

LIFE: THE RESPONSE TO ANOTHER WHO IS CALLING ME
Notes from Davide Prospero's Summary
at the International Assembly of Leaders of Communion and Liberation
La Thuile (AO), August 30, 2022

We have come to the end of our journey. These days have been intense, intense with words, shared living, comparison of our experiences, of what our life has to say about the things proposed to us. Rather than summarizing what has emerged, I would like to draw some conclusions for looking ahead, realizing that, walking at our own pace, we are on a sure road.

1. “The Teacher is here and is asking for you”: taking responsibility for the charism

The Movement is alive, as Fr. Massimo said Saturday morning. At the conclusion of these days together, we can feel as true, with renewed evidence, with the grateful wonder we have felt many times at the conclusion of our gatherings, the words of Péguy: “He is here. / He is here as on the first day. / He is here among us as on the day of His death. / In eternity, He is here among us exactly as on the first day. / In eternity, every day. / He is here among us in all the days of His eternity.”¹

One of you said this well, quoting the simple and profound words of that child who did not want to leave at the end of the community vacation: “Me here!”. I, too, want to stay here. I don't ever want to leave. Why? Many of you have said it in different ways: because “the Teacher is here.”²

Not only is He here: He is here and is calling *us*. He is here and is calling *me*. He is here and is calling *you*, calling each of us. What is He calling us to? We have said and re-said this to each other in these days. Julián reminded us in his message. Monsignor Camisasca told us again at the beginning of his talk, and Archbishop Giuseppe Baturi repeated it yesterday: the Lord is calling us to take responsibility for the charism that has seized us, to take personal responsibility, each of us, and at the same time together, not alone, but in communion. So, what does this mean, to take responsibility?

Yesterday, Archbishop Baturi told us clearly and precisely what it does *not* mean. First of all, it does not mean having a role, wielding power or hoisting on your shoulder Lord knows what heavy burden, like the burden of Isildur in Tolkien's saga, even if, certainly, taking responsibility at times demands effort, involves openness to a dedication that requires effort. So then, what does it mean, if not this?

The word “responsibility” derives from the Latin word *respondeo*: a responsible person lives life as a response, as a desire to respond. Respond to what, or better, to Whom? To an Other who is calling me, who takes a risk on me, on my freedom, who mysteriously wagers on me, trusts me, esteems me, puts His trust in me.

So then, it seems to me that in order to live this responsibility with enthusiasm and drive, to take it on consciously, first of all it is a matter of focusing our gaze not so much on “what” we have to do, the list of things to do (as we know, this quickly tires and suffocates us), but rather on the Face of the One who is calling us, the Christ who begs for my and your heart, who thirsts for my and your response, who sits, thirsty, next to the well of your freedom and begs for your heart, begs for the movement of your heart, as expressed so poetically and heart-meltingly by our great Anas in the song we have just sung together, “If you knew how long I have waited for you / How much I have thought of you, how much I have loved you / If you knew in this desert / Who has come to meet you, how

¹ Ch. Péguy, “Il mistero della carità di Giovanna d'Arco [The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc],” in Id., *I misteri [The Mysteries]*, Jaca Book, Milan 1997, p. 56. Cf. also *Lui è qui. Pagine scelte [Chosen Pages]*, Bur, Milan 1997, p. 176.

² Jn. 11:28; M.-G. Lepori, *Christ, the Life of Life*, p. 37. <https://english.clonline.org/publications/other-texts/fraternity-exercises/christ-the-life-of-life>

much I thirst inside // [...] You came to me without thinking, distracted in your memory / But I am the one who asks you, I love you even to the point of asking / I thirst, listen to My voice, thirst for you all the way to the cross.”³

Only if we perceive within this call to responsibility Christ’s voice begging for our heart, thirsting for our heart, even to the cross, will we hear this call not as a task that crushes us, but on the contrary as a gift, something that sets us on fire and fills us with enthusiasm. Therefore, we are grateful for these days, which have above all been this: making evident again through the faces and voices of many witnesses, the presence among us of this You thirsty for our response, for our “yes, I’m in.” This is the origin, only this, of the birth and continual re-birth of what yesterday one of you called “the yearning for Christ” the same described by Saint Paul: “For the love of Christ impels us, once we have come to the conviction that one died for all; therefore, all have died. He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for Him who for their sake died and was raised.”⁴

