



**“YOU HAVE GIVEN HIM  
RULE OVER THE WORKS  
OF YOUR HANDS”**

Gathering of the Young People of CL

Assisi, March 23–26, 2023



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*What allows us to enjoy everything in a true way, until the final moment of our life? At the bottom of the steps that descend from the Basilica of Assisi into the crypt, where the nave opens onto the tomb of Saint Francis, in a small niche, repose the relics of one of Francis's friends. There is buried Jacopa dei Settesoli, a noble Roman woman to whom the brother, a little before his death, wrote to come meet him at the Portiuncula. And he reminded her not to forget to bring him her wonderful cookies, which he loved so much.*

*This is the story that Francesco Vignaroli, a historian from Perugia, used to introduce a visit to the city of Assisi by 300 young people (and some older people) of the movement, invited from all Italy and from Spain to spend three days together, from 23 to 26 March.*

*It can seem like just a curious anecdote, but those cookies of Jacopa speak about the possibility that each thing, every detail of reality, just like for Saint Francis—it is enough to re-read the Canticle of Creation—touches the desire for happiness and our ultimate purpose. “There are only two things that are worth talking about in life: the purpose of life and the road to get there,” said Father Paolo Prosperi, a priest of the Fraternity of Saint Charles Borromeo, citing Father Giussani during the lesson dedicated to the theme of work, held on the Friday morning of the gathering.*

*There is a path that must be verified in the impact with everyday life, as the invitation to the young people to Assisi said: “What does it mean for you to live the responsibility for the charism in front of the challenges of adult life, between your work, relationships, friendships...?”*

*That this is an urgent topic was easily seen, from the first moments, in the two assemblies, some passages from which you will find in these pages, where only some of the many raised hands found space to intervene with experiences and questions. There is the phrase, almost an aside, from his dentist that for Luigi becomes a provocation to look at his work and the value of friendship. There is Michele, a doctor, with the desire to return home and embrace his wife after the funeral of a patient. Or Paolo, who helps dress his son in the morning while he carries the difficulties of his work in his heart. Or Matteo, who returns to the office a month after the death of Silvia, his wife... Everything compared with the faith and with our belonging to the movement. What does it mean—the underlying question—to be responsible for the charism, as Pope Francis said at the Audi-*

ence on 15 October 2022? “There is a link between the responsibility about which we speak and memory,” says Francesco Cassese (Camu), leader of the movement for the Diocese of Milan, who led the two assemblies with Father Paolo: “Do we really want to live the responsibility for the charism?”

We helped each other with this during the three days in Umbria, to look at this history that has grasped us all, to deepen our friendship through words like “communion,” “memory,” “judgment,” “obedience”... And where nothing was left out. A visit in small groups to the city and its Basilicas, for example. Where some people happened to meet a Franciscan brother and speak with him about Francis and his followers, and of their relationship with the Church, even after the death of the Saint. Or, on Friday and Saturday evenings, between the music of Rachmaninov presented by Pier Paolo Bellini and the figures of Miguel Mañara and of Mozart’s Don Giovanni, following that passion for beauty that always gripped Father Giussani, because it is a powerful call to the meaning of human existence. We could read that same beauty in the faces of so many that got together to sing in the meeting rooms of the hotel in the late evening: Alpine songs, as well as Spanish and African songs... Or still, in the dialogues at table during lunch and dinner.

To recognize the origin of all this, the point of unity, is the first step of a “common judgment,” a phrase that came out many times in the interventions and dialogues. Father Prosperi will say it again at the close of the gathering (you will find the text of the synthesis, as well as the other moments, published in this booklet): “It is to let Christ wash our feet,” to let ourselves be loved by Him, to begin “to feel” like him. It is not to abdicate our own heart, explains Father Paolo. In obedience, in fact, the understanding of what the heart desires expands, becomes clearer: “A presentiment of the truth, as Father Giussani called it. We do not enter into Christ’s point of view violently, but little by little.” It is a path for which we need “the virtue of availability,” the last point touched on in the synthesis, and taken up again by Davide Prosperi, head of the movement, at the end of the vacation: “We are invited to this path. And we are invited to walk it together.”

**Paolo Perego**

*Thursday, March 23*

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## INTRODUCTION

Davide Prospero

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** Let us say a prayer.

*Glory Be*

**Davide Prospero.** Welcome and thank you for responding to our invitation. I see that we are all here, or almost all, from different parts of Italy, maybe a few from Spain have not yet arrived. Surely you will have asked yourselves the reason behind this invitation and what you have come here to do. For me it is already a sign of hope that—while not knowing exactly the reason—you have come all the same. Having to introduce these days, the first thing that comes to me to say is this: do not ask yourselves why it was you who were invited. There is a right aspect to this question, but to fix yourselves on this would lead you astray. Maybe some of you were pointed out to me as leaders in your groups of Fraternity or within your communities, some others were indicated by older friends that are here and who I asked to share these days with us, some—who knows, found the invitation on a golden ticket in a Willy Wonka chocolate bar. It doesn't matter. What matters is to ask ourselves what is being proposed and offered: not only words, content, but something more. When someone offers you something, it also asks something of you (at least when you are asked to accept it). So, what is being offered? And what is asked of our life? There are two fundamental reasons for this invitation—which then can be developed in many ways, and we will develop them.

1. The first is that—as you notice looking around you—you belong (I wanted to say “we belong,” but unfortunately I am a bit older than

you!), you all belong to a certain generation. Together we have all come out of a difficult period, Covid, that kept us far from each other and, from a certain point of view, introduced something that we have never experienced before, not me or the generation that preceded me. There has also been, in some way, a dispersion that in part was fostered by this and in part by the context in which we live, about which I will allow myself to say a few words.

Said synthetically, the context in which we live is not irrelevant: we are not strangers to the mentality that permeates everything and everyone; it is what in our friendship has always been called “environment.” With this word Father Giussani meant not just a geographical or physical space, the places of life, but above all that context that influences people in a determinative way. He said in fact in 1960: “Never like today has the environment, understood as the mental climate and way of life, had at its disposal instruments so despotic with which to invade consciences. Today more than ever the educator, or the sovereign dis-educator, is the environment with all its expressive forms” (*Porta la Speranza* [To Carry Hope], Marietti 1820, Genova 1997, p. 16). If this was true 60 years ago, just think of the influence of the dominant mentality today, a mentality that we find in ourselves, without realizing it and often even thinking ourselves immune. Father Giussani always faced the fundamental steps of our education starting from a clear gaze on the context, so that we could discover the influence of power in ourselves, even before seeing it outside of ourselves. Because education is the path of salvation. This is the fulcrum of our whole history: the path of salvation, that is, the liberation from slavery to power.

What you are facing with in this time of your life—which so many of you point out, begin to point out, according to your age—that coincides with becoming adults in the proper sense, is the defining of your vocation. Vocation understood as a state of life—family or virginity—and as work, profession. The work, more than just engaging the majority of your time, at least for most of us, is also the place of life and therefore of the expression of the self; therefore, it is there where the influence of power becomes most evident. All of this



today, in 2023, is impacted by the dominant mentality with more violence than ever, a violence that wants to demolish the meaning of things. Why? Because the one who knows the meaning and therefore the destiny of himself and of things is free from power. Today, it is the very possibility of there being a meaning that is denied; not so much which is the true meaning, but that things have a meaning at all, that there is a meaning. And so, everything is reduced to reactivity. In such a context, freedom understood as we understand it is the worst enemy of power and is the only bulwark against its taking over.

2. The second motive for our coming together is to offer ourselves a companionship. I must say that the proposal of these days together came out of my experience these past few months. As many of you know, I went around all the Regions, meeting the communities. That is why so many of you knew about this invitation, because the thing was not some project of mine, but something that came out of our meeting together. When we met, I began to intuit that for many of us the movement is surely a well-known reality, a place where many of us grew up, but the movement also feels a little like something that pre-dates us—and in a certain sense it does, because we all entered into a reality that already existed. The true question, or, if we want, the true challenge—I think above all of the words that the Pope addressed to us in Saint Peter’s Square, inviting us to assume responsibility for the charism—is if the movement, if this experience that represents the heart of our life, is something from which we take this or that, or if it is really ours. Ours, in the sense that this belonging at the same time generates us and is generative: we belong to a movement that is generated by our belonging! Otherwise it would be like walking into a supermarket and taking what we wanted, bringing it home, cooking it, but life would be somewhere else. Anyway, the risk of treating the movement like this is there, not only because we find the movement, the charitable works, all this reality already made, but also because of a mentality that pervades us, because the mentality of today is characterized by individualism; and we find this individualism in ourselves. We are



immersed in this climate, to which Covid contributed, but Covid was only an accidental cause; there is something more structural that determines it. In fact, we see it well: everyone speaks about the I, Giussani always spoke about the I, in all these years we have always spoke about the I, and today we realize the urgency of understanding even more deeply the true meaning, the novelty, the originality of the content of the word “I.” Because thirty years ago, forty years ago, it was lived in a context in which a certain associative sense dominated, so that to say “I,” even in an individual sense, was something original. Today no; to say “I” is no longer original. Whoever had the misfortune of attending the first night of the San Remo Festival, heard a little girl talk for half an hour about the I; when we speak about the I, are we saying the same thing? What is the difference? The way we talk about the I is original: the I is relation, the I is relationship, the I implies a you. “I am ‘you-who-make-me,’” this was how Father Giussani defined the I in *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023, p. 110). And we have learned it not only because of a received teaching, but through the experience of all these years. This is the definition of our I that Father Giussani communicated to us with his life and with his teaching. And it requires a decision on our part: not to affirm our individual thoughts, but to affirm the companionship inhabited by Christ as the generative point of the I. This is the reason that gives form to the gesture of these next few days. We will have moments of listening, of dialogue among us; we will not only be reacting to the things that we hear. This time requires that our lived experience, at every level, come out. The central theme will be above all the relationship with work (because of what I said before), that will be the content of the lesson that Father Paolo will give tomorrow morning. But in the assemblies, there will also come into play all the aspects of our life and our experience. Tomorrow morning there will be a proposal of content, but then we will have two moments of assembly when we can speak freely. I will not lead it, but rather Camu together with Paolo and others will guide the gesture. The idea is to face these themes from a particular angle, that of our charism, as a help to enter the

path, the journey that all of us are making in these times that we are living, in this historic period in our story. So tomorrow morning an introduction on the theme of work, then two assemblies and then other moments to deepen this way of looking at reality according to the charism, that is, as Father Giussani educated us to live every expressive aspect of our story. There will also be a guided visit to the places of Saint Francis. Saint Francis incarnated another charism, but he helps us to understand our own as well.

To finish, I want to underline a simple and clear concept: this gathering is a beginning. I do not want it to be interpreted as a "let's participate, then each one cooks up things for himself," otherwise we would contradict the concerns which have brought us here. It is a beginning, and the hope is that it may become a place. Pay attention: I do not mean a place made up only of you all (obviously, the fact that you are here means that this place will be made by you), but I hope that this place will expand, can expand wherever you are, wherever you live, in the relationships that you have and in those that you do not yet have, to the people you will encounter, etc. We can continue to return to this companionship to which we belong. I would like us all to perceive it like this. As you see, if we look to the right, to the left, in front and behind, there are not only old friends or those who live close to us. So, I would like us to feel this companionship inscribed on the horizon of everything that is here and beyond, so that it may really be the beginning of a friendship. If at the end of these days you think it has been useful to see each other, we will also have other moments in the future; otherwise we will say goodbye to each other, telling ourselves that Assisi was a beautiful experience.

To say these things at the beginning enlarges the horizon of each of us here present, that we may participate better in the proposals that we will make.

Friday, March 24

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## LESSON

Fr. Paolo Prosperi

### 1. On the journey toward freedom

Every year during Lent the Church invites us to fix our gaze on the great epic of the Exodus of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the promised Land, the land of freedom, which is not America—the subject of the song that I had you listen to, not by chance<sup>1</sup>—but the land of Canaan, “flowing with milk and honey.” We could legitimately wonder why. If we have already been “freed from the yoke of evil,” as sung in a Lenten hymn familiar to many of you, why is there always need for a new exodus? Are we free or not? Each of us can answer for ourselves, partly yes, partly no, for many reasons, one of which is that many *Egypt*s keep us prisoner, not just one. There are many forms of slavery in our life, and new ones are continually emerging with changes in circumstances and in the mentality that dominates our environment, a mindset that, as the School of Community we have been doing underlines insistently, inevitably exerts a seductive power over us whether we realize it or not. Every time and every moment in history has its “invisible Egypt.” The environment is characterized by a certain dominant ideology, a certain mindset that dominates society and becomes a challenge, a temptation, and a trial for Christians, and at the same time, exactly for this reason, also offers an *opportunity* for maturation and enrichment, because temptation, if faced and overcome with the sword of discernment, to use a term dear to Pope Francis, always makes us stronger and more aware, and thus paradoxically enriches us.

