

EASTER 2020

**“I AM LIVING,
NOT I, BUT
YOU ARE
LIVING IN ME”**

Notes of the contributions
from Pigi Banna and Julián Carrón
via video link
with members of Gioventù Studentesca

Holy Saturday, 11 April 2020

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◎ PIGI BANNA ◎

May our desire to participate win in us; to participate however we can. Let us have the attentiveness, the silence, and the openness necessary to not treat this event as merely one of many occurring via our computers and phones over the last month. To place ourselves in this position of attentiveness, openness and silence, we ask Our Lady that we may have the same attitude as her, when she received the annunciation of the angel.

Angelus

Reality has disrupted all our plans

We are meeting in the strangest of ways, a way none of us could have envisaged a month ago. A month ago, we had the luxury of complaining about our usual *routine*, we anxiously worked towards the thousands of deadlines that life was presenting us with; until, suddenly, as we all know, reality disrupted all our plans. The COVID emergency has put a stop to our run, changing our habits, but, most of all, has made us face problems which we thought we

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could put aside. As with any crisis, it has forced us to focus on the essential, on the fundamental questions.¹ Among the many stories you have sent in, here is one with which we can all easily identify:

I have happened to think about death several times during this period. I have cried. On many occasions, I have occupied myself with my shopping, and other things, which made me deal with my time; time of which, deluded, I wanted to be master. What's more, my father works in an intensive care unit... and who knows what will happen with school finals. Or after that... This is a sea which I have been navigating since the start of the year, and several times I have come close to drowning. Between unexpected events, and cancelled plans. Reality has disrupted all my plans.

Powerlessness: wanderers, loners, prisoners

Who could not agree with these words? Reality has disrupted all our plans, revealing the extent of our powerlessness: this seems to me to be the first self-evident fact that we have all shared in this period. Powerlessness.

A powerlessness which emerges, sometimes, in the inability to do anything good, or useful, in our days; days spent wandering in the confines of our homes. Precisely now that we are free from performance, from the judgement of others, we feel like wanderers in our own homes. We might attempt to follow on-line lessons, we wait hopefully for the fresh air of video-calls, we skip from one TV series to another, sinking further and further into the sofa or bed, hoping to find something useful with which to flee from boredom and passivity. But the results are scarce. An Orwell quote from his famous novel seems truer than ever: “The truly characteristic thing about modern life was not its cruelty and insecurity, but simply its barenness, its dinginess, its listlessness.”²

In this period, perhaps more than ever, we feel the need to discover the taste and color of life, something that gives it sense.

1 “A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments. A crisis becomes a disaster only when we respond to it with preformed judgments, that is, with prejudices. Such an attitude not only sharpens the crisis but makes us forfeit the experience of reality and the opportunity for reflection it provides” (H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, The Viking Press, New York, 1961, pp. 174-175).

2 G. Orwell, 1984, Arcturus, London, 2013, p. 94



Yet, as I said, we feel powerless. A powerlessness which has touched those who have been directly or indirectly affected by the disease, unable to do anything for their loved ones. Yet it is a powerlessness, a solitude, also experienced by those who are not unwell, as one of you writes:

"My girlfriend has left me, my friends seem to have disappeared, and within my family, it is impossible to talk to anyone; everyone is nervous and worried by the situation."

In other words, not only those dying in hospitals are alone; we, too, can feel alone when we feel like we are suffocating in the "tomb" of our own rooms. Not just wanderers, but loners. As never before, we feel the need to rediscover a true love, that love which is not just a temporary companion, but accompanies us forever, even when we are physically alone.

Yet this powerlessness returns, it returns with a face of anger: anger for not being able to go outside, for being forced to respect the rules, feeling like prisoners. Prisoners in our own homes. But how many times did we feel the temptation to flee from everything, flee from the judgements of others, flee from deadlines, and burrow down in our own rooms? Now we can do just that, yet we feel like prisoners. Another one of you writes: "Every day, I find myself completely unsure what to do with this freedom"; we have this freedom, but feel like prisoners. A Russian writer, Tolstoy, seems to underline this: "He felt himself caught in the meshes of a stupid, empty, valueless, frivolous life, out of which he saw no means of extricating himself."³

We have never felt, as we have in this period, such a need to rediscover the taste and true love of life, and, most of all, of freedom; that freedom which can make us feel free even within the four walls of our room.