2. From wonder at the call, yearning for the mission

What is the content of this yearning? Archbishop Baturi said it well. “Fr. Giussani observed that the movements “were born for the mission of the Church. For the most part, they arose in connection with the Second Vatican Council, which energetically re-proposed the missionary nature of the Church, inviting Christians to ‘raze the bastions’.”⁵ [...] It is no coincidence that some of the most significant words addressed to the Movement by the Popes go in this direction. John Paul II said on September 29, 1984, “‘Go into the whole world’ (cf Mt. 28:19) is what Christ said to His disciples. And I repeat to you: ‘Go into all the world to bring the truth, the beauty, and the peace which are found in Christ the Redeemer’. This invitation that Christ made to all His followers and which Peter has the duty ceaselessly to renew, is already interwoven with your history [...]. Take on the burden of this ecclesial need: this is the charge I leave with you today.”⁶ And Pope Francis, in the gathering in Saint Peter’s Square on March 7, 2015, “Like this, centred in Christ and in the Gospel, you can be the arms, hands, feet, mind and heart of a Church ‘which goes forth’.”⁷ [...] In a very beautiful passage, Fr. Giussani said, “Mission, the presence of the missionary drive, is the indication of a loving presence.”⁸

On this point I will limit myself to a brief comment. As our friend from Caracas (someone who certainly finds himself carrying out his ministry in conditions that are not exactly easy) testified yesterday in a clear and endearing way, not only is the missionary drive the index of how alive the charism is in us, but in a certain sense it is what keeps the charism alive in us and makes us explore, know, appreciate and love it more and more. For this reason, we are grateful to the many among us whose testimonies have shown us exactly this in action, evoking in us, I hope, a “healthy envy” for what they are given to live. Think of what our friend who is alone in Turkey told us last night: “Not only have I never felt alone, but my affection for the charism and the faith has grown. Now I’m thinking of staying here, in spite of the difficulties: I am called here, and it makes a difference whether I am here or not.” It is difficult to think of a clearer example of what it means to *take responsibility for the charism*: “I am called here. The Lord is here and is calling me.”

³ “Se tu sapessi [If You Knew],” words and music by Antonio Anastasio.

⁴ Cf. 2 Cor. 5:14-15.

⁵ L. Giussani, “Introduction,” to *I Movimenti nella missione della Chiesa. Tre discorsi di Giovanni Paolo II [The Movements in the Mission of the Church]*, suppl. to *Litterae Communionis-CL*, n. 11/1985, p. 3. English translation is available at <https://english.clonline.org/archive/fr-giussani/the-movements-in-the-mission-of-the-church>

⁶ John Paul II, *Discorso al movimento di “Comunione e Liberazione” nel XXX anniversario di fondazione* [Address to the Movement of “Communion and Liberation” on the 30th Anniversary of its Foundation], September 29, 1984, 4.

⁷ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation movement*, March 7, 2015.

⁸ L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987) [The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter]*, Bur, Milano 2010, p. 316.

3. The human heart begging for Christ

So then, what is our task? The answer to this question has come from many of you. Maybe its most concise expression emerged during the assembly. “More than anything, we are called to beg, to beg that the Spirit Himself accomplish His work in us, that is, make us capable of responding to His call.” I would like to look more closely at three aspects, I would say three existential translations of this begging, that I feel are particularly important for us in this moment we are going through.

a) *An endless desire to learn*

A living reality is desirous of growth and maturation, thus eager to correct itself and be corrected. We desire to allow ourselves to be corrected inasmuch as we have affection for ourselves as destiny, affection for the possibility of growth and becoming great, becoming what we were made for. Pier Paolo Pasolini wrote in *Il pianto della scavatrice [The cry of the excavator]* (a really beautiful quote, and I thank the person who suggested it to me): “Only loving, only knowing / count, not having loved, / not having known. It’s anguishing // to live a consumed / love. The soul no longer grows.”⁹ The first begging for Christ is the prayer to understand more and more, which, as we heard yesterday, presupposes a fundamental condition, the humble awareness that there is more to learn, that we do not know everything, that we are still on the road. “*Si enim comprehendis, non est Deus,*”¹⁰ said Saint Augustine. If you have understood it all, it is not God. We do not possess Christ, just as we do not possess the charism: rather, we are possessed by it. So, we desire to continue learning, even questioning ourselves if necessary. In this regard, my hope for you and myself during the whole year that awaits us is that we will take to heart Saint Paul’s words: “It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it, since I have indeed been taken possession of by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus.”¹¹

b) *Following in order to understand*

One of the highest aspects of begging, of the poverty of spirit that is the virtue of the beggar, is following. How many times have we been told this, and how many times did Fr. Giussani return to this point! But in these days together the theme has also returned over and over. I would like to add a final, concise point about this. As we have learned, the road of following authority is not different from or in conflict with the road of using the heart as criterion. Rather, following is what enables the heart and reason to expand, if and in the degree to which you seriously verify what the authority proposes. If you follow only when you “feel” that what is asked of you is right or “correspondent,” you will never truly follow or obey, because you would just be following yourself, not an Other. So then? Faith would not be needed, because faith would no longer be faith; it would no longer need witnesses and Christ would be reduced to our measure. Instead, precisely through obedience, an obedience that at times demands the destruction of your measure, you enter into the new mindset born of belonging to Christ. (On this point, I really encourage you to re-read the chapters on obedience in *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* and *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way]*,¹² which explain this very well, and obviously in order to be brief I won’t quote them

⁹ P.P. Pasolini, *Il pianto della scavatrice [The Cry of the Excavator]*, 1956, in Id., *Tutte le poesie [All the Poems]*, Volume I, Mondadori, I Meridiani, Milan 2009, p. 833.