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<sup>1</sup> The Bay Ridge Band, *New Creation*, from the CD *Spirituals and songs from the Stoop*, 1999, © Euro Company.

*It is impossible to live in a general cultural context without coming under its influence [...]. In our restless and confused spirit, the falsehood of the modern-day way of thinking is present, in which we ourselves participate, because we are children of this historical reality that is human life and we have to pass through all the hardships, the temptations, the bitter consequences, and keep that hope that is the life of life.<sup>2</sup>*

So then, let us ask ourselves, “Today, what is the Egypt we are all living in, breathing its air, whether we like it or not?” We could say many things. I would like to reflect with you above all on a particular feature of this new “Egypt,” which I will describe drawing inspiration from a little book by Byung Chul Han, an interesting Germanized Korean philosopher whom a friend recently told me about. The title of his book is *The Burnout Society*, and I encourage you to read it, especially the fans of [the Italian rock star] Vasco Rossi, since Han (*relata refero!*) is one of the thinkers who influence his music. So then, let’s begin!

## **2. A new (or is it ancient?) slavery: the achievement society**

One of the most heart-wrenching scenes in the book of Exodus is right at the beginning, where the sacred author with two brief lines describes the suffering of the children of Israel in Egypt, forced to work like beasts of burden under the whips of the slave-drivers to build Pharaoh’s cities. I remember that when I was little, every time I saw Cecil B. De Mille’s *The Ten Commandments*, the part that moved me was the opening when you saw an immense crowd of men, including old men and children, working like beasts in the pyramid construction sites. I was a child, but who knows why, seeing these human beings whipped like mules moved me to tears, as if my heart sensed that those scenes actually held something that concerned me personally, though I did not know what it was.

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<sup>2</sup> L. GIUSSANI, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, ed. Julián Carrón, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2022, p. 44.

*Accordingly, they set supervisors over the Israelites to oppress them with forced labor. Thus they had to build for Pharaoh the garrison cities of Pithom and Raamses. [...] So the Egyptians reduced the Israelites to cruel slavery, making life bitter for them with hard labor, at mortar and brick and all kinds of field work—cruelly oppressed in all their labor. (Exodus 1:11–14)*

Now, I think we can agree that this type of slavery is no longer the dominant one in today's society. If Marxism has failed, at least its classic version, it is because the dialectic of slave-master/oppressed-oppressor no longer seems to describe the reality of the neoliberal society we live in today. The average Italian, or, let's generalize, the average person in Western society, for the most part has usually been able to choose what to study (I imagine almost all of you could say this) and often even what job to do (not always, certainly). If we work, we receive awards, we advance in our careers, and above all earn well. The most fortunate have a profession they love, or they can change if they dislike it, or they can find another one that attracts them more. So, has slavery been overcome? Has the time come when "what your hands provide you will enjoy; you will be blessed and prosper" (Psalm 128:2)? According to our philosopher, the answer is no. Material slavery has been replaced by one that is more ambiguous and paradoxical, but no less devastating. What is this slavery? In a short expression, one we will expand later, it is the slavery to *performance*.

Part of the famous change of era we are going through perhaps lies here, in the fact that, as Han expresses it, we have passed from a disciplinary society made up of obligations, duties, and prohibitions imposed by the constituted order (incarnated by family, Church, State, etc.) to an *achievement society* where in theory the only obligations or duties are those of "promoting" or "raising up" oneself, which essentially means making money and gaining in prestige, demonstrating you are someone who "makes a difference." The great

mantra that echoed everywhere when I was in the States was “You are the difference you make in the world. You exist and are someone to the degree to which you make a difference.” It does not matter what kind of difference. The important thing is that you make it.

*Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society. [...] Also, its inhabitants are no longer “obedience-subjects” but “achievement-subjects.” They are entrepreneurs of themselves.<sup>3</sup>*

So, you understand why I spoke of a *paradoxical* slavery. Something paradoxical seems contradictory but instead proves to correspond to reality. In our case, when we think of slaves, we think of people subject to others to the point that the owners can make them do whatever they want, that is, they can *exploit* them. As our Korean philosopher asserts, in the achievement society something different and “paradoxical” happens, because the entrepreneur *is* the worker: the exploiter and the exploited have become the same person. You exploit yourself in the sense that you no longer run yourself ragged to please someone else, but to obey your own need to feel that you perform, that you’re good, that you’re “great” (to put it in a nutshell), and this slavery is even more oppressive than the external one of the servant or the proletarian:

*“You can” exercise even greater constraint than “You should.” Auto-compulsion proves more fatal than allo-compulsion, because there is no way to resist oneself. The neoliberal regime conceals its compulsive structure behind the seeming freedom of the single individual, who no longer understands him-or herself as a subjugated subject (subject to) but as a project in the*

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<sup>3</sup> BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Burnout Society*, transl. Eric Butler, Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2015, p. 8.

***process of realizing itself.*** [You are what you make of yourself, the famous ideal of the self-made man]. *That is its ruse: now, whoever fails is at fault and personally bears the guilt. No one else can be made responsible for failure.*<sup>4</sup> Chul Han lays it on thicker: *Now we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. Freedom is exactly the opposite of compulsion: being free means being free of compulsion. Now, this freedom, which should be the opposite of compulsion, actually produces compulsion. The maladies such as depression or burnout are expressions of a deep crisis of freedom [exactly the freedom that seems to be the highest value of our society, according to Han, the freedom consecrated in the Statue of Liberty, the symbol of America, is actually one of the values most in crisis today], are the pathological manifestation of the fact that today freedom generally flips into compulsion.*<sup>5</sup>

In commenting on these lucid lines, I'd like to make two points. First, the achievement-subjects may not appear to be the slaves of anyone,<sup>6</sup> but slaves they are, because their relationship with their own work and in general with their own actions is entirely analogous to that

<sup>4</sup> BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Agony of Eros*, transl. Eric Butler, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Our translation. Cf. BYUNG CHUL HAN, *La società della stanchezza*, cit., pp. 109–110. This chapter is lacking in the English edition.

<sup>6</sup> “However, the absence of external domination does not abolish the structure of compulsion. It makes freedom and compulsion coincide. The achievement-subject gives itself over to free-standing compulsion in order to maximize performance. In this way, it exploits itself. Auto-exploitation is more efficient than allo-exploitation because a deceptive feeling of freedom accompanies it. The exploiter is simultaneously the exploited. Exploitation now occurs without domination. This is what makes self-exploitation so efficient. [...] Psychic maladies such as burnout and depression, the exemplary maladies of the twenty-first century, all display auto-aggressive traits. Exogenous violence is replaced by self-generated violence, which is more fatal than its counterpart inasmuch as the victim of such violence considers itself free.” (BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Burnout Society*, cit., pp. 4–48).



of a slave.<sup>7</sup> Slaves live *in anguished fear of making mistakes* because they know that if they do so, if they fail to do everything demanded of them, they will be whipped. The *achievement-subjects* fear not another’s whip, but that of their own “ego” (or better, *super-ego*), which tells them that if they cannot make it, they are nothings. Again, slaves *do not enjoy working* because they usually do humiliating and exhausting tasks. In appearance, the contrary is true for achievement-subjects. They engage in activities in the pursuit of prestige and gratification. Ironically, obsessed as they are by performance anxiety, they cannot enjoy what they do, even if it is a kind of work that in and of itself they would like. “Tangled in an unattainable I-ideal,”<sup>8</sup> they become worn down by work just as much as a slave.<sup>9</sup> This, according to the Korean philosopher,<sup>10</sup> is the origin of depression and burnout.

*The complaint of the depressive individual, “Nothing is possible,” is conceivable only in a society that believes that “nothing is impossible.” The “No-longer-being-able-to-be-able” leads to destructive self-reproach and auto-aggression.*<sup>11</sup>

*The achievement-subject exploits itself until it burns out. In the process, it develops auto-aggression that often enough escalates into the violence of self-destruction. The project turns out to be a projectile that the achievement-subject is aiming at itself.*<sup>12</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The achievement-subject’s attitude to hard work as profession tends to become (or vice-versa, expresses) a totalizing spiritual and psychological posture that encompasses every sphere—moral life, family relationships, sex life, social relations, etc. See in this regard BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Agony of Eros*, transl. Erik Butler, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2017.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, our translation.

<sup>9</sup> In Marxist jargon, the achievement-subjects are *alienated* no less than the eighteenth-century workers, because they, too, tend to identify their own personal value in terms of the products of their activities.

<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that, if I am not wrong, the citizens of South Korea have the highest number of work hours per capita in the world, (or one of the highest).

<sup>11</sup> BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Burnout Society*, cit., p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Burnout Society*, cit., p. 47.

A recent tragic example of the aptness of this diagnosis is right in front of our eyes and in our hearts. How can we not think of that poor nineteen-year-old girl who took her own life in the bathroom of the Modern Languages University in Milan because she felt like a failure? Certainly, it is always mistaken and reductive to explain a tragedy in terms of the social or cultural context. Every human vicissitude is a unique and unrepeatable mystery, and only God's gaze can truly penetrate its depths. However, it is natural to ask how someone can feel like a failure *at the age of nineteen* when she has her whole life in front of her. Permit me to suggest that it is possible if you live in an environment where morning, noon, and night you are bombarded by the one, insistent message that *you are your performance*.

Another observation: Han's mention of the ruse of the neoliberal regime cannot help but lead us to think of the greatest of all the deceivers, the Ancient Serpent (Genesis 3:1ff; Revelation 12:9), the "Pharaoh of Pharaohs." In effect, (neo)liberalism seems to achieve more than any other ideology that preceded it the dream of every self-respecting Pharaoh, that is, to have slaves who do not know they are slaves, and thus are slaves even more so. It is no coincidence that John calls the devil the father of *lies* (Jn 8:44). In fact, the weapon of the great enemy of God and man has always been deceit, mirages, lies. Where is the center of this deceit? We have now reached the third point.

### **3. At the root of our malaise: the *self-made man* and forgetfulness of God as *all and in all***

As Chesterton said, a heresy is a truth gone mad, or in other words, a half-truth, a part of the truth that is absolutized as if it were everything. It is no coincidence that the word *Devil* (from *diaballo* = *divide*) means *divider*. The Devil is the *divider* of many things, man from God, husband from wife, friend from friend, etc. But even before (just read the story of the fall in Genesis 3:1–7 attentively to see it), he is the divider in the sense that he instigates the separation of the *parts* of the total

truth, leading us to blow one out of proportion and *forget* the others. This is idolatry. It is not just adoration of a golden calf.<sup>13</sup> Instead, it is also, or rather, above all the enlargement of a part, a part that shines and attracts your gaze and that ends up arbitrarily being identified with the everything.

Now, in our case, what part of the truth is being blown out of proportion? This is it: it is true that human beings were born to be able to affect reality, to improve it with their works, and it is true that humans cannot attain fulfillment, cannot rise to the “glory” (using a grandiose Biblical word) for which they were made, unless they expend themselves, working to improve reality, making use of all their genius and creativity. Fr. Giussani loved to quote Psalm 8 to explain this idea:

*When I see Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,  
the moon and the stars that You set in place,  
what is man, that You are mindful of him,  
and a son of man that You care for him?  
Yet You have made him little less than a god,  
crowned him with glory and honor.  
You have given him rule over the works of Your hands.*

What is man? A speck of dust. We seem like a speck of dust, and yet the Psalmist says this speck of dust is *crowned with glory*. Why? “You have given him rule over the works of Your hands.” This speck of dust is called to collaborate with the Creator of heaven and earth to *bring the reality of the world to its destiny*. To use the splendid expression of the great Tolkien, this speck of dust is called to be a *sub-creator*. Tolkien believed in this vocation with such serious-

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<sup>13</sup> Note that according to the Bible, a distinctive feature of the idol is that it is made by the hands of those who adore it. “*At Horeb they fashioned a calf, worshiped a metal statue. They exchanged their glory for the image of a grass-eating bull*” (Psalm 106:19–20). In effect, if you think about it, this is true not only about the idol as a statue or image, but also about every other object of idolatry, for example, the woman you love, a singer, a political leader, etc. In all these examples, it is true that they are metaphorical or mental “fabrications.” But I am the one who identifies that certain person or certain thing with my god: I am the maker of the transformation of that non-divine person or thing into a divinity.

ness that, using the material provided him by the “primary world,” he was driven to create an entire “secondary world” whose beauty fascinated and continues to fascinate millions of readers. Is there any greater vocation than this? The story of the creation of Adam in Genesis 2 says this symbolically, when it tells us that the Lord *Himself* first planted the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:8) and then invited human beings “to cultivate and care for it” (Genesis 2:15). So, the first worker, the first gardener, the first “farmer” was not Adam, but the Lord. And the flip side of this means that cultivating and working the land is not the work of slaves, as thought by the Babylonians, the most culturally powerful enemies of Israel.<sup>14</sup> Instead, it is the most honorable of tasks, because it means imitating the Lord of Lords, the creator of heaven and earth.

