in the discovery of God?”

*Carrón.* This is the problem. We do not understand that reason and freedom are continually involved in knowledge. In *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani established three premises involving three elements that are necessary in order to know: *realism* (reality has primacy: it is the object that determines the method of knowledge), *reasonableness* (an adequate use of reason by the subject is needed) and *morality* (and here we see the element of freedom: in the position that the subject takes, freedom is necessarily involved).<sup>155</sup> He proposed an example that can help us understand our question. When Pasteur discovered the role of microorganisms in medicine, all scientists should have recognized the value of what he had seen with the microscope. It was evident that he had come upon something important and new. Instead, the foremost scientists of the time fiercely opposed his discovery. Why? Because not only were reality and reason in play, but also their freedom. They felt their prestige was threatened by the discovery.

Freedom plays a key role in knowledge. Everyone knew that the man born blind could not see, and yet after his miraculous healing some even tried to show that it was not him. They were not willing to accept what had happened. Their freedom refused to acknowledge it, not because it was not evident, but because they had already closed their minds against it. That is why we say “there is none so blind as he who *will* not see.” This means that freedom is a crucial part of knowledge.

Freedom is involved not only in the journey toward what I have discovered after I have discovered it, but also and above all in the discovery itself. This is why simplicity of heart is crucial for knowledge. The episodes about Pasteur and the man born blind do not concern only the past, but hold today, too. In fact, at times, after participating in certain gatherings and listening to what some have said about them, I say to myself, “Were we in the same room? Did we see the same things? Listening to the various descriptions it

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<sup>155</sup> Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 3–32.

seems that the same things did not happen. Have these people developed a more refined critical attitude or are they just not willing to see? Without the openness and willingness of freedom, we truly no longer see the things that happen. We studied this in the School of Community: “Naturally, we might well walk past the miracle, the human equilibrium, the intensity of the experience of holiness in the Church, as if we were perfect strangers to it”,<sup>156</sup> that is, without seeing it. In contrast, someone can arrive and see the same things, yet be surprised at the sight. This shows that freedom is continually engaged with knowledge. It is crucial to realize this because if something happens and we do not recognize it (for any reason), we miss out on the best thing. We think that nothing is happening, and instead it is happening. Pay attention here: it is not that I do not recognize it because it does not happen. This is the point: I say that it cannot happen, and then when it happens, I do not recognize it, I deny that it has happened, to the point of saying that the man born blind had no vision problems and that Pasteur did not observe what he observed. We need to become aware of this element of freedom. You ask, what need is there of freedom if a thing is evident? No, no, calm down. An element of freedom is playing a crucial role now in my and your acknowledgment of what is happening in front of us.

**Prosperi.** “You spoke about verification as the one road of the personalization of faith. The way you describe it, it sounds like something exciting, while for others among us...”

**Carrón.** It is exciting because the verification is of Christ, not of our attempts!

**Prosperi.** In fact, “many times among us verification is lived like moralism, and so we do not make it ours and enter it fully. Actually, we only verify our own attempt, which can’t help but depress us.”

**Carrón.** Perfect!

**Prosperi.** “Can you help us understand the terms of the verification that you challenge us to make? If the experience of Christ is something that you do not turn back from, since it generates an indestructible attraction I can’t pull myself away from, why do we need a verification? What does it entail?”

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<sup>156</sup> Giussani, *Why the Church?* 226.

**Carrón.** We have to see whether what has happened to us is true in any situation. This verification makes us ever more certain—experiencing that Christ serves for everything, can respond to everything, is true in front of any challenge, not only those we think He can respond to, but everything! The bigger the challenge, the greater is my desire to see how He will solve it this time, because the verification is of Christ. If I expect everything from Christ in any situation, when I lose a child or when I do not have him, I will be attentive to seeing how He will bring me to fullness, without my own image of fulfilment being achieved. How will He bring me to experience the “hundredfold here below,” not according to the image I have formed for myself?

We think that fulfilment is only what corresponds to our image, which is often the one provided by the common mentality, but it is too small, too reduced. Are we willing to accept the challenge that Christ can fulfill us in a way that goes beyond our measure? Are we willing to give Him space so that He can show this to us? Do we offer Him the opportunity? Only the simple of heart can accept the challenge of this verification, not those who think that Christ either adjusts to what they have in mind, or does not provide a real answer.

**Prosperi.** The last two questions concern your emphasis on the place as a road.

“Can you clarify the point about the place that is a road? Is any Christian companionship fine? Or is there a specific companionship, and what are its features?”

“The wellspring of memory is the living community, people who are together because Christ is there. But this same place (the people who compose it) can become an objection. How do we overcome this objection?”