An opportunity to look ourselves in the face

Wanderers, loners, prisoners. In one word, powerless. Who among us has not felt like this in the last month, at least for one moment? Yet we must not be scandalized by this, we should not blame ourselves for this; rather, we can look with tenderness on these emotions that each of us has experienced. With

³ L. Tolstoy, *Resurrection*, trans. Mrs L. Maude, Pennsylvania State University, 2000, p. 107.



tenderness, and as an opportunity for discovery. In fact, what do they reveal about us? What does this feeling of powerlessness say about us? It reveals that we have a need, we “are” need, particularly in this period, of something essential: finding someone or something which regants us that sense, regives us that love, that freedom, which we need so much, but which we cannot give to us by ourselves. Let us tell ourselves clearly: no form of consolatory messages, or low league optimism, can be enough to us, though they may make us laugh, cheer us up for a moment; they do not change us, they do not leave traces in our everyday life, or give us the essentials for living today, not just tomorrow. One of you writes:

“What sense would it make to say ‘I will be happy only when quarantine is over’, when everything is ok? What a joke would that be? Why can I not be happy here, too? If I cannot also be happy here, too, I will not truly be happy when I can leave, either!”

What this friend says is very true, because it is our ‘I’, our humanity, which is emerging in this period as never before: a need for truth, for taste, for love, for freedom. Of course, these are immense questions to which we do not have the answer; they seem too great in comparison to our own attempts, but these questions shape us. This is shown by what one girl wrote to her teacher:

“What sense do you find in this period, in which all the world has stopped, but nevertheless life goes on exposing us to seemingly insurmountable challenges every day?”

What sense do you find? Our human ‘I’ is truly strange. Truly strange, but unique. We are different to animals. Animals are content with adapting to unexpected circumstances in order to survive, otherwise they die. Not so for us, we are not content with merely surviving during the quarantine; in fact, cornered, we feel the emergence in us of this unique need to understand, to ask ourselves: “Why? Where is the sense of all of this? Where has true love ended up, the love that makes us free and stops us from feeling alone?”

If we do not want to emerge from our homes—when we can emerge—even more disheartened by life, even more frightened, even more confused than before, then perhaps this is precisely the time in which, without being scandalized by what we are experiencing, we can finally look our ‘I’ in the face,



and listen to our own questions. I do not suggest having an answer, but at least listening to them. What have we discovered in this month, as we were listening to our questions?

Reality is something given, which is greater than our thoughts

Reading what some of you have written, and thinking about myself and my experience, I would say that the first thing we have discovered is reality. Such as this same reality, that of COVID-19, which has overturned our thoughts. Reality. It has imposed itself as something that has been given which does not depend on us, but on which we depend. The reality we complained about so many times, which we took for granted because we felt like we owned it, has forced us to face it and recognize it for what it is: a fact we cannot manipulate as we would like, in front of which we are unavoidably passive.⁴ We can thus either accept it, receive it, recognize it and welcome it, seeking to live it intensely, or we can close ourselves and reject it. Yet, in any case, whether we accept it or not, one thing is evident: we do not create it ourselves. None of us would have wished to create Coronavirus.

One of you writes: "I realize how much greater reality is, how much greater than everything I have in my head". Reality is always greater; perhaps, rather than opposing it and closing ourselves to it, it is in our interest to go along with it and live it intensely, as another friend of ours recounts:

"Nothing seemed to touch me when, on the evening of the 'super moon', I went into the garden to look at the sky, full of stars. I stayed there for half an hour, alone, eyes fixed on a point in space, when a flood of tears began to cover my face: how could I be so stupid as not to notice such a simple and magical thing as that sky? I was there, in that moment, outside, in my garden at home, crying for a bunch of constellations and asteroids placed there just for me."

We cannot help but realize, if we stop for a second, that we have not made any of what surrounds us: everything has been given to us. But... just like that beautiful starry sky, has Coronavirus also been given to us? What does it mean to accept this?

⁴ "The very word 'given' is also vibrant with an activity, in front of which I am passive: and it is a passivity which makes up my original activity of receiving, taking note, recognizing." (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston-London-Buffalo 1997, p. 101).



Presences that are truly friends

It is a vertiginous question; alone, we know, it is difficult to face and accept such a reality. In this last month, if we think about it, it has only been possible to accept reality, and not retreat into ourselves, when we have encountered or rediscovered the faces of friends, unexpected presences totally different to all others. They are different presences, like a teacher to whom students, via video link, said: “Miss, here everyone is tense, but you smile; how can you smile in this situation?”