But here’s the rub: continuing with Tolkien’s term, saying *sub-creator* means that human beings are called to work terrain that they did not originally create: it was placed in their hands by an Other. I can do nothing “with nothing” and “from nothing.” My work is always applied to something that I did not make, beginning with that great something that is my own “I,” as Fr. Giussani always reminded us. “I do not make myself,” even if it is certainly true that it is up to me to try to improve myself every day, to be a better person. So why is it important to keep this in mind? Why is it important to *make memory* of this, to use the very beautiful Giussanian formula? (I say very beautiful because the expression says that not forgetting is already an action, a doing, in fact, the most important work there is. What does this fellow sitting here on my right do? Management consultant? No, first of all, *Memor Domini!*) This is important for several reasons, but here I will stress one: because making memory of the fact that what I have in my hands has been

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<sup>14</sup> In the Babylonian myths as well, men were put on the earth to work the land, but they are there as slaves who do the “dirty work” that the gods will not stoop to doing. Instead, in the Bible everything is overturned. God plants the garden and gives it to man to enjoy. The paradox is that part of this “enjoyment” lies in being called to collaborate with the Creator to make the world an ever more beautiful garden. To explore this idea further, allow me to refer you to P. PROSPERI, *Sulla caduta degli angeli. Indagine sulle origini del male* [On the fall of the angels. Inquiries into the origins of evil], Rome: Marcianum Press, 2023, pp. 166–168.

entrusted to me by an Other does not take away any "glory," that is, "weight, importance"<sup>15</sup> from me and my action. Rather, it is what enables me to perceive how great this "glory" is. In fact, what gives infinite weight to my action cannot be *what or how much I do* because what I do is always finite. Even if I am Novak Djokovic and I win 22 grand slams, it is still a finite number (after all, another fellow can come and win 27 and I'll fall into depression!). What I do is always finite. But I am thirsty for eternal glory! And here we are at the well-known activism that never achieves gratification. "The exhausted, depressive achievement-subject grinds itself down, so to speak [...] It wears itself out *in a rat race* it runs against itself."<sup>16</sup> Now, is there anything that can redeem my actions from finiteness? Is there anything that can give my action a truly infinite value? Yes, there is. Those of you among us who have had and who have experience of it know this. We are introduced into the *gusto* of the infinite in action, any action, even the smallest and most humble, by living it as a loving answer to the voice of the Infinite who calls me to that action. To put it simply, this means living the *memory of God*.

Now, if I see this well, the exact opposite of the *memory of God* is at the root of what we have called *the achievement-subject*: to use the powerful expression of the School of Community we have been doing, it is "*the forgetfulness of God all in all*." The keyword here is *forgetfulness* because it describes the dynamic of a negation that is not theoretical, but practical and existential. In the Bible (we said it over and over again in the responsorial psalm at Mass yesterday) forgetfulness is the first among all the sins, the father of all sins. In fact, what does it mean to forget? It does not mean forgetting that something is true, but *not thinking about it, not looking at it*, or in other words, *living as if it did not exist*. So, I can go to Mass every Sunday, or even every day, but live *as if God did not exist*, as if all my substance, my glory, my *pondus*, what gives me a "name,"

<sup>15</sup> In Hebrew, glory is *kabod*, which means "weight" (like when you say: that person has heft, that is, that person's presence and word has "weight").

<sup>16</sup> BYUNG CHUL HAN, *The Burnout Society*, cit., p. 42; my italics.

lies *only* in what I have done, do and will do, and not *also* in what I am *beyond* my actions. What am I, beyond my actions? I am the “result” of a continuous, elective Act of love, *continuous* because I did not receive my being 48 years ago and now I go ahead on my own until the battery runs out. No, I am *continually* “drawn out of nothingness” by an Other who makes me, who gives me being. Well, in existential terms, forgetting the *God all in all* means living as if I make myself (here we have the *self-made man*), and not “You-who-make-me.” Ironically, forgetfulness and the loss of the *gusto in doing* are the two partners in this sad dance.

We know the consequences of this loss of *gusto*: insecurity, performance anxiety, competition, envy, jealousy (we detest it but it’s there), the inability to rejoice in the success of others (that is, genuine charity for your neighbor), a narcissism that eats away like a woodworm at our relationship with work and worse still, with others) because if my “substance” or “glory” lies *in my performance*, then I will continually need someone who applauds and acknowledges my performance, who tells me “You’re great!” (Doesn’t this happen all too often among us, too?). The others become mirrors you continually need to look into to find confirmation of your worth, like in the myth of Narcissus. Relationships rot from the inside out; we use each other without wanting to, in fact, even against our will. You want to be gratuitous, pure, sincerely and gratuitously passionate about the good of others, and instead you find this cursed need for affirmation from others, which insinuates itself subtly into all your relationships, making them cursedly political, muddying them and making them ambiguous. “Miserable one that I am!” cried Saint Paul. “Who will deliver me from this mortal body! Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Romans 7:24-25).

#### **4. And we saw His glory: Christ the way, the truth and the life**

Anybody, even those who have not had an encounter like ours, can sense, maybe confusedly, but at least sense that this is not the life for which the heart was made. The heart wants something else.

“Everyone confusedly conceives of a good in which the mind may be at rest, and desires it; wherefore everyone strives to attain it.”<sup>17</sup> In which the mind may be at rest, and desires it, that is, find rest, peace, and true freedom. Everyone confusedly knows they are made for a “glory” that is different from the type of glory that the achievement society drives us to pursue in work and relationships, even in the Movement (!), through striving for roles and honors. What glory? Question of questions: what is the glory that the heart truly desires? The answer is simple, even if you need to “have received a great grace,” as Péguy said, for it not to be abstract: the glory that John and Andrew, Simon Peter and all the others saw shine in the flesh of that man Jesus:

*And we saw His glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son,  
full of grace and truth (John 1:14).*

In the man Jesus of Nazareth, *true life, true glory*, that life and that glory that our heart has always desired, finally appeared in history. But our heart by itself could never reach that glory or even have imagined it, if it had not appeared in front of us, as it appeared in front of the eyes of John, Simon Peter, and his brother Andrew. So, let’s try to say something about this glory, stuttering, certainly, but we have to try, because in the end there are only two things worth talking about, as Fr. Giussani once said: the purpose of life and the road to get to there: the destination and the road.<sup>18</sup> And as we are seeing in the new School of Community, the man Jesus Christ is both these things: “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). “I am the life” means “I am the destination, the purpose, because the purpose for which you were made is to enter more deeply into My life, that is, into My mindset, *My point of view* on your wife, your work, everything. This is the purpose, otherwise familiarity with Christ remains a lovely castle in the sky; it remains

<sup>17</sup> DANTE ALIGHIERI, *Purgatory*, XVII, vv. 127–128.

<sup>18</sup> “Speaking in ideal terms about life means identifying the purpose of life and the road for getting there, which none of us could think of or imagine, at all, but is given” (L. GIUSSANI, *L’io, il potere, le opera* [The “I,” Power, Works], Genoa: Marietti 1820, 2000, p. 61).



who knows what.”<sup>19</sup> But Christ also says “I am the way.” I am the way because by looking at Me, following Me, *remaining* with Me, you can enter into My life. So it was for the first followers: “and *they stayed with Him* that day” (John 1:39). And so it is for us. We must help each other look this Christ full in the face. We are together for this reason.

So therefore, let us try, for the nth time, to immerse ourselves in the story of John and Andrew, the first ones who encountered Him, the way Fr. Giussani taught us to do. How many times Fr. Giussani invited us to imagine what happened in that famous early afternoon that John and Andrew spent with Him, when they went to see “*where He was staying*” (John 1:39). Well, allow me to dare to offer a variation on Fr. Giussani’s story. Let’s imagine that they not only “watched Him speak,” but that Jesus showed them His workshop where He had spent many hours, days, at times even nights in His early youth carving chairs, tables, hoes and whatnot in Joseph’s company. Well, in effect it is improbably that He did so that afternoon (also because it is equally improbable that the house where He brought them that afternoon was in Nazareth, considering the distance). But let’s imagine that He did it other times, later on, when John and Andrew were His disciples, and He had begun working miracles and was the man of the moment, sought out and revered by the crowds. Let’s imagine the wonder and even unease of John, the most reflective and the deepest of the disciples, watching the Master’s extreme care and meticulous patience all day long carving a chair, *one chair* (!) that He had decided to do for so-and-so, when outside there was a crowd of thousands of people waiting to see one of His miracles. “But everyone is looking for You!” Instead, He sat there, carving, carving, carving. Imagine John looking around, observing the tools one by one, and him seeing in a rapid flashback

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<sup>19</sup> “Faith opens us up to a different mentality from that into which we plunge every morning as we get up and leave home, but even at home, too. A new mentality (mentality is the point of view from which man starts off for all his activity), (...) The first effect on the life of a man who has this (...) is a new mentality, a new awareness that cannot be reduced to any law of the state or social custom; a new awareness as the source and echo of a working relationship with reality, in all the details implicit in existence.” (L. GIUSSANI, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, pp. 58–59).

all the years Jesus had spent there in anonymity, planing tables, He who with a snap of the fingers could feed the crowd, He who with the fascination of His voice could enchant the whole world. Why? John did not understand. At the moment he did not understand. He understood many years later, with the help of the Spirit (see John 16:12-15), because without the help of the Spirit (this may seem like a parenthesis, but it is not at all) you understand nothing of Christ, and in fact Fr. Giussani always told us that there is no prayer more important for us than *Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam*. Nothing is more important than begging the Spirit because without His help we always remain in the antechamber and never enter the heart of the question, always at the beginning and always wanting the same thing over again like children who always want the same snack even when they have the most delicious and nutritious steak in front of them. Well, what did John understand *later*? He understood that the glory that Jesus sought was not the glory sought by the Pharisees and Scribes. It was a different glory.

What glory was this? "And we saw *His glory, the glory as of the Father's only Son*." It was the glory of the Son, the glory of one for whom all the honor, all the merit, all the satisfaction lay in responding to His Father, in giving Himself moment by moment to the task the Father gave Him, whether that be feeding 5,000 people or planing a table for Mr. X. In this sense, how beautiful is the beginning of the Our Father! "*When you pray, say Our Father who art in heaven*". *Who art in heaven*. *Why in heaven*? Because the sky, heaven, is at the same time infinite vastness and light, the source of light that illuminates things. I don't know if you've ever been in Palestine in the desert and seen how people's profiles appear against the background of the immensity of the sky. Well, Our Father who art *in heaven* means "Father, you who are the background that envelopes each thing in light and infinity, Mary Magdalen's face and the lepers, the hungry crowd and the wood of the table for Mr. X."

For Him, everything held greatness, everything, even the most hidden, humble and even humiliating task, it should be said. Why?

Because “the more hidden there is, the more love there is,”<sup>20</sup> as Fr. Giussani wrote in one of his most powerful letters to Angelo Majo when he was young. Precisely that task enabled Jesus to unleash “*the glory as of the Father’s only Son,*” to show *to what point* He was Son, *to what point* He loved the Father, and at the same time to show *to what point* charity, the passion for the good of every single person, erupted in Him from the peace of this Sonship. “Come on, Lord, work a good miracle in front of everyone, so the world will believe!” (cf. John 7:4!). But no, today no miracles. Today, carving. Why carving today? So that also Mr. X will know that he is worth as much as the 5,000, so that Mr. X will know that he is worth the day’s work of the King.

To tell the truth, the way Jesus did miracles was often strange, like that time in Cana in Galilee when He changed the water into wine, His first “great” sign, as John records it, the first time that He *revealed “His glory”* (John 2:11). Pity that very few at the meal knew what He had done, if it is true that the headwaiter praised the groom, not Jesus, for having brought such a fine wine!<sup>21</sup> A strange way to “reveal His own glory,” so strange that it is natural to ask, “What kind of glory is this?” His “*glory (...) full of grace and truth,*” a glory different from the one people seek, is true. And yet, in the final analysis, it is the only glory truly “full of grace and truth,” the only glory that truly corresponds to the heart, to our heart. What is the glory for which the human being is made? We know

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<sup>20</sup> “Love is enclosed only in the action we are doing, any action, and the more silent and limited compared to the impetuous and expansive desire of the heart, the more it is ‘love’” (L. GIUSSANI, *Lettere di fede e di amicizia ad Angelo Majo* [Letters of faith and friendship to Angelo Majo], Cinisello Balsamo–Milan: San Paolo, 2007, p. 38) Our translation. In an earlier letter as well, the young Giussani had stressed the same idea, applying it to his studies: “So now I return to my books, and I think that from March to today [...] I’ve been bent over my books, with an intensity of study perfectly similar to when I was preparing for the final exam of classics high school, such a demanding effort. Am I tired? This limitation, this solitude, this silent and laborious renunciation of the living expansion of the impetuosity of affection that surges through my heart is truly a great sacrifice. I would do it for the rest of my life, exactly because it is pure sacrifice, very acute sacrifice, silent and unacknowledged sacrifice” (*ibid.*, pp. 32–33). Our translation.