**Carrón.** The place is what Christ generated and generates through those He grabs hold of and who recognize Him. The question is whether we are together for Christ because we want to move toward the destiny that is Christ. Let’s ask ourselves what the reason is for our being together. Is it for Christ? Who of us wants to be together to help each other move toward our destiny? Who wants to be together exclusively for Christ? Asking ourselves these questions, we will begin to see who is truly able to be our companion. Their features are very clear. In the final analysis, any other reason for being together is insufficient. This demands honesty of us: “Who truly accompanies me? Are they all equal?” If we can distinguish a doctor who responds to our need from one who cannot, how can we not see whether a

companionship leads us to our destiny or not? Do we need a degree from Harvard? Let's get a move on!

It is easy to identify the place that is the road. You do not have to invent it, you just need to recognize and follow it.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Is 50:4–7; Psalm 21 (22); Phil 2:6–11; Lk 22:14–23:56*

## HOMILY BY FR. JULIÁN CARRÓN

During this Holy Week, the Church documents the method chosen by God to attract our freedom without eliminating it. “Christ Jesus, though He was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, He emptied Himself.” God’s method is to strip Himself even of His being God in order to take on “the form of a slave.” In this way, accepting the condition of a slave, placing Himself entirely in His Father’s hands, according to a design that was dramatic for Him as well, because it passed through His offering of Himself and His death, Christ showed us the one method God holds to be adequate for attracting us: His offering of Himself, a love all the way to the end. “There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

This is the love God sets before our eyes. The church gives us all this week to look at it, so that each of us can be swept away by the one method God believes in, that is, His love for us. Nothing else can truly attract and move our freedom. This shows the road to us, too, who are called to share the same method in our relationship with all people, to communicate to everyone what has been given to us as grace: a passion for their destiny, like that of Christ for us, an interest in each of them, according to the modality by which God is interested in us. This is our contribution to the world, and it cannot be different from the modality by which God moved. Gratitude fills our life in seeing the love God has for us, because we, too, can testify about it to everyone, free from worry about the outcome, just as He offered Himself, placing everything in the hands of His Father.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

**Julián Carrón**

### **Common Fund**

It is always moving to read your letters about the common fund.

“I was very sorry to read the summary of my contributions to the common fund last year. I was and am aware of it. My family is going through a serious financial problem. Our income, which was already low, has been reduced even more because the market in my husband’s field has constricted further and his attempts to find new work have not succeeded. We probably will have to make a decision about our house as well. Thus I must halve our already minimal contribution to the common fund, in the hope of facilitating my faithfulness to the gesture. I want to remain solidly bound to the friendship that educated me to the meaning of life.”

I read you this letter because the fact that a person has the simplicity to say she cannot continue to contribute the amount she pledged and so must reduce her common fund contribution, that there are people among us who have this freedom, demonstrates an adult awareness that I sincerely admit, moves me deeply.

Among the letters received in preparation for the Spiritual Exercises, I was struck by how some people described their experience of the common fund:

“When Fr. Giussani proposed the purchase of ‘bricks’ to buy Sacred Heart and give the Movement a “home,” my wife and I, who have never had the opportunity to buy a home, went to the bank to take out a loan.”

“When my company failed, I was without work for almost a year, and for the following fifteen years have had to pay a big part of my income to paying off the company’s debt. Through all this, the one thing we have always put first was our contribution to the Fraternity common fund. Certainly, we had to reduce the amount and even today are unable to donate the amount we used to give, but we have always made the contribution. Why? Because we believe that in supporting the material continuation of this presence, this life, that is directly the Movement and indirectly the Church, we guarantee our children and grandchildren the opportunity to encounter and choose a presence, as we have been able to encounter it.” This person understands the import of what we live together.

Two newlyweds wrote: “The decision to embrace the vocation to which the Lord has called us began and grew within a journey of faith we have been traveling together for years. The companionship of the Movement has been fundamental in this journey. This step would be unimaginable

for us without this companionship, which continually helps us to look into the depths of our being, and thus to discover that we are in a continuous relationship with the Mystery. Grateful for the encounter we have had, we would like to contribute to the growth of the Movement in the hope that others, too, can be reached by the same grace that has reached us. For this reason, we would like to make an offering that can support the needs and intentions of the Movement.”

One person wrote to express gratitude for finally graduating from college after many hardships, and another said that for his sixtieth birthday he was making an offering for our missions “so that Christ may be known and loved in the world.” A Fraternity group gave a donation for the fiftieth anniversary of one of the couples, “as a sign of gratitude for their life in the continual discovery together of the presence made flesh, who transforms our days and time.”