They are presences which we recognize straight away, because they differ from the “pats on the shoulder” over video which do not console us, do not offer us true companionship, do not take us away from our solitude, or, most importantly, from the emptiness of our thoughts. As Pasolini describes with a stunning expression: “There is always something missing, there is a void / in all my intuitions. And it is vulgar, / this, my being incomplete, / and was never so vulgar as it is in this anguish, / this “not having Christ”—a face / that can be a tool for a work not completely / lost in the solitude of pure intuition.”⁵

There are certain faces which drag us from the nothingness of our thoughts, and interrupt their monotony. They are—as Carrón wrote—“presences who are truly ‘friends’ [...] presences [...] so exceptional that they leave us speechless, in silence;”⁶ they did so with very simple gestures (a phone call, a message), but they were different from the others, because those friendly presences were not ashamed of us, they placed us back in front of reality, they loved us more than we love ourselves. Their diversity has been very easy to identify in such a difficult period as this. One of you writes:

“The loyalty and sincerity of my friends has changed; they have not been spared a gram of the pain of this situation, with no holds barred: friends and family testing positive for the virus, the fear, the struggles with school. This immediately threw me off the ‘comfortable perch’ I had created for myself. Faced with truthful accounts and with the humanity of people older than me, I too perceived this desire to live through this quarantine ‘as a man’, without masks.”

5 P.P. Pasolini, VI. “L'alba meridionale”, from *Poesia in forma di rosa* (1961-1964), in English on the Easter Poster, Communion and Liberation, Easter 2020.

6 J. Carrón, *Letter to the movement of Communion and Liberation*, 12 March 2020, p. 3, clonline.



A new self-awareness

This is the great discovery: when we encounter these people, not only do our eyes open to reality, but we feel the desire to live as men, without masks; such is the gaze of love that they bring to our 'I'. They are not afraid, they are not ashamed of us, and they introduce us to a new awareness of ourselves, a new self-awareness. When we are with them, when we think of them—tell me if this is not true—there emerges a depth within us that we could never have imagined. It is someone who can begin to look at themselves in this way, today, that can truly change the world. Don Giussani told us this: "The subject's power lies in the intensity of his self-awareness, that is, of his perception of the values that define his personality."⁷ To give you an example, I want to read a section of a letter from a friend of ours who is a nurse, battling every day with Covid-19. She wrote to Carron:

"I would certainly have preferred to not be working in this situation with Covid patients, rather than having no choice. I would have preferred many other things. But I would not trade my heart, so needful of everything in these weeks, for anything else in the world. There is a new taste to things! It is only because I am loved that I can face this situation with happiness."

Only when one discovers to be loved can he say: "I would not trade my heart, so needful of everything, for anything else in the world". He who feels loved discovers the greatness of the heart. The heart that all of us, each one, carries within themselves. And who of us gave themselves this heart? Which of us signed the certificate to have it installed? Which of us gave it permission to beat? It is only thanks to these encounters that we rediscover the nobility of this heart, so powerless, that feels imprisoned, alone, and yet is so needful, because it does not make itself. It is made, it is wanted, it is loved.

I have been thinking, in the last few days, of the line of coffins stacked in army trucks—we have all seen it, shocking images—and I've been asking myself: what is man? Man is like a blade of grass; here yesterday, and now

⁷ L. Giussani, *Religious Awareness in Modern Man*, Communio: International Catholic Review, Washington, 1998, p. 138.





gone.⁸ Yet between the nothingness we come from and our death, without wanting it, you are here; I am here, someone wanted you, you did not make yourself, you are not giving yourself existence. There was nothing of me, of you, but from that nothingness, someone wanted you and loves you now.⁹

What an incredible awareness we can have of ourselves! What an incredible awareness: I am wanted now, I am loved, I do not make myself; and to He who is making me, timidly, as I mature step by step, I can begin to say ‘you’, “You”, “You who have made me, You who make me”. “This is prayer: to be conscious of oneself to the very center, to the point of meeting an Other”,¹⁰ who has wanted him, who loves him. Prayer is not a series of gestures, of rites, of words given to the wind like the songs coming from balconies in the last few weeks. Prayer is a mature expression of one who begins to say: “What a Grace it is that I am here! What a Grace, how incredible, that someone wanted me!” And I can direct all my pressing questions to this You that makes me: “Why have you let this situation occur?”; “Why do you want me here, in this situation?”; “Why did you not stop it?”; “What do you want from me?”

If we have this self-awareness within us, even today, confined to our rooms, as much as we may have erred, as much as we may be full of errors and feel imprisoned, then this is already the revolution of the world. We should not await the chance to leave our homes, because we are already prepared to face

8 “Lord, what are mortals that you notice them; human beings, that you take thought of them// They are but a breath; their days are like a passing shadow” (Psalm 144,3-4).