<sup>21</sup> “And when the headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine, without knowing where it came from (although the servers who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, an inferior one; but you have kept the good wine until now.’” (John 2:9–10).

that according to the Bible, the answer is to become similar to God, to be in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). But what does it mean to be in the image of God? This is the true question. If Christ had not come, we would not have the vaguest idea of what this means, because "No one has ever seen God," (John 1:18) as John wrote at the end of the prologue of his gospel. No one except Him, the man Jesus: "The only Son, God, who is at the Father's side," (John 1:18) has seen God, knows Him, and for this reason moves like a man in the way He moves, to imitate the God that He has seen, to reflect in His every gesture and move the glory of that God whom only He has seen. What is this God like? What does only He know of God, while the Pharisees, who know the Scriptures by heart, do not know it? That God is love, *Deus caritas est*, as Saint John wrote.<sup>22</sup> God is a *pure gift of self*,<sup>23</sup> as Fr. Giussani translated it. What Jesus knew and the Pharisees and scribes did not is that the glory of the true God is the glory of a God whose joy, whose life consists in nothing other than giving His own being, His own substance to an Other, to the Son. God is love, total gift of self. What does the Father delight in? The joy of the Father is entirely in giving His Son *all that is His*. This is what Jesus knows and that His adversaries do not.

At this point, one could object, "So what changes if I know or don't know 'what God is like'?" Everything changes! Because, as we have said, everyone aspires to "be like God," no two ways about it, not only the scribes and the Pharisees, but us. Consciously or not, it is what everyone desires. Is it wrong? No, it's not wrong. God made us this way. "Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness," as it says in Genesis (1:26). So the problem is a different one. Without Christ, without the grace of the encounter with Him,

<sup>22</sup> "How do you explain God's nature? How was it explained by Him, beyond all the images that human philosophies were able to build? As a source of being that gives itself totally. Thus the Son was generated, and in this relationship, a loving and moved energy just like theirs springs forth, which is the Holy Spirit. And, in fact, Saint John says *Deus caritas est*, God is love." (L. GIUSSANI, *Is it Possible to Live This Way?: An Unusual Approach to Christian Experience, Volume 3: Charity*, transl. John Zucchi, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009, p. 26.)

<sup>23</sup> Cf. L. GIUSSANI, *Is it Possible to Live This Way: An Unusual Approach to Christian Experience, Volume 3: Charity*, p. 8.

it is impossible to understand what it means “to be like God.” As we have said, this happens because we do not know God! Instead, Jesus knows Him, as He continually repeats in the dialogues with the Pharisees we are reading at Mass these days: “You do not know Him, but I know Him. And if I should say that I do not know Him, I would be like you a liar. But I do know Him and I keep His word” (John 8:55). “I know Him, believe me, I know Him! This is why I move as I move, go where I go, do what I do.” It is inasmuch as He knows the Father that Jesus seeks the glory that He seeks. What glory? The glory He finds in serving, in giving Himself totally so that John may live, Simon may live, Andrew may live, so the Father may find His glory in generating Him, in loving Him: “As the Father loves Me, so I also love you” (John 15:9).

For me, there is no scene in all the gospels that expresses this more heart-meltingly and powerfully (not in words so much as in actions) than the washing of the disciples’ feet, as recounted in chapter 13 of John’s gospel. So let us end by putting ourselves in this scene, which is truly the supreme icon of the new conception of work, the new *gusto* of action that Christ brought into the world and that by osmosis is being communicated to us bit by bit, if we have the simplicity to stay with Him, to remain attached to Him, present in our companionship:

*So, during supper, fully aware that **the Father had put everything into His power** and that He had come from God and was returning to God, He rose from supper and took off His outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and dry them with the towel around His waist (John 13:2-5).*

Just a couple of brief comments on these few, but magnificent lines. First, “*During supper.*” In John, it is always through the apparently marginal details that the greater things shine forth. Here, it was not *before* supper or *after* supper that Jesus got up to wash the feet of His disciples, but *during* supper, which seems absurd, senseless.

Why in the world? Why would You get up to wash their feet in the middle of the meal? "Yes, I want to do it in the middle of the meal." Why? But it is obvious! To tell them that for him, for the man Jesus, washing their feet is a pleasure, an action He enjoys doing, the way He enjoys drinking a cup of good wine.

Second point: *Fully aware that the Father had put everything into His power* (knowing that the moment had come to take the throne that awaited Him, knowing He was destined to reign over the whole world) *and that He had come from God and was returning to God, etc. (...)*. "*Fully aware that*": here we have one of the rare moments when John seemingly allowed himself for an instant to peek into the human heart of Christ, one whose intimate depths he, the beloved disciple, had access to more than any other. Remember that John not only was the closest to Jesus during the supper, but wrote his Gospel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, so he was not telling tall tales. What does he say? That the Lord, at a certain point during the supper, was so dominated by the thought that His time had come, the hour when He had to bring to completion the work the Father had entrusted to Him, before returning to Him, that He could no longer stay there seated, reclining. He had to tell His disciples what He was about to do. Or, rather, more than having to speak, He had to do a gesture, a gesture that would symbolize what He was about to do, which is His greatest work, the work that will give Him power over the whole universe: His death on the cross (!). What is this gesture? "He rose from supper." Let's imagine this Jesus who stands up tall, totally aware of His royal mission. He rises from the table and... does what? He "took off His outer garments. He took a towel and tied it around His waist. Then He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet." That's terrible! How can we reconcile the image of Jesus who rises with the air of a sovereign about to do who knows what, *and* the gesture of a slave that he then does? They can be reconciled because for Jesus, this is what it means to have "everything in His power" (John 13:3): to use His hands "worthy of veneration" to wash His disciples' feet. This is the Christian revolution, the revolution that Christ introduces into the way of conceiving not only of work understood as

profession, but of every action. It is all here in this change of perspective that changes an action that to the eyes of the world is humiliating and mortifying, and fills it with glory and greatness and thus a gusto, an enjoyment that is incomparably superior to the greatest professional success.

So now, to crown all we have done today, allow me to read you a letter I received yesterday from a friend in Boston, Luca, who was gravely sick with leukemia while his wife was pregnant with their third child. This is how Luca describes what he experienced and learned in the mysterious time of illness: “I want to tell you about an experience I’ve had in the last two years, since, in October 2020 I was diagnosed with acute leukemia and was hospitalized for chemotherapy and a bone marrow transplant, all in the arc of a couple of months when my wife was in her eighth month of pregnancy with our third son Carlo, named after the Blessed Carlo Acutis, who contributed to my healing [and who, by the way, is buried here in Assisi]. Carlo was born when I was hospitalized in absolute isolation, three days after the transplant. For many months I was so weak that I couldn’t do anything, like play with Legos with Giovanni, our eldest who is now nine years old. I’ve often asked myself what value I had in that condition, in a world where if you can do nothing, you are nothing. Three or four months after the transplant, I was hardly able to set foot in our yard and walk a bit. Giovanni came to me and said, ‘Come on Dad, let’s play soccer.’ This made me understand again who I am: for him, I was simply his father. He had no idea how weak and incapable I was. I understood that you discover your value in the way those who love you look at you, which is a sign of Christ who loves me. Only in relation with a gratuitous love do I understand my true value.”



Friday, March 24

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## PASSAGES FROM THE FIRST ASSEMBLY

*Angelo. I am reacting to the lesson from this morning. I agree with the description you made about the risk connected to work: I recognized myself in that description, especially when you said that our gusto comes from living the action as vocation, as a call from God in that moment. For me this is really true and it is the only position that makes me free and makes it possible to risk, because the temptation that we have—above all at work—is not to get involved and not to risk. But, in experience, this awareness is sometimes there, sometimes not. Life has its highs and lows: there are moments of awareness and moments of fog. You said that it is crucial to practice memory, and so I wanted to understand well—from what you all are living, what is the dynamic of memory: how does it happen?*

*And I ask again: how can the life of the Fraternity, of the small group of Fraternity, help to practice memory? From my point of view, it seems like I am not understanding, I am not living fully, the potential that Giussani saw in the Fraternity, what he had in mind.*

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** There could be thousands of points, but I'll begin by just touching on one that is close to my heart, that has to do both with the responsibility for the charism and with memory. It is the question that I ask myself and I want to ask you all: do you really want to live memory? Do we really want to live the responsibility for the charism? Because this is a condition without which we cannot go anywhere.

In the book *Is It (Really?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, at a certain point a *Memor Domini* asks Father Giussani how it is possible to live memory in every instant, in every moment. Because you have to work, you have to concentrate on teeth if you are a dentist, you have to concentrate on the accounts or on the organization... Father Giussani answers him with what I think is one of the most

beautiful things I have ever heard: “So how do I do it?’ How does the God who sent Jesus to reveal to us the essence of his true nature respond? He says: ‘It is *impossible* for you to think about me in every action, and it is *not necessary either*.’” That is, how is it possible to live memory in every moment? How is it possible to avoid the ups and downs of awareness, to think of Him while we are doing all the things we have to do? It is impossible; it is impossible, but it is not necessary either: to live memory does not mean to distract ourselves from what we have to do in the moment. Then he adds: “I cannot think about him in every action.’ Memory does not mean that in every action we think of Him; it is not necessary to live like that. It is necessary for you to *love* this.” That is, that we desire this, that we begin to ask for this, so that one gets up in the morning and says: “Lord, I will forget You fifteen times, a thousand times during the day, but I want to remember You always, I want my whole life to be this memory.”

And this is also true—this is just now coming into my mind—for responsibility: responsibility is, first of all, the desire to be able to say “yes” to the One who calls us. But we cannot jump over this question: does this kind of memory interest you? Does this kind of memory interest me? Does this responsibility interest you? Does this “yes” interest you? Does this “yes” interest me? Otherwise—I am connecting it now to Father Paolo’s lesson from this morning—even memory is a type of performance, will generate in us the stress of performance... since we never remember Him enough, we have to shove Him into events where He is not. No, memory is to say to the Lord: “You interest me.” And He is interested in this and that’s it, not the fact that we remember Him five hundred thousand times a day.

**Father Paolo Prosperi.** What you said has, it seems to me, an interesting corollary, that has to do with what I mentioned in the lesson this morning, when I underlined that the Giussanian expression “make memory” reminds us that memory is an action, and as such requires energy, the unleashing of a force. This makes me think of salmon, who in order to give birth go back up the current,

swim against the current. And when you see it you are amazed, to see them going up the current amazes you, that is, it makes you say: "Wow! Beautiful! What strength!"

Here, maybe we need to switch perspectives. It is true, falling away is inevitable, it is a fact: in fact, I forget. The wisdom of the Church tells us: it is the inevitable (inevitable!) consequence of original sin. If Adam and Eve had not eaten the apple, we would maybe be able to live memory at every instant. But they did eat, and therefore it is no longer possible. Not even for the greatest saint. The real question, then, is to ask ourselves why God allowed this to happen. God cannot permit evil, if not in view of a possible greater good. God cannot permit a fault, if this fault could not transform (certainly, always respecting our freedom, nothing is automatic) into a *felix culpa*, that is, into an occasion for revealing something, something beautiful, a glory even more spectacular than that which would have been without that evil, the fall that happened.