Finally, we were surprised by a friend who phoned the Fraternity offices to say that this was the first year he could not come to the Spiritual Exercises because of health problems. But he wanted to participate as best he could, and so he donated what he would have spent on attending the Spiritual Exercises.

## MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest ones,

Once again Divine Providence has allowed all the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation the intense gesture of the Spiritual Exercises all together.

This is a special occasion for deepening your relationship with Christ as the meaning of all our living, and for finding in this relationship the road for welcoming every sister and brother in the faith, every person.

“What Can Withstand the Test of Time?” This year’s title immediately reveals a clear awareness of the travails we are experiencing on the ecclesiastical and civil levels.

The person of the Servant of God Msgr. Giussani and his charism indicate the answer to this question. We live with truth and justice if we allow to shine forth our decision of faith to want to follow, notwithstanding our limits, and the orientation God gives to our existence and that of the entire human family. Only a freedom that allows itself to be led docilely by the hand of God withstands the test of time and transforms it, not without sacrifice and pain, into an opportunity for a more intense and beautiful life.

I assure you all of my prayer and blessing.

With affection,

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola*

*Emeritus Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Fr. Julián Carrón,

I send my greetings and prayer for a good outcome of the 2019 Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

I am close to all of you in these days of grace, which are always crucial for growth in the experience of Fr. Giussani’s charism, a charism which reveals its capacity to respond to the expectations of the heart, promoting for many people an encounter with Christ and the Church.

The Spiritual Exercises are an event because they make it possible for a new beginning to happen again, and they document that the fascination of the first encounter can endure over time. Thus the great question of what can withstand the test of time places us in the right position, one not to be taken for granted, of humility and openness to drinking from the living water of the love of Christ that wells up with eternal life (cf. *Jn* 4:14).

I pray for the Fraternity of CL which you lead, Julián, that in full faithfulness to the Holy Father Pope Francis, you may continue your mission with ardor and be a sign of the ongoing and unending mercy of the Lord in the Church and the world.

With warmest regards, and invoking upon all of you the Lord's blessing and the protection of the Mother of God,

*His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto*

Dearest Fr. Julián,

I was very struck that the title of this year's Spiritual Exercises is a question: "What can withstand the test of time?" It is a true and dramatic question in this time in which the Church is living an hour of passion and in which deep confusion dominates the hearts of our sisters and brothers.

And yet, there is an irreducible Presence that happens again through grace in the life of real women and men, perhaps in unforeseeable circumstances: only the event of "He who is among us," the Risen one who lives, "*Christus vivit*," can withstand "the test of time."

I accompany the great gesture of the Spiritual Exercises with my prayer and blessing, that they may be full of His sweet Presence.

*His Eminence Corrado Sanguineti  
Bishop of Pavia*

## TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness Pope Francis*

Your Holiness,

Twenty-two thousand members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have participated in the annual Spiritual Exercises in Rimini, and thousands more by satellite link-up in thirteen nations on the theme “What Can Withstand the Test of Time?” Having taken to heart the invitation expressed in your message, for which we are very grateful, to “study the signs of the times,” we have traced one of these signs in the urgent need for something that lasts in this change of era. This has made us more aware of the nature of Christianity as it has reached us through the charism of Fr. Giussani: an unpredictable encounter that has made us feel preferred. “You are precious in my eyes” (Is 43:4). We have immersed ourselves in the experience of the first followers: “The disciples who followed Him were poor wretches like you and me. All the newness of hope, the absolutely new certainty and new reality that they were, was that Presence. The contemporaneity of that Presence with me, with my children, with those who will come after us in a hundred million years: this is the victory that conquers the world. This is the absolute newness. This is the divine in history!” He is the One who withstands the test of time. “He who frees us is someone alive. He is the Risen Christ” (*Christus vivit*), who remains present in history in a place of life, the “holy Church,” and reaches us through witnesses of holiness.

We return to our homes more certain that He lives, because of the hundredfold He causes us to experience here and now, a gladness, peace, and joy that fill us with wonder. Asking Our Lady that everything we touch may be filled with the newness that has won us over, we continue to pray for you, Your Holiness, a witness to the living God through the gladness we see on your face as father and guide of the Christian people.