9 “There was nothingness, the nothingness of everything, but more precisely your nothingness, my nothingness. The word ‘election’ sets the limit, the boundary between nothingness and being. Being blossoms out of nothingness, as a choice, as election. There is no other condition that can be proposed, no other premise imaginable. This choice, this election, is the pure freedom of the Mystery of God in action, the absolute freedom of the Mystery that expresses itself”. (L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal-Kingston-London-Ithaca, 2010, p. 45).

10 “When I examine myself and notice that I am not making myself by myself, then I - with the full and conscious vibration of affection which this word I exudes - turn to the Thing that makes me, to the source that causes me to be in this instant, and I can only address it using the word you. You-who-make-me is, therefore, what religious tradition calls God - it is that which is more than I, more T than I myself. It is that by means of which I am. [...] To be conscious of oneself right to the core is to perceive, at the depths of the self, an Other. This is prayer: to be conscious of oneself to the very center, to the point of meeting an Other. Thus prayer is the only human gesture which totally realizes the human being’s stature”. (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, pp. 105-106).





any challenge. This is the great advantage we can garner –paradoxically– from the time of Coronavirus: a new awareness of self, from the fact that I am loved, whatever I do and will do.

A Man on whom the positivity of existence depends

I have this certainty, I can talk to you with this certainty about the heart of each one of you, of the heart of each of us, because my history, just like the history of many of you listening to me, has been reached by the announcement of a Man who, within himself, always felt loved, within himself, felt that He was not here by mistake; a Man who said He was the Son of God, the beloved Son of God.

He, like us, experienced the powerlessness we are sharing in this period: the feeling of imprisonment, solitude, abandonment, betrayal to the emptiness of death. Yet, even in that moment, He did not stop turning to the Father, asking him: "Why have you allowed all of this to happen?"; "Could this test not be avoided?"; "Why have you abandoned me?". This is how the Son of God died: giving Himself into the hands of the Father.

This Man, a little over 2000 years ago, was Risen, defeating death, and His victory reaches us concretely today, precisely through the friendly presences that we have spoken about; those presences through which, as Carrón says, it is possible to see an incarnate experience of victory, the experience of the resurrection.¹¹

"That Risen Man is the Reality on which all the positivity of every man's existence depends", said don Giussani. Therefore "the real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ."¹² Thus, not despairing, but with faith in Him, we discover ourselves to be beggars, and can ask those questions which emerge in us during this period, and that He shares with us: "Why is all of this happening?"; "What do you want from us?"

11 "What we need, therefore, more than any reassuring speeches or moral instructions, is to tap into the people who embody the experience of this victory, that there is a meaning in life proportionate to the challenges" (J. Carròn, "This is how we learn to conquer fear in times of difficulty", Corriere della Sera, 28 February 2020).

12 L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating traces in the history of the world*, p. x, xii.



Asking these questions of Him with faith, faith in His victory, can render us certain of being able to build a new world, even today, without having to await leaving our homes, because this is a new 'I', an 'I' that feels ever more itself the more it feels loved.

Before wishing you Happy Easter, I must announce a surprise from this Love which is so deep within us: Julián's participation via video link; as he has accompanied us during this period, he wished to be here today, too, to greet us.

◎ JULIÁN CARRÓN ◎

Good morning, hello to you all. Yesterday, trying to identify with what we were celebrating, Good Friday, I reread a quote from the then Cardinal Ratzinger: "In Johann Sebastian Bach's great compositions on the Passion, which we listen to every year during Holy Week with new emotions, the terrible event of Good Friday is immersed in a transfigured and transfiguring beauty. Of course, these *Passions* do not talk about the Resurrection—they conclude with Jesus' burial—but in their clear solemnity they exist in the certainty of the Easter day, in the certainty of the hope that does not vanish, even on the night of death. Today [a great deal, in this time we are going through], this confident serenity of faith—that does not even need to talk of Resurrection, because it is that in which faith lives and thinks—has become strangely alien to us."¹³

I find it amazing that Jesus did not spare his friends any challenges, just as He does not spare us any either. This is why He said to His friend Peter: "I have prayed for you, that in the challenge you must face—when I will be rejected and crucified—that your own faith may not fail, that your certainty of what you have seen living with me may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers."¹⁴

Why did Jesus not spare him this challenge? Why did he not spare the disci-

13 J. Ratzinger-Benedict XVI, *Gesù di Nazaret. Scritti di cristologia*, LEV - Città del Vaticano 2015, p. 13.
[translator's own translation]

14 Luke 22,32.



ples the silence of death on Holy Saturday? So that they could truly attain the understanding of what Jesus was. So that they could understand the novelty that He can introduce, even into the darkest of situations. We must be forever grateful to these friends, these first friends of Jesus, who faced the darkness of "that" death for us.