So, how do we apply this idea to the problem of the inevitable forgetfulness (that in itself is an evil, not a good)? It applies in the sense that the Lord makes out of this evil, out of the inevitability of this forgetfulness, the occasion for setting loose in us, by His grace, by the action of His grace, something so incredible that He himself rejoices to look at it, that He himself—as Péguy would say—wonders at it: what is this something? The fact that you—that even though you forget, that even though you spend your days immersed in an environment that is entirely made of forgetfulness—one, two, three times you remember Him, you swim upstream and like the salmon you remember, you remember Him! And isn't this continual redemption, this movement of the salmon, even more great and beautiful than the swimming of the other fish, who do nothing else but swim with the current? This does not make the fact of the forgetfulness a good in itself. Just like it doesn't make original sin a good (we are not Hegelians after all!). Rather, we must say: it makes this evil the occasion for a good, for a beauty, for a glory, that without this evil would not exist (just like there would not be the love of the cross without sin). Am I explaining myself? It is clear that it is grace, it is the action of Christ's grace that makes this beauty,

this leaping of the salmon, possible. It is not our strength. And still grace does this in us, it is a gift that makes us, and never without the collaboration of our freedom, of my freedom and your freedom, which is also our glory! Isn't it beautiful to be salmon, to leap like salmon? Isn't it beautiful to have this chance? And so we understand why God loves our freedom so much, loves to risk everything on our freedom, as Péguy says. Even more: because he loves our freedom to the point of letting it be found, in fact, dragged along by currents that inevitably distance it from its natural goal. It is the price that He pays, so to say, in order to make salmon, that is, to obtain from us the beauty, the greatness, the generosity of an act of memory that rows against a world, an environment, a day in which everything conspires to make you forget Him... It is true, the price of the game is that I can forget Him the whole damn day. But, if we think about it, is it not greater love like this, a greater love on His part, that He is open to being forgotten, that He is open to this sacrifice, to letting me love Him, letting me seek Him, to say it again with Péguy, "not only freely, but even gratuitously"? Is it not a greater love toward me, is it not a greater respect, this great generosity?

In the very moment you assume this "reverse perspective"—try to believe!—all your scruples disappear (the kind of performance about which Camu was speaking) and you begin to discover yourself grateful, grateful for having this risky playing field into which Christ throws you again every day, like a roulette ball, betting once again on that "yes, maybe one, two, three times it will go badly, but the fourth, the fourth time he will remember me!" It is the risk that the Mystery takes, that Christ takes. And it is beautiful like this. Life is beautiful like this, is more beautiful like this than in another way, than if the Lord had done things another way—in redeeming life (given that in Christ life is redeemed) he would have given it another rhythm, another structure. He could have done it in such a way that Baptism eliminated the necessity of this daily fight between memory and forgetfulness, if he wanted he could have done it: away with original sin, away with the tendency to forget! And instead he didn't do things this way (original sin is washed away,

the Church says, but the consequences of sin remain, that is, for example, the tendency to forget). He wanted to risk a little more on us. And it is beautiful like this: "The risk is beautiful," said Pindar.

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** I will take another shot at memory. In the School of Community, Father Giussani says: "Christianity is an event and is therefore present, it is present now, and its characteristic is that it is present as memory" (*To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, p. 48).

I will share a personal episode, from ten years ago. I was transferred for work to Paris and I stopped for the weekend at the family of some friends from the movement and slept at their house: They had left me a little room, where there was a door of frosted glass from which you could see outside and, in the morning, when I woke up, their daughter was there and began to tap on the glass and call me by name. I woke up with this little darling of a girl who called my name, and this thing you're talking about came to my heart: "Mamma mia!" Not having children, this thought came to me: "If I could wake up every day like this, my life would be transformed." It was the first thought I had. And the thought immediately after was about the bell in my house, that rings when it is time to pray Morning Prayer: "But isn't the bell the same thing for me as this little girl? Isn't it the voice of One who is calling me? Isn't it One who is summoning me?" And the answer is "yes," because my whole story leads me to say: "If this Presence were not there, I would not have entered the movement, not have entered the *Memoires Domini*, I would not be here..." From that day—when I hear the sound of the bell in the morning—everything changed: it is an experience of something that before was not a sign, that before said very little to me, but now is experienced because of an event that entered my life, that entered my heart.

Memory functions like this. It is a struggle to be conquered again, but it is also this exchange of a past with a present and of a present with a past, that is, of an encounter that I had and that is given to me again every day in something that happens. The bell happens every day, and the work of memory is exactly this work of looking at reality and of knowing *within* reality a fact that is happening.

**Matteo S.** *I start with a phrase from this morning's lesson: "What am I, apart from my doing? I am the 'result' of a continuous, elective Act of love." Looking at these last twenty years, if I had to ask myself "who am I?" I would respond: "I am a gratuitous act of love, the fruit of a preference." Every choice in my life was a radical disequilibrium that happened due to someone that loved me and loves me. The most important decisions were for the sake of a radical affection, for affective reasons. With respect to what it means for me to "live the responsibility for the charism," I have seen in these two months since I returned to Italy, after so many years living in Uganda: the first thing that came into my mind is that this responsibility is the openness to knowing again what I think I already know about the charism. From this point of view, the judgment of Pope Francis really struck me: "The potential of your charism is in large part still to be discovered." It has made me thankful, because it invites me to a loving path of knowledge, to discover ever more the originality of what I have encountered, that is, to go to the origin. And it fills me with enthusiasm, this being able to follow someone who intuits or sees in "my" charism something that I still do not see. It has left me with a great peace.*

*The second point played out in me as following and obedience, always with respect to this responsibility for the charism. In these two months, I have rediscovered in myself a peace that is both mine and not mine. When Davide Prospero asked me if I was able to return to Italy, I found myself saying to him: "Give me twenty seconds," because a horizon had entered that found me immediately available, open to verifying how to obey the design of God. I went quickly to Rose (Busingye) and told her: "I would like to obey God, I don't want to disobey God." And she said: "Don't worry, you are not disobeying God, you are not going anywhere." [laughter] She left in the car and I was standing there breathless. We didn't talk for three days. After three days she calls me and says: "You know, the certainty and beauty of what we are living here is not made by us but by God. Maybe God desires us to share all this beauty and certainty that we are living with others, with the world." Then she told me: "It is as if they were cutting off two of my arms, but we follow and obey with the legs and with the heart, and therefore we go forward."*

*This obedience and following really struck me. I discovered myself in peace and free, I did not find any reticence, as sometimes happens to me, in front of the sign with which God was reaching me. On the contrary, there is a peace that I discovered as well in leaving in a virginal way the work that we were building.*

*Another aspect of responsibility for the charism is in recognizing our communion as an event that happens only in front of an incarnate truth, as its origin and aim. A banal example: one day, at the school where I am rector, I was going to the elementary students and I saw two teachers who were checking a row of students, head by head. "Here there are only the eggs, here they have already hatched..." They had found lice. I saw that there was a little girl in the room who was crying and another four kids isolated from the others. I asked her: "Why are you crying? Are you afraid of the lice?" And she: "No, I am crying because they are afraid of my lice." And my heart was moved, so I said to her: "Look, do you know what they have in Africa?" And I showed her on my phone the photos of a termite nest that I had shown my students... At a certain point, I look up and see all the other kids that were there looking at the photos with us. She had stopped crying and I left. It is a banal example, but it struck me because we all have lice, but a point of truth that is recognized and spoken, generates unity. The lice don't disappear, but what places itself among us is stronger than the lice. I can look at your lice because I am looked at by an experience that generates communion with you, both in its origin and its aim. So, responsibility is being able to touch more deeply the origin of the event of communion among us.*

*And so I have a question. There is a text on communal judgment, suggested a bit ago by Davide, which says: "We need a judgment because the judgment indicate a path. But then there is something that comes before the judgment and it is the love and the desire for the path." How can we help each other in this love for the path?*

**Davide Proserpi.** At a certain point in our history, we recognized a danger: the fact that the common judgment was substantially determined by a "violence," where someone decides and all the others assume the decision a-critically. Not that it happened systemati-



cally—it certainly did not—but we recognized it as a risk, because it sometimes happened. It was not just theoretical; it happened now and then. And at a certain point this created an ambiguity, because of which we posed the topic to ourselves (it was outside of our intentions, because obviously no one ever wanted to do anything with violence): in what sense is the judgment really common and not imposed by the authority from on high? So a correction on this aspect became necessary. So, if there was a correction, why are we still here talking about these things? What need is there to clarify it further?

I will give an example to introduce the problem: when I went on my honeymoon to Egypt, I did a windsurfing class; the first thing that they teach you is how to get up on the board, the second thing is how to pull up the sail. So, if you don't pay attention and temper the strength with which you pull it up, the risk is that you fall on the other side and you end up in the water together with the sail. The recent risk that we could run is described exactly by this dynamic. It is not simply a question of equilibrium, of knowing how to measure the pressure so that you don't pull too much here or too much there. It is something else: it is necessary to understand what is the origin of this communal judgment on our life, that is, what it is and from where it is born. Why is it not about just finding an equilibrium between two opposites? Because whether the judgment is born from an imposition that arrives to me from on high, or whether instead the defense of my autonomy prevails first of all, what these two extremes have in common is the fact that between me and you in reality there is not a real communion. A real communion implies in fact that you are me and I am you, your experience is my experience, your difficulty is my difficulty, your joy is my joy. It implies that life between us is *shared*. The word *communion* indicates that the very conception of the *I* contains the *we*. And so we begin to understand that the communal judgment does not mean so much that someone tells me what is the judgment of the movement, but rather the communal judgment emerges from our lived communion, from the experience of our lived communion. Even the leader is leader only in so far as he is an expression of lived communion; otherwise he

can be the most brilliant man in history, the one who knows how to convince you by the words that he says and to enlighten you, but in the end you find yourself still alone. Instead, the great thing about our companionship is that one, through the relationship that he has with the other, is no longer alone.

This, in our time, is a decisive aspect even at the cultural level and is *original* with respect to the context in which we live. Today, we are in the same situation in which we found our world, at least in Europe, when Jesus arrived: the world was not Christian, there was the Roman Empire and everything was under the control of Roman power, for good or for bad. At a certain point what happened? The dream of Rome ended and the barbarians arrived and wiped away this great civilization like the returning wave that leaves only a small trace of the castles that we built on the sand... Who reconstructed Europe? The Christian communities rebuilt Europe, because no one else had the perception of the substantial and real difference between facing individually the enormity of the cultural, political, and economic problem that was invading the world and thinking ourselves instead part of a place where the I is generated and from this place to start again with a well-founded hope, in order then together to diffuse the constructive energy originating from such a hope. We must therefore recognize how this communitarian conception of our experience is a factor of novelty and reconstruction for the world in which we live.

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** I am thinking of a fact that happened to me. I had to make a personal decision and for a few months I was meditating on a certain solution. I live in a house of *Memores Domini* where there are eight of us. And, at a certain point, I said to myself: "I am here with these friends, I belong to these relationships." And so, one evening I wanted to speak at dinner about this decision. Which means that you have to be open to putting the hypothesis that you have made up for discussion; I wasn't just informing the others about a decision I had already made. And this becomes clear when, instead, you pretend to ask a question, but in reality you have already decided. The first aspect,

then, is a poverty: I have nothing to defend but everything to gain within a belonging.

The second aspect that I want to underline is that the judgment that emerges in a belonging always surpasses you, always surpasses what you already had in mind and surpasses everyone who participates in the judgment. It is a judgment that is so original, so generative, that it surpasses all the people around the table: something is born that is completely new, something that supports me and that I can obey. This is an exalting experience from a rational point of view and it is the way the Lord leads us, guides us... it is not that, in getting together, we see better the factors because we are more than one, but at a certain point, within the belonging, something happens that surpasses us. If we do not experience this common life, this taste of being able to abandon ourselves to “something other than us” within a communion, we will always have something to protect. There are thousands of ways to pretend that we are putting our judgments in common, and I see that we are often very defensive about things. In short, putting yourself in play is an experience of joy, of a freedom that does not compare to what you have already programmed for yourself.