¹⁰ Saint Augustine, *Sermons* 117.3.5.

¹¹ Phil. 3:12-14.

¹² L. Giussani, “Obedience,” in Id., *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Volume I, *Faith*, Chapter 3, pp. 116-158; L. Giussani, “L’obbedienza [Obedience],” in Id., *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, Bur, Milan 2011, pp. 212ss.

here.) Now pay attention here, because this destruction of your measure is not a rejection of reason (we follow Fr. Giussani, the champion of reason!), but readiness to allow an Other to broaden and enlarge it, to bring us toward a new, truer, deeper point of view, His point of view. As we have learned, faith completes and fulfils reason: Fr. Giussani said that “Faith is rational, since it flourishes at the extreme boundary of the dynamics of reason like a flower of grace to which man adheres with his freedom.”¹³ In fact, faith completes and fulfils reason and exceeds it, bringing it beyond its capabilities. Think of Peter’s reaction when Jesus told His disciples, “What God has joined together, no human being must separate.” Peter reacted impulsively, and maybe we with him: “If that is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.”¹⁴ Does Jesus’ position correspond to the heart, to the deep needs and evidences of the heart, or not? Yes, it corresponds. And yet, then and there, it was not easy for Peter to understand it immediately and thus accept it. The opposite! Certainly, the reasonableness of following comes from the fascination of a presence. Another episode of the Gospel (the Gospel is full of them) is that of washing the disciples’ feet. “You will never wash my feet!”, exclaimed Peter, and Jesus answered: “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with Me.”¹⁵ So Peter let Jesus wash his feet out of affection. He did not understand; it seemed outrageous to him! But the opposite is also true. Following and obeying are not only the fruit of understanding: at times without understanding well, without understanding everything, following leads to understanding, to making clearer and richer the awareness of what truly corresponds. What counts is that the following not be blind, not be a following with an extinguished heart. As we have learned, the heart is the criterion against which everything is to be compared. But this is the point: in order to compare, first of all you have to put your trust in the proposal. Only in this way can you truly verify whether the proposal corresponds, that is, whether or not it makes you grow. Archbishop Santoro spoke of tradition, a content of proposal that initially may not necessarily warm your heart.

c) *Unity is a miracle, but you have to beg for it*

I would like to conclude by inviting all of you to pray constantly for the miracle of the unity of our companionship. We understand well that, as we said yesterday, true unity does not void our differences, but composes them into concordant harmony. We do not create unity; actually, we can only try to destroy it. We do not create it. We can even say that it is impossible for us to achieve it: all of us have this experience on every level. This is why I used the word “miracle.” In any case, this is a miracle we cannot help but desire, since Jesus makes the splendor of His glory in the world depend on it. “I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how [this is how!] all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”¹⁶

If we are honest, we know that we are unable to obey Jesus’ high and moving command with our own strength. However, we can and must pray for it, beg for it. Someone led the way, begging for that unity for us, a unity that at times we may even find it difficult to ask for. “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in us [be one], that the world may believe that You sent Me. And I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one, as We are one. I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent Me, and that You loved them even as You loved Me.”¹⁷

Allow me to add a final observation. At this point, you may be waiting (or someone may be waiting) for the answer to the final “quiz” of the first evening. We have clarified that Peter’s function is not John’s (I believe we all agree on this point) and that both are necessary and indissolubly bound

¹³ L. Giussani, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, edited by Julián Carrón, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022, p. 61.

¹⁴ Mt. 19:10.

¹⁵ Jn. 13:8.

¹⁶ Jn. 13:34-35.

¹⁷ Jn. 17:20-23.

together to give a body to the Church. Therefore, what is Peter's function, and thus that of the leader, in the institutional sense of the term, within our companionship? Many have asked me this. What are the criteria for recognizing and electing the leader? I believe these are important questions. In these days we have focused on some criteria and characteristics that help us in this sense: certainly affection and dedication to the Movement, balance, prudence in discernment in facing decisions, affective maturity, charity and the ability to pay attention, listen, valorize others, relate with others, etc. As we have said many times, this means that we should not limit ourselves to identifying the most charismatic personality among us, having this as the only criterion for recognizing and choosing the leader. Here a whole new order of reflection opens up, one we need to undertake to be able to reach the awareness necessary for holding free and responsible elections, as repeatedly augured in Cardinal Farrell's letter. But we do not need to rush, because we will speak of this again.