Today, we can ask ourselves: how must John and Andrew have experienced any situation in their lives after having faced that darkness, and then seen Him Risen? I am certain that they would not have been able to face any challenge, any upheaval, any circumstance, as uncomfortable as it may have been, without the presence of the Risen Christ in their eyes, as they saw him. They needed to face all that darkness to realize that they were not alone in their powerlessness, with their troubles, with their darkness. From the day of Easter, they were all invested by a unique Presence, different to all others.

Thus, another friend, Saint Paul, was able to summarize what the lives of all the friends of Jesus would have been like after Jesus, with this phrase: "Insofar 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."¹⁵ The first friends of Jesus thus give us the key to engaging in any circumstance, to confronting any challenge: before doing anything, before imagining how to face anything, the recognition of His living presence dominated in their hearts, in their memory.

Therefore, we do not tell you what you've heard, or what we will tell you, to merely offer a tale which distances us from the current challenge we are facing now. On the contrary, we start from here—the recognition of His presence—in order not to run from any challenge, to face any darkness with His companionship, to be able to consider any circumstance in the correct manner, because there exists no world, no circumstance, no darkness, into which the Risen Christ has not entered, and cannot enter. He was the first to enter the darkness of the sepulcher; he did not watch our death from a balcony, He experienced it Himself, entering the sepulcher in order to tell us that darkness and death have been defeated, not with mere discourse, or a tale, or an "everything will be fine" slogan, but with a fact.

15 Galatians 2,20.





This announcement has been made to resonate in our lives by another friend, much closer to us in time, don Giussani; he has told us, as we have read in this year's Easter Poster: "That Risen Man is the Reality on which all the positivity of every man's existence depends. Every earthly experience lived in the Spirit of Jesus, Risen from the dead, blossoms in Eternity". But this blossoming does not only concern the future: "This blossoming will not bloom only at the end of time; it has already begun on the dawn of Easter".

Whoever allows this Presence to enter his or her life, whoever recognizes this living presence of Christ, will begin to see a flourishing of life now! This is why I was struck by what one of you wrote to an older friend, who introduced her to this history that has reached us: "that 'something greater' has made itself known in the most simple manner possible, through facts that have slowly filled my heart, sick with fear, with a strange joy: it is One/one [with a capital and lower case letter in the same word] that has the power to free me from distress, because he wants me to savor life, life that is still there now, and that I have seen in you. I know this because I used to stay at home in order to not risk dying, to not lose my ability to breathe. Now, I stay at home to live, live. Staying at home is not meant to defend myself from a threat; it is the place in which I wait to be reached by true life. Everything has changed, from my way of dealing with long distance study to my way of looking at my friends. "Yes, because He is here". [...] Living through this new situation with the same gaze as before has been difficult, but not impossible. Difficult, because it is not sufficient to repeat positive words [we have heard lots of these in recent days]. Not impossible, because all is needed is for it to happen again, and today, it has happened again. True joy lies in giving one's life for the work of Another, and the first piece of work is me, letting my humanity be nourished by the only One who can do so".

This is the greeting I offer you, and that I leave you with, as this sixteen-year-old girl said: allow His living presence to enter your hearts, into the folds of your life, so that the current circumstance may not be a tomb, but rather a place of resurrection, the place where you can witness the flourishing of your 'I'.

Why do I leave you with this wish? Why did I choose to wish this for you,





among everything else? Because, like this girl, man sees from within a relationship, as Giussani told us: "Like a son with his father, like a disciple with his master, or like a friend with another friend, this Presence is viewed *from inside a relationship*,"¹⁶ just as John and Andrew saw from within a relationship with their living Friend.

Thus, we must have only one concern, as don Giussani tells us: "The first object of our attention accordingly needs to be this Presence itself, not some abstract 'duty' that we are supposed to be carrying out. The first object of our affection or attachment similarly needs to be this Presence itself and not some 'reality' that we are supposed to possess. The primary source and fount from which we draw our energy again needs to be this same Presence and not our own ethical strength. The clarity of our moral judgments [...], our inclination toward justice and righteousness, as well as the power of our wills, will all mature and be strengthened by contact with this Presence. In fact, the totality of the person is attracted and motivated toward the good through a relationship with the same Presence."¹⁷

Now, to allow this Presence to enter, let us listen to *Regina Caeli*.

Happy Easter, my friends!

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16 L. Giussani, *Morality: Memory and Desire*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1986, p. 171.

17 *Ibid.*