Happy Easter from all of us, your children of the Fraternity.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI*

Your Holiness,

The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have focused on the question that Fr. Giussani asked in facing the revolu-

tion of the 1968 student protests, of which you spoke recently: “What Can Withstand the Test of Time?” We have deepened our awareness of the difference of Christianity as a new event in the world: living is a presence, the risen Christ. He withstands the test of time. What an impression to read in your recent text that the Risen One reaches us today as well in the “holy Church” through “witnesses to the living God” who make us “glad in the faith”! Well aware of the infinite debt we owe you, we wish you Happy Birthday and Happy Easter.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Cardinal Kevin Joseph Farrell  
Prefect of the Vatican Dicastery for Laity, the Family and Life*

Dearest Eminence,

Twenty-two thousand members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have participated in the annual Spiritual Exercises in Rimini, and thousands more by satellite link-up in thirteen nations. To the question: “What can withstand the test of time?” we have answered with the words of Pope Francis: “Christ is alive! He is the Christ, risen from the dead” (*Christus vivit*), who reaches us concretely in history in an encounter. In the memory of the charism of Fr. Giussani, our father in the faith, who fills us with enthusiasm for Christ and the Pope, we renew our commitment to testify to the newness that has won us over for all time, creating, as best we can, spaces of life for the faith. Happy Easter of the resurrection.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti  
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Dearest Eminence,

“What can withstand the test of time?” We asked ourselves this question during the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, which gathered in Rimini twenty-two thousand members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation from all over Italy. In the legacy of Fr. Giussani and in the magisterium of Pope Francis we have found the convincing answer to this question that overcomes the fear that is so widespread among our sisters and brothers. “Alive is present!” “The one who liberates us is fully alive. He is the Christ, risen from the dead”

(*Christus vivit*). We want to bear witness to this in our daily reality as children of the holy Church, glad in the faith and open to an encounter with everyone. Happy Easter.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Angelo Scola  
Emeritus Archbishop of Milan*

Thank you, dearest Angelo, for the words you wrote us. The journey that Fr. Giussani led us on has helped us become more aware that only the unforeseen and unpredictable newness that has happened in our life—Christ alive—is able to withstand the test of time. We see its fruit in the lives of those who decide to assent to and follow the evidence of His presence: a gladness and peace that fill them with gratitude. Happy Easter.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto*

Dearest Filippo,

Grateful for your prayers, we have renewed our willingness to yield to the attraction of Christ, aware that only He withstands the test of time. This is the certainty of our faith and of our mission in the world. Happy Easter.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Bishop Corrado Sanguineti  
Bishop of Pavia*

Dearest Corrado,

This dramatic time for the life of the Church has been a precious opportunity for realizing that it is not our own strength, but the victory of Christ that withstands the test of time, “He who is among us,” present in history today as He was two thousand years ago. Happy Easter.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

# ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

*Prepared by Sandro Chierici*

*(Guide to the images drawn from art history that accompanied selections of classical music during entrance and exit)*

## *The fifteenth-century frescoes of the Sistine Chapel*

The fifteenth-century cycle of frescoes on the Sistine Chapel walls were painted between 1481 and 1483 by some of the greatest artists of the Renaissance. The iconographic plan called for frescoes on the north wall showing moments in the life of Jesus, and directly across from them in parallel, images on the south wall depicting episodes from the life of Moses, both sets characterized by numerous references to each other. Two initial scenes, *The Birth and Finding of Moses* and *The Birth of Christ* were destroyed to create space for Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* on the wall behind the altar. The itinerary along the side walls begins with the *Last Judgment*. The final scenes of the life of Moses and Jesus are on the entrance wall, across from the altar wall with the *Last Judgment*, and were painted in a later period. Every scene is almost like a film, uniting different episodes into one image.

### *Scenes from the Life of Moses*

1. Pietro Perugino, *Moses Bids Farewell to his Father-in-law Jethro: the journey of Moses to Egypt; the circumcision of Moses's son* (Ex 4:18–26).
2. Sandro Botticelli, *Episodes from the Life of Moses: the killing of the Egyptian; the encounter with the daughters of Jethro; the burning bush; the Jewish people leaving Egypt* (Ex 2:11–21; 3:1–12).
3. Cosimo Rosselli, *The Crossing of the Red Sea: Pharaoh consulting with his generals; the Egyptian army covered by the waters of the Red Sea; The song of victory of the Jewish people* (Ex 14:5–31).

4. Cosimo Rosselli, *The Tables of the Law and the Golden Calf*: the handing over of the tables of the law to Moses; the waters of Massa and Meriba; worship of the golden calf; Moses destroys the tables of the law; Moses presents the tables of the law to the people (Ex 24:12–17; 32:1–35; 34:1–4).
5. Sandro Botticelli, *The Punishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram*: the attempt to stone Moses; the refusal of the offering of incense; the punishment of the rebels (Nm 16:1–35).
6. Luca Signorelli, *The Confirmation of the Law and the Death of Moses*: the Jewish people gather around Moses; the division of the promised land among the tribes of Israel; the handing of the holy rod of power to Joshua; an angel shows Moses, on Mount Nebo, the promised land; the descent from the mountain; the death of Moses (Dt 33–34).
7. Hendrick van den Broeck (sixteenth century), *The Dispute over the Body of Moses between Saint Michael and Satan*, from an original by Domenico Ghirlandaio.