*Paolo. In these days, we have said that there is a risk of “performance” even in the living of memory. This came to my mind when, in the last School of Community Announcement, Bishop Santoro told us what Rose said to her friend Gloria: “Pray to Our Lady so that today you are not scared to see how Christ will make Himself present to you.” And Gloria that day went to the youth prison thinking about those words: “I understood that my question coincided with the position of my person, along with my gesture.” This for me is a clear example of what memory means. I came here with Father Fabio Baroncini, who without any reductions told us: “Don’t bust my chops, age quod agis. And then: chi ciàpa ciàpa.” You are doing something, you keep open the question about meaning and the desire to understand more, because this will make you—not immediately, like an epiphany—more intelligent about reality, and you will understand what you happen to understand.*

*Here's an example: the other day I received a quick correction from my boss about something that did not go well. I returned home on my scooter quite dazed, thinking that my consistency is in what I manage to do well: "Man, you aren't able to do anything," and this grew into an almost distrustful and diabolic gaze on all the rest: "Maybe you aren't even a good husband, not even a good father..." In short, a total burnout. The next day I woke up with a different awareness: "But I do not consist of what I know how to do. I consist of Your gratuitous touch in my life every day. So, let's see." Two very banal things happened. At dinner I told my wife what had happened, in front of our five kids. From that moment, the oldest asks me every morning and every evening: "Papa, how did it go?" "Papa, good luck today." This is the first brush stroke of what it means that Christ comes to meet you: you are within all of your thoughts, in the turbine of your thoughts, but if you are attentive where He happens, you catch Him in the simplest thing, in your daughter.*

*Then one morning... when my wife left with the three oldest children, I stayed with the two youngest, who are six and three years old, and the "Vietnam War" starts... you clean up everything, put things in order a little, then when you put their jackets on, one of them gets dirty and then you change him, then you have to change the other one, who is a huge fan of Milan, and starts up: "Papa, do you know that Ibrahimovic is taller than you?" "Yes, take off your pajamas." "Yes, papa, but did you know that Florence went to the quarterfinals of the Europa League?" "I didn't know, but take off your pajamas." And in the meantime you think about work and about what is waiting for you that day and about the fact that you have to fix the error that you made... At a certain point, out of nowhere, my son takes off his pajamas and says: "Papa, listen, this life is a trial, huh?" So I stop and ask him: "In what sense?" "Well, we are living for Heaven, dad." Period. And then: "Do you know that Ibrahimovic is the same age as you?"... Right there I thought: "If I didn't have this desire to see where You are and how You are taking initiative with me, this would be the silliness of a child..." And instead no. For me, this is the intelligence of the faith that becomes the intelligence of reality: with this question within it, you see more clearly what is happening, you see it truly.*

*A last comment on the companionship. My wife, when I told her about this, looked at me, hugged me and said: “Remember that we have everything,” that is, we already have everything, we have the fact that Christ is our companion in life and gives us the possibility of living and of being in front of our failures, for the sake of this possibility to recognize a meaning in life. This for me is the value of the companionship: a help to recognize that “we already have everything” and to live everything, even the trials, in light of this. Certainly, this demands an “disturbance” that is sometimes uncomfortable, because it challenges you, but it is always worth it.*

**Giovanni.** *Last night I found myself at dinner with a friend I hadn’t seen in a long time. Among various things, I happened to tell him that years ago I had to have a pacemaker put in. I was feeling faint and, after a number of tests, they put a loop-recorder in me, which registers the activity of my heart. When an important crisis happened, I first lost feeling in my arms, then my legs, and then I dropped to the ground... in fact, I did not faint, I did not lose consciousness, but I could not stay standing. When the cardiologist downloaded the data from the “recorder,” he heard: tu-tum, tu-tum, piiiit... for nine seconds. There I had an incredible, existential experience, of what it means that “I am You who make me.” When I had the crisis, I went down on the ground, and yet with all my strength, all my will, all my stubbornness, I wanted to stay on my feet: in that moment, I realized that I, with all my energy, do not give myself even one beat of my heart. We can forget this, but luckily—as Camu said before—I do not need to remind myself of it all the time: it is not that now I remember every instant that there is Another who makes my heart beat, but it is already in my body. The fact that among us something—or someone—comes along now and then that educates us to remember it is something incredible. And so, memory is totally different than performance; rather, it is the recognition of an objective fact: I am made by Another. Benedict XVI, when our friend Manuela Camagni died, said what memory means, what it means to be a Memor Domini: “We are Memores Domini because He is Memor nostri.” We are not the ones who re-*

*member Him because He already has us in mind instant by instant, moment by moment.*

*I wanted to say one last thing on this question of the companionship of the Fraternity. Thank God, I have a small group of Fraternity where I am helped precisely on this point: we have different stories and we are also scattered in various places, but each time the amazing thing is that we look at each other in light of the vocation that we have, that is, in light of the fact that in this moment, I, with all my problems, and the other with all his, are defined by the fact that we are called: called by Christ to be together. And so it is true to commit ourselves, to seek, even tentatively, to "wash each other's feet," to take care not so much of our problems, but of our attempt to respond: "Yes, Jesus, come among us. Come among us, because it is the only thing that we recognize as the origin that give joy to our life, that make our life livable."*

**Father Paolo Prosperi.** I would like to say something that condenses, so to say, the thought that started to buzz in my head while I was listening to the last interventions, which seem to contain, even in their differences, an element that joins them (an element that maybe has not yet emerged with sufficient force, while it seems to add an important piece to the puzzle). Let me explain: apart from all that we have said, we need also to do justice to the other side of the coin, and that is, to the fact that, independently of how much we remember Him, Christ Himself continually takes the initiative of manifesting His presence in the most unthought-of and unthinkable ways. In other words, both things are true. It is true that living the memory opens my eyes, enables me to recognize the presence of Christ that comes to find me. And it is not less true that Christ, the "making Himself seen" of Christ, is not the mechanical product of my memory, of my attention, even though the training of my attention (as Paolo's intervention said) is fundamental.

We can even say something more, to bring to light this "both/and" of our initiative (memory) and the sovereign initiative of Christ, that always amazes us. On the one hand, I know that there are privileged places where by faith I can be certain of entering into

contact with Christ, if “I go to find Him” with a wide-awake heart. Why do I go to Mass? Because I know that Christ gives Himself to me there in an objective way. On the other hand, as we always repeat to ourselves, it is also true that, from the existential point of view, I also need “events” through which the Mystery comes to meet me with His own sovereign initiative, shaking me out of my sleep. Both of these things are true: that my active memory helps me to recognize Him present, and that He Himself comes to wake me when I have fallen asleep. It is a dialogue, a mutual searching, like between lovers. I want, though, to make a “nota bene” on this—a “nota bene” inspired by the point of the last two interventions, in particular of Giovanni’s. So many times we risk associating this unpredictable breaking through of Christ with only one type of “irruption,” so to say. That is, we risk reducing the irruption of Christ to moments of exceptional light, to moments of exceptional fascination, like the fascination of a great testimony or an impressive fact. Without a doubt, these moments have a decisive importance in sustaining our path. Of course! And yet: if this were the only modality with which Christ met me, it would mean that the other circumstances of life—the moments of darkness or tribulation, for example, or simply of grayness—cannot fulfill the same “function,” that is, cannot also become the modality with which Christ knocks on my door. This would be limiting and disappointing, I think, because in fact my life is totally full of these circumstances, of moments like this. Instead, as the intervention of Giovanni witnesses to us, reality is much more paradoxical, much richer than this. The Lord has much more imagination! Even the tribulation, even the suffering and the stripping away, even a “fainting spell” can become the modality with which Christ breaks into my life with an exceptional power. The beauty of Giovanni’s intervention, for me, is precisely in the fact that it documents this for us: paradoxically, it was in feeling himself “on the threshold of death” that Giovanni was given again, with an unparalleled intensity, the perception of the essential, the pure perception of his being “given to himself,” of his being made by Another. Right in the moment when he felt himself losing his grip on life, that truth in which he already be-



lied—"I am You who make me"—became an experience, became a powerful, concrete feeling like the beating of his heart.

There is a passage in *The Idiot*, where Dostoevsky describes the interior experience of someone condemned to death who is walking toward the scaffold. In reality, this is an autobiographical passage, because Dostoevsky was in effect condemned to the scaffold (the condemnation was revoked when the condemned were already in front of the soldiers pointing their guns at them!). What always struck me about this description is the way Dostoevsky manages to make the paradox of the gift that this experience of total privation, this feeling of the "immanence of death" was for him: while he walks toward the scaffold, the man is attracted by the sight of a flower, a simple flower. How many flowers he must have seen in his life! And yet it is as if only in this moment, for the first time, does he manage to grasp the infinite mystery that is hidden in every flower. In the moment when life is about to be taken from him, it is as if for the first time he is perceiving the infinite gift. This seems to be of the same nature of what Giovanni described for us. But how many of us could describe similar experiences!

As far as I'm concerned, while I listened to Giovanni, I could not help but go back to, other than the passage I cited from Dostoevsky, the most dramatic moment of my life as a priest. It was back in 2011—I had just transferred a few months earlier to America from Russia, a step that was for various reasons particularly traumatic for me. The darkness had surrounded me—a darkness that one would not wish on his worst enemy. And so, the memory of that first "shock of the resurrection," if I can express myself in this way, is for me linked to an experience very similar to what Giovanni described: there were a couple of days when I was so exhausted interiorly that I literally could not get out of bed. So Antonio, the head of my house back then, told me: "Paolo, look, start from the small things. Get up now, try to brush your teeth, and offer this gesture, in all simplicity, to Jesus. Take a shower, and do the same thing." I got up, went to the bathroom, took the toothbrush... and I began to brush my teeth, which is a gesture that I had done every morning for my whole life, all my blessed days! And yet: I swear



to you that the emotion that invaded me in that moment, when I began to move the toothbrush, I have experienced only a few times in my life. Why? I believe it was for the following reason: because precisely the fact that such a normal gesture, that gesture that I had always done without even thinking about it, had become so difficult, so arduous, it was as if all of a sudden the potential greatness of that gesture had woken up in me. What makes every gesture great? The yes to the Mystery that is expressed in it... How closed off we are at times! Why do we put limits on the Mystery, why do we decide ahead of time how the Lord can or cannot speak to us, how He can or cannot change our heart? Certainly, without Antonio who came to me and said, “Brush your teeth, offer it up,” this experience would never have happened to me (the importance of the companionship!). And yet it remains true that if the Lord had not sapped me to the point that getting out of bed and brushing my teeth cost me a Herculean effort, all the good that, starting from that “brushing teeth,” flourished in my life (and it was great!), may-be—even certainly—would not have been.

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** It seems to me that in this assembly there has come out a deepening—perhaps without even willing it—on the topic of memory and on the first point that Paolo now told us, that is, the initiative of the Mystery. There is a beautiful page from Father Giussani, in *Affezione e dimora* (Affection and dwelling), that I think can be a help. At a certain point, in the dialogue with a girl from the *Memores Domini* house, Giussani imagines God saying: “You recognize yourself in the moment when the Lord’s grace touches you, in the time that God sets, when God wants, when God says to the whole world: ‘Do you see? You have her delivered to you, you have penetrated everything in her, you have exalted original sin in her, you have exalted all her weakness... now, when I want, do not rob me of her!’... But God can say this with pride—forgive me Lord—Christ can say this with human pride: ‘I am preferred, do you see how I am preferred?’ if, when he calls you, he finds you available, when in your depth an unexpressed desire for this remains. An unexpressed desire for this that

is nourished, solidified, becomes ever more consistent the more you ask for it expressly: this is the value of prayer."

If the first point that Father Paolo said is missing, it seems to me that even memory will leave us lonely: if memory is the fact that we have been good, that we have remembered something, in the end even this is an exercise that leaves us lonely. The only possibility is for memory to be the irruption of Another within our life, when a true affection begins or continues. When I remember, is it I who am remembering or is it He who is taking an initiative in my life?

Saturday, March 25

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## PASSAGES FROM THE SECOND ASSEMBLY

*Matteo R.* I was really struck by the lesson on work, because I found myself thinking about how I returned to work in this month, after the death of my wife Silvia. I saw that it was different. I am doing my doctorate, so I work at the University, and when I returned I saw a real difference with respect to all the dynamics, even the ugly ones, that there are in the University (mors tua vita mea, to put it simply): I returned wanting to verify my work truly. For example: one often goes to the Department to make oneself seen, because if you do not make yourself seen you do not exist. Without thinking about this, I, after a year and a half that I was working as I could because of my wife's sickness, I went to the library, because there it is easier to work.

Yesterday, listening to the lesson, I asked myself: where have I seen work like this, that is, with a love for what you do like the love of Christ? And I thought of Silvia: she was working in a day center for people with serious disabilities, she was a professional educator, and I saw over the last year and a half, despite the sickness and all that was happening to her, she could have been mistaken for a workaholic. She lived her vocation in its entirety: her relationship with me, her sickness, her work... I accompanied Silvia so many times, as she slowly got worse, whether to work or to development courses, and she had an attention for every particular... She lived like this: "This kid, this activity, this aspect of the profession that I want the State to recognize... is truly One who calls me." I saw a person in love with her work: even when she was feeling badly, she did not call me to come and get her. After the last chemo treatments, she was really sick and she went to do the activities with the kids. And if you would have asked her about it, she would have said: "There is no one to substitute: if I don't go, these kids won't do the activities."

For me, in a year and a half in which I worked as I was able, to see my wife was the occasion to see that vocation is one whole thing: we

cannot break it up into different sectors. And it is not even reducible to the fact that she liked being a teacher, because at a certain point her feeling was not enough to justify what she was doing. And this has changed me: it made me get up at 7, eat breakfast alone and get to work, because I have a conference and I want to do it well. The familiarity with Christ that Silvia lived was the familiarity that she lived with me, with her students, and it is what I can live now that I am returning to "normal" life.

**Emanuela.** I was struck yesterday when we said that even memory, and we could also say even unity, can become a problem of capacity. Instead, the only thing that is necessary is to desire memory, and therefore also unity. When I try to be united I get tired just in the attempt. When instead it is a desire, God has an infinite mercy and loves that desire more than all that I can manage to do.

I am a Memor Domini and a few months ago the request arrived to move to a house where a few old and fragile people live. The evening that I read that email I was not able to sleep, because I asked myself: "But would I be open, Jesus, for your sake, to change the comfort of my life?" I was living with people who are young like me, some who are a bit older, in a situation that is rather easy. I looked at myself sincerely and said "no," because I am doing well in this comfort. And yet, I really wanted to have a heart like this, an open heart, because for the one I love, I would do everything. So I continued to think about that email, because I was not able to pretend that it didn't have to do with me. It had touched me. And it happened that instead of a measure on myself—"I am not capable, I am not open"—a desire made space for itself. And I think that in order not measure ourselves, we need to feel that we are profoundly loved. So I entered into dialogue with someone from the Direttivo and I discovered that the same thing was happening to someone in my house, and we hadn't told each other about it. To be brief, a new house was born, in which there is a difference of age of fifty years, which you can just imagine... There is unity in practically nothing, not even in the food we eat. I don't know how to respond with a definition to the question about unity, but I know that since I came to that place I think that there is hope, for

*me, for the movement, because I see that it is possible to be together with all the difference between us, all our different stories. There is someone I live with who is 78 years old: one day at table I corrected her, she reacted badly, and we left it at that. That evening she says to me: "I thought the whole afternoon about your correction. I do not understand it, but I would like to try to enter into it." It shocked me: the problem is not even that the position of the other convinces me, but that at least there is the desire to be able to enter into it.*

**Davide Prosperi.** I would like to make a few synthetic observations, that derive from the experience of these last months. We need to understand at the same time that we are not speaking about theoretical questions but about concerns that are born from a judgment on present experience. Already to speak about *communal judgment* is a communal judgment: it is, that is, a judgment that first of all matures as a judgment on our experience, because we, when we speak about *common judgment*, or *communal* in the sense that we have said, are not just referring to the position that each one of us takes on certain sensitive topics, such as politics, bioethics, etc. Not because these are not important topics, let us be clear, but first of all because the judgment to which we are called is a judgment on all that makes up our experiences, therefore, also—but clearly not only!—on politics, etc., in so far as everything is an object of the interest we have for reality. In this moment, in this period, it behooves us to understand, to understand again, the nature of a communal judgment. We were saying before that it has to do with a judgment that is born from the experience of a lived communion. So, the point of departure is concrete experience, exemplified in something that we are living and that joins us together. One could say: "This thing does not interest me; it does not have to do with me." Or it might not even come into your mind as something that interests you. But at the moment it is proposed, if it does not enter into the horizon of your interest, it means that you are not attentive to the experience that you are living, not that you are not following the leader. So—someone asked—first question, unity: how are we to pursue unity?

This summer, in the synthesis of the International Assembly of Leaders, something on which all of us should have worked a little, we said: unity is a miracle, a miracle that we cannot help but desire because Jesus wills that from this depends the efficacy of his disciples' testimony ("From this will all know that you are my disciples: if you love one another") and the splendor of His glory in the world ("And the glory that you gave me, I have given to them, so that they may be one as we are one"). And yet, we do not know how to obey this command of Jesus with our own strength. So we have to ask for it, beg for it. Even Jesus found himself praying to the Father for unity, so much is it something impossible to bring about with our own strength ("I do not pray only for these, but also for those who will believe in me through their word: that they may all be one... I in them and you in me, so that they may be perfect in unity and the world may know that you have sent me and that you have loved them as you loved me"). The examples that you have recounted give witness to this: yes, we can make little victories that are fundamental because they give us hope, but this hope should become the hope that Christ would make himself so present among us that he fulfills what our attempts are trying to bring about!

I remember that when my son was three years old, he was trying to turn on the light but could not reach the switch. And he was there, trying to understand how to do it and after a few attempts he took the stool and tried to get up on it. But he couldn't. At that point I took him and put him on the stool. Staying with this image, the imploring gaze of the child that does not stop trying is prayer, while putting him on the stool is the intervention of the Grace with which Christ makes possible what our own strength cannot realize. What is the point, though, that I want to make clear? That you have to want to turn on the light! Because if at a certain point you begin to think that there is nothing to be done or that you are okay in the dark because you can't reach the switch, then our I begins to distance God from life and action. I remain alone with the light switch, and given that I cannot reach it, I begin to convince myself (and to convince others around me) that the problem is not the switch or the light, but something else. And then we tell ourselves—

without much emphasis, but we say it to each other—that there was a moment when we had this temptation, the temptation, that is, to think that the unity between us was not that important, but only something else was important. But we never what this other thing is. And we couldn't say it because it does not exist! In fact, what is there that is more important than our communion? We call ourselves Communion and Liberation. That means that our liberation, that is, the path to our salvation from the confusion and the violence of power, our liberation from every power of this world, passes, is born, and develops from and in our communion. And so, if anything, the problem is to understand what this communion is. We have told each other so many times what is at the foundation of this communion. But what it is, what our experience of it is, is surely useful to understand more deeply.

When we hear certain things, like those about which Matteo was speaking, we have to have the courage to say that this is a testimony about our communion. It is not just a testimony about the exceptionality of one or another of us, however undoubtedly there are great people. But we can be truly great if we recognize where this greatness comes from, as Our Lady did: “The All-powerful has done great things for me and Holy is His name... and for this reason all generations will call me blessed.” It is a new attitude of the person. And so, to think about the newness of the Christian event means to think about the event of something that strikes me, that fascinates me, and that, as a method, generates a friendship. The event of an exceptionality generates the event of a friendship. Otherwise, once the exceptionality ends, once the flame that dazzles me at the beginning grows weaker, everything is ended. For this reason, it is important to understand what is the nature of the communal judgment. We must help each other to understand what is the deep nature of this communion of which the judgment—and truly the examples that we have heard give witness to this—is not just something we say, a statement, a definition, but a presence. The judgment *is* a presence.

**Francesco Cassese (Camu).** Can I ask a question? Giussani was an exceptional man already when he was young, already when he

wrote those letters to Angelo Majo (when I read them, I often stop and say to myself, "My God, what stature!"). And yet he says that something amazing happened to his life. Everything began with those students at Berchet High School: "I belonged to those three kids; I belonged not to them, but to the unity with them. Something had happened." It seems to me that this is the issue that you are raising: that the event is from the beginning this communion, this friendship.

**Davide Proserpi.** Yes, when you are struck by how one lives, or by what he does or says, the event is already there. Not simply in the fascination of the person that you have in front of you, but the event is the unity that springs up between me and you and that amazes me. And it is the expansion of this unity that allows even the content of that initial fascination to deepen.

***Javier.** I would like to give an example of what a communal judgment on the movement itself means, which for me is the most intense point, because it is where I put everything into play. Among us we are not simply different and complementary; at times I find myself in great difficulty because we have different criteria for judging. For example, in taking responsibility for Gioventù Studentesca with other adults, we find ourselves judging the most important things differently.*

*In the last years I have struggled in the movement, because I didn't understand things, I didn't agree...I struggled to follow and for me it was very difficult, I suffered a lot. I had so many reasons, but with all my reasons I was totally bored. I was not doing well and I saw that I was distancing myself, and this was the hardest thing. In the meantime, I entered my current group of Fraternity, where the people live a life of following and enjoying the following of the movement, in friendship with the one who leads. And I decided to enter the Fraternity, because the friendship with them is what helps me to follow Christ more, and yet it was the place where I struggled the most: for them it was totally immediate and I was the only one who had objections. But at a certain point, I realized that following all my reasons and only my reasons, even if they were very reasonable,*



*I was distancing myself. For me it was very clear: if I lose them, I lose Christ; if I distance myself one millimeter from them, I distance myself from Christ. And on this I cannot fool myself. To affirm more the friendship with them is to affirm Christ more: it is the “before” of the communal judgment. This means that I discuss everything with them, because it’s not that “I affirm Christ, so my reasons are not important...” I cannot leave my reason to the side. But, living this friendship with them in Christ, we speak about everything and I am more simple, I am not ideological like usual, I am not political, I don’t label, I don’t have anything to defend, because I want to be with them and I want to look at things “with” them.*

*So the communal judgment is not having a bunch of different opinions in order then to build out of them a more complete vision. No, it is that I, in order to judge, must judge with them, I must walk with them, because with only my reasons I do not go forward. My small group of Fraternity, where there are those with whom I do not agree, is the place where I can discuss things with more peace, more freely, and where I enjoy discussing more, because first of all I want to be with them, and they want to be with me. It becomes a desire and a method for living everything.*

**Eleonora.** *First of all, I wanted to thank you all for this occasion to be together, because I really think it is a gift to see the climate that you set in these two days, because it generates a freedom, a loyalty, a freshness among us, in the desire to want to get to know each other, that I do not take for granted. I am struck by the attention and the love for the particulars in taking care of this gesture, to the point of how the story of Saint Francis of Assisi was presented to us. And of Carlo Acutis, of whom I knew very little. I was amazed in front of the tomb of Carlo to see a 15-year-old kid in jeans, a sweatshirt and Nikes, already beatified. It moved me, it was a blow to the heart. This blow to the heart is already a judgment for me, as Giussani says: the first judgment is the simple reaction that you bring home with you. I am grateful because I will be able to remember this in my life.*

*In these days, your way of looking at us already takes away the problem of performance, because I think that performance is a prob-*

*lem that we also have in how we live the movement. When I live my faith and the charism "going out," when I am with people that do not belong to our story, I realize that they see a strangeness and a kind of life that they want to cling to. My husband and I are a couple who are absolutely mediocre, we are not a "model" family, but it always strikes me how much the climate among us is similar to what I see with you, where there is an amazing freedom and a loyalty on the part of those who come to meet us and want to be with us. In order to be here, I left my four children at home with my husband. The unity that I am living with him is concrete; if I am here it is because he responds to Christ by being with our children, and so we are together. I am not an infallible mother, nor do I want to transmit this to my children: I am a mom who makes mistakes, because being a mom is difficult, I am a wife that makes mistakes because it is difficult, I am a friend who makes mistakes... So it happens that I have to ask forgiveness and admit my errors. This is not something to take for granted. But letting my children see my fragility is not a problem for me.*

*I think about when I had to change the assignment at my job: I am a social worker and I am always tied up with very difficult cases, but when our third child arrived I plodded along in my work and all my colleagues let me hear it, often in an ugly way. And yet I knew that it was true. I had to go to my boss, to recognize and admit that I was messing up, because it meant that I was working poorly. I cared so much that I requested a change of assignments. And I ended up taking care of basic income cases, something I would have never wanted... But within the story of a great love—a life is full of sacrifices, greater and lesser—it is never something less. I think about when Saint Francis, at the point of dying, asked his friend Jacopa for her cookies. Because Jesus was as important as the companionship of Jacopa, as important as having her cookies. For me, in these days, to give up being with my children, to give up the first dance competition of my daughter, is a lack, because I want to be here as much as the dance recital of my daughter.*

**Father Paolo Prospero.** I would like to say something that may come out a little off, but I want to say it all the same because it

seems important. When we speak about “communal judgment,” in the sense that Giussani gives to this expression, we are speaking about our communion as the instrument or the place of forming the judgment on this or that. And that is good. Communion, though, is not only this. It is much more than this. Moreover, if I had to say in two words what the encounter with Father Giussani has introduced that is really new in my life (because I already had faith, in the dogmatic sense of the word, even before meeting Father Giussani)—I would say first of all (not only, but first of all) this: the discovery of communion not just as an instrument or a help to judge, but rather also as the content of a “new” judgment that is at the base of every other “new” judgment. What is the judgment? The judgment about who I am, about what I mean when I say “I.”

In order to explain what I want to say, I cannot help but go back to what happened to me the day of the encounter, as we often like to say to each other, that for me was 11 December 1994, that is, the day of the famous “Recognizing Christ” (that’s right: I was one of those 8,000 students present at those Spiritual Exercises). I remember many things about that afternoon. But one stands out more clearly than all the rest. When I entered that room full of people, I was a lonely kid. A kid who was not lacking anything, let’s be clear. I was someone who muddled through his studies. But I was alone, tremendously alone. I was in CLU and in CLU there were golden kids, that despite my difficult character really cared for me. And yet I was alone. Between me and the others, I wouldn’t even know how to say it, it was as if there was a wall that I did not know how to break down. But that day something happened, something that is still difficult for me to explain and tell here, because in the experience of Grace there is always something ineffable. When Giussani started speaking, I was a small kid with a frozen heart. When he finished, I remember like it was now, I was no longer that kid. Close to me there was Marco Squicciarini—we were in the choir—someone who isn’t very outgoing, exactly how I was at that time (let’s just say, I wasn’t even able to hug my mother). So, I got out of my chair and hugged Marco like a fool. Why? Because in that very moment I felt myself seized by Christ, I quickly felt myself total-

ly united with all those 8,000 people who were there. I remember still, when we were leaving the hall in silence, the thought that was hammering within me: I am no longer the same, I am no longer just "myself." There is also You, O Christ. You are there too: I am now a relationship with You. But if this is true, if it is true that I am flesh of your flesh, O Christ, then it means that all these people here, all these faces around me here that I do not know, that are on this bus, are my brothers and sisters, are flesh of my flesh. Yes, even if maybe I remain blocked like before, even if maybe I continue to be a disaster in relationships like before, now I know, I recognize and I even feel that these here are all my brothers and sisters.