#### Scenes from the Life of Jesus

1. Pietro Perugino, *The Baptism of Jesus*: the Father blessing; the preaching of John the Baptist, the baptism of Jesus; the preaching of Jesus (Mt 3:13–17; Mk 1:9–11; Lk 3:21–22; Jn 1:29–34).
2. Sandro Botticelli, *The Temptations of Jesus*: the three temptations of Jesus; Satan is cast out; the angels prepare a meal for Jesus; Jesus surrounded by angels (Mt 4:1–11; Mk 1:40–45; Lk 5:12–16).
3. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *The Calling of the Disciples*: the calling of Peter and Andrew; the miraculous catch of fish, the calling of James and John (Mt 4:18–22; Mk 1:16–20; Lk 5:1–11).
4. Cosimo Rosselli, *The Sermon on the Mount* and *The Healing of the Leper* (Mt 5 and 7; Lk 6:17–49; Mt 8:1–4; Mk 1:40–45; Lk 5:12–16).
5. Pietro Perugino, *The Handing Over of the Keys*: the tribute; the attempt to stone Jesus (Mt 17:24–27; Jn 8:31–59; 10:31–39).

6. Cosimo Rosselli, ***The Last Supper***: *prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, the capture of Jesus; the Crucifixion* (Mt 26:17–29; Mk 14:12–25; Lk 22:7–23; Jn 13:21–30).

7. Matteo da Lecce (xvi century), ***The Resurrection***, from an original by Luca Signorelli.

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## **FR. GIUSSANI'S COMMENTS ON THE MUSICAL PASSAGES PLAYED DURING ENTRANCE AND EXIT**

These texts are taken from the jacket notes of the *Spirto Gentil* CD series. A compilation of all the *Spirto Gentil* texts in Italian is available in the book *Spirto Gentil: Un invito all'ascolto della grande musica guidata da Luigi Giussani* [Spirto Gentil: an invitation to listen to great music, guided by Luigi Giussani], edited by S. Chierici and S. Giampaolo, Bur, Milan, 2011.

Friday, April 12, evening—L. van Beethoven, *Symphony no. 7 in A Major*, op. 92, *Spirto Gentil*, 3

“This chord fills almost the entire passage and dominates it, while the melody is so evocative and rich in variations that one should be content with it, but no longer can be: the theme of destiny and sadness dominates the theme of life like a background that can't be escaped.”

Saturday, April 13, morning—L. van Beethoven, *String Quartet in A Minor*, op. 132, *Spirto Gentil*, 49

“It is good to give thanks to the Lord”; it is wonderful to recognize him! If we listen to Beethoven, just for a minute, we say to ourselves, “How beautiful!” The beauty of recognizing the Lord is of this nature, but deeper, like the taproot that deepens the hardly-hinted-at appearance of the tree that is being born; much deeper and incomparably more stable—a total form instead of partial and ephemeral forms.”

Saturday, April 13, afternoon—W.A. Mozart, *Piano Concerto in D Minor*, no. 20, *Spirto Gentil*, 32

“Beauty is the link between the present and the eternal, so the present is the sign of the eternal, the beginning of the eternal, the initial experience of the eternal. So the taste for life begins to beat with an unmistakable note, the note of what is permanent: justice, love. In a word: the need for total satisfaction, the need for the fulfillment of the “I” (it is only thanks to a joyous presence that our heart becomes joyful in its turn: if we are alone, joy cannot spring up in us).”

Sunday, April 14, morning—W.A. Mozart, *Sonatas for Piano and Violin*, nos. 21, 24, 26, 18, K 304, 376, 378, 301, *Spirto Gentil*, 46

The enfolding, penetrating, persuasive music of Mozart [...] is born of the experience of the absolutely gratuitous nature of the mercy of Being, which continually bows down over man's permanent neediness. What is this mercy, if not the desire, the anguished longing—in its supreme manifestation, which is Christ crucified—that the Mystery has for our happiness? Not only for the hereafter, but at once, here and now!

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Translation from the Italian by Sheila Beatty

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Cover: *Christ in limbo restores life to the elect* (XV century).  
Chapel of Saint Sébastien in Lanslevillard, Haute-Savoie, France.  
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