Look: Christianity is this or it is nothing. What does it mean to be baptized? It means to become children of God and brothers and sisters of all the members of the body of Christ. This in an ontological sense. The charism, as Father Giussani taught it to us, is nothing other than the concrete instrument the Lord uses to make this ontological truth a living, vibrant, warm experience, as happened to me on that day. What does Baptism do? It makes us children of God and therefore brothers and sisters of each other. What did the encounter with the charism work in me? It made this double gift of Baptism a living and conscious experience. Certainly, the encounter did not change my personality. Just like my character before was a little moody and proud, so it continued to be. And still, from that moment a path began, the path toward an ever fuller and more beautiful experience of that great and sublime thing that is communion. I say "path toward" in order to underline that, to say it in other words than how I said it before, fraternal communion is not just a means (we have to be clear about this). It is instead part of the end for which we are made, unless we want to think of Paradise as a bunch of little cells where each person is there alone with Jesus. No, Saint John describes Paradise as a city, the heavenly Jerusalem, which means: the full happiness for which we are made implies communion, the enjoyment of communion not only with God but in God with everyone and everything (Christ all in all—God all in all!). And thank God for that. It is right that it is like this. What is more, it cannot be anything but this, it would be contradictory if it

wasn't like this. Why? Because God is not a monad, God is Trinity, He is a communion of persons. So, the fact that I can live a friendship with you, that there is between us a mutuality of affection that is the image and likeness, that is like an incarnate mirror of the life of God, is not something secondary with respect to my experience of God, with respect, that is, to the experience of the goal which the heart craves. It is rather the sign, the manifestation of the fact that this experience of the goal begins to flourish, already begins to give a taste in this life (even if it will not be fulfilled until Paradise). A manifestation that is born of faith, certainly. And yet a manifestation that we should want, that we should pursue, beg for, because nothing in Christianity is automatic. One could say: "Faith is enough!" The rest is a consequence. In a certain sense this is true, because faith is the root of everything. But in another sense, this is not quite true, because if not we would be Lutherans. Luther says that faith is enough. We say instead that faith is the root of everything, but faith has to become charity, which generates communion, where it is crucial to understand that there is in the middle of this "becoming" freedom, desire, the tension of the heart. Certainly, and we know this, communion is impossible without faith. If I think about my experience it is exactly like this: it is in discovering myself a child that I discover myself also a brother. And yet, I could have resisted the call that came out of what happened to me, the call to throw myself into the friendship of CLU, into the friendship with Camu and with others. I could have. But I would have lost that beautiful thing. Because unfortunately, if we do not arrive at communion, we lose the beautiful, we lose the peak of the question (go and read Chapter 4 of the First Letter of John, which is a hymn to this idea).

From here there is a moral consequence that is crucial: as Emanuela said before—and I wanted to hug her when she said it—it is true that we cannot produce communion, this unity between us. But we can and must ask for it, desire it and ask for it, where the verb "must" is an obligation because of what I said earlier, that the experience of communion is not something optional for one who loves Christ. Certainly, we are not talking about producing the event of

communion with our own strength. As Father Giussani said, unity is a miracle, a grace. But every gift of grace is entrusted to our freedom, which can guard it and make it grow, or destroy it.

To conclude: if I have to tell you what I am most grateful for in this moment, while I am sitting here and speaking to you all, do you know what I would say? I am grateful for the fact that I am here sitting next to Camu, after so many years when we did not see each other and even lost sight of each other, because I went to Russia and then to America and in fact only this year have we begun to spend time together again; and to realize with amazement and emotion that the friendship that was born so many years ago when we were youngsters in CLU, that friendship that maybe was immature but full of passion for the Ideal that we were living then, is still there—it is the same, maybe even more beautiful. In short, isn't it the greatest thing to be able to experience something like this? This is for me the real point. Then, if there is this, if there is the recognition of this indestructible bond because of the fact of Christ, you can also rip each other's heads off, you can also fight about everything. We can tear each other apart about A, B, and C. For me the, the divergence of views is not and will never be a problem (personally, I consider the total absence of disagreement a sign of mental lethargy). Let's go ahead and tear each other to pieces. On the condition that this confrontation is born from a true passion for the common good; on the condition, that is, that we love each other, that is, that at the root even of the dialectic, there is charity, there is love for What unites us.

*Sunday, March 26*

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## **SYNTHESIS**

Fr. Paolo Prosperi

Good, so let's put the threads together this morning. It is not easy to do so because—as our friend said yesterday evening—these days have been “a bit of chaos, in the good sense.” What that friend meant to say, I am not sure, to be honest. I translate his words like this: in these three days a lot has happened and been said, which makes it very difficult to make a true and proper synthesis. I will limit myself therefore to “throwing out” three points, that, more than bringing to a synthesis what has happened and what has been said, will try to signal a trajectory for the road, that seems to be indicated by what has emerged.

### **1. To let him wash our feet: the path of liberation**

Given that we have spoken so much about the washing of the feet, both in the lesson and in the assembly (many questions and interventions turned on the comprehension of this grand gesture of Jesus, a sign that our zooming in on this has struck the imagination of many), permit me to begin this brief synthesis by returning again to this great scene from the fourth Gospel and to bring out the connection with another theme that has been central to the assembly from yesterday: the theme of “communal judgment.” What do we mean exactly when we say “communal judgment”? Here, maybe the washing of the feet can help us understand. Let me read you the following passage that we quoted and commented on at the end of the lesson:

“So when he had washed their feet and put his garments back on and reclined at table again, he said to them, ‘Do you realize [that is,

do you understand] what I have done for you? [The importance of understanding] You call me “teacher” and “master,” and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, the master [king] and teacher, have washed your feet, you [in order to enter into my royalty, to enter into my *nous*] ought to wash one another’s feet [interesting this reciprocity: to wash and to let yourself be washed!]. . . . If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it”;<sup>24</sup> that is, you will be happy, fulfilled, you will reach the most that we can desire in life already in this world.

“Do you realize what I have done for you? . . . If you understand this, blessed are you if you do it . . .,” which can also be translated: “It is not that you will be blessed if you wash each other’s feet materially. This is not what I am saying. What I am saying to you is rather that you will be blessed, that is, you will enter into the true meaning of life, if you do for each other what my gesture signifies, that of which my gesture is a sign,” which is more than a material *doing*. What does this *more* consist of? What does it mean, outside the metaphor, this washing of each other’s feet?

An important part of the answer emerged yesterday in the assembly: it means living the relationship among us, in our communities and groups of fraternity, that “loving invasiveness” of which we spoke yesterday—an invasiveness that on the one hand has the courage to correct each other, which is very much harder than washing each other’s feet (so much more so today, in the era of the sacralization of privacy); on the other hand, we do this in a truly loving way, which first of all means: taking on ourselves the weight of the other, suffering with the other, making the problems of the other our own, just like Jesus, down on his knees to wash the feet of his followers, cannot help but “get his hands dirty,” cannot help but let himself get dirty from those feet that come in contact with him. Certainly, an invasiveness that must also be discreet, that is, respectful of the freedom of the other, if *loving* in effect means: “The lover—Péguy taught us—puts himself in a state of dependence . . . relies on the beloved,”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> John 13:12–14,17.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. CH. PÉGUY, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. David Louis Schindler, University of Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996, p. xi.



that is, he always makes space generously for the playing out of the freedom of the beloved. And yet it is a real invasiveness, as we see in the instinctive rebellion of Peter: “You will never wash my feet!”<sup>26</sup> Certainly, in the rebellion of Peter to the gesture of Jesus there are also other elements at play, to which I will return in a moment.

Now, I would like to suggest that in a first and ordinary sense, the expression “communal judgment” indicates exactly this.<sup>27</sup> It is easy to reduce the communal judgment to a “flyer” on questions of current events, politics, culture. Instead—as we were saying yesterday with a group of friends from Puglia—the first and most “carnal” form of communal judgment (carnal in the sense that it *touches* the living flesh of our interests and our personal problems) is the judgment on our personal life, in all of its aspects. Even more: it is the judgment about the ultimate truth of my I, of my person, as I tried to suggest in the last intervention that I made yesterday at the assembly. “How do we get free from the performing ego, in order to enter into the freedom of Christ?”—someone asked, after Friday’s lesson. How do we get off the hamster wheel? How do we concretely affirm in ourselves that new self-awareness about which our friend spoke in the assembly, that is, that I capable of gratuitousness, because it knows itself loved gratuitously?

In the first assembly, we said a lot about the importance of memory. I will not return here to this. I want instead to pause on the

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<sup>26</sup> John 13:8.

<sup>27</sup> “The judgment must be communal. Evidently the word, the term ‘communal judgment’ means ‘communion judgment,’ because otherwise it would mean a judgment made by everyone on which everyone agrees. This, besides being dangerous from the viewpoint of the eventuality (which rarely happens), it would also be indecent from the viewpoint of the journey, because it would mean that there would never be the sign of something more; that is, there would never be obedience. ‘Communal judgment’ means ‘communion judgment.’ What does this indicate? It indicates a judgment which springs forth from the communion we live with each other; the communion judgment expresses a life of communion that is lived. What does a life of communion that is lived mean? A life lived together in order to live the memory of Christ. Because it is in fraternity, in fraternal companionship that Christ’s Presence is most pedagogical, communicates Itself in the pedagogically greatest way, and is assimilated in the way that is most alive and certain. If fraternal communion is lived, then we can also speak of a judgment that is truly communal; but to the extent that there is no effort to live the life of communion, communal judgment will be the locus of presumption, in which we presume or demand to impose our point of view.” L. GIUSSANI, “On communion judgment,” *Traces—Litterare Communionis*, n. 6/2001, p. 37.

second answer that emerged in these days, an answer that seems no less decisive than the first: in fact this breaking of the autonomous ego, of the I encapsulated in itself, happens above all through that active "letting our feet be washed" that is the desire to be corrected, sustained, helped, by one who is our companion toward destiny. So many times we tend to think, maybe unconsciously, that this help consists only in the affective consolation that the friend offers us, in the support on the path that the presence of the other at our side is. Certainly, we have told ourselves so many times and we have repeated it also in these days, the companionship is first of all this: we need continually this gaze that testifies to the Mercy of Christ, the predilection of Christ for each of us. We can dare even more, as I tried to say yesterday at the assembly. Friendship, that reciprocal affection, is so central to the experience of the divine that it is the end no less than the means, if it is true what we mentioned yesterday, in Paradise we will not each be in our little room alone with Jesus, but will partake in the joy of the heavenly Jerusalem, that is, of a communion with our brothers and sisters no less than with God (I will not go into the reason for this, even if it would be interesting to ask ourselves why this is so).

Nevertheless, for us who are still on the road, communion is not only this, cannot limit itself to this. To seek only this type of support, the support of a gaze that only affirms us without condition, as if there were nothing in us that needed to be washed, transformed, changed, means to deny an essential factor of the meaning of communion, of the meaning of companionship. Christ does not say: "Cuddle each other." He says instead: "Wash each other's feet," which, read in reverse, means: "Let your feet be washed." What is the peak of this dynamic? The highest point of this dynamic is called the Sacrament of Confession, because to confess means exactly this: to accept that in order to be able to walk, in order to have feet capable of walking after Christ, of running after Him, I need to let myself be washed by Him again and again, to be recreated by Him, reinvigorated by Him. *By Him*, certainly, not *by* the priest. And yet, *through* the priest (the divine always passes through the human; here is the genius of Catholicism), which in turn requires

from me the humility to put my dirty feet in the hands of the priest, that is, of a sinner like me, a poor sinner like me. And this is an even greater humility—here is a “nota bene” that is not at all banal—than if I had Jesus in front of me, like Simon Peter had in front of him in the upper room. There is a humility we must have. But the reward of this humility is freedom, an always greater participation in the freedom of Christ, which is the freedom of the one who consists totally in the gratuitous love of Another, of the generating and regenerating power of the love of Another.

And so, *mutatis mutandis*, the life of our groups of fraternity, desires to be something analogous to this (*analogous*, not identical: it is not that I make a list of my sins for the fraternity group!): a washing and letting ourselves be washed in turn, that is, a help in facing the challenges of life, that in time generates a freedom, a non-measure on ourselves that is not born from an acquired perfection, from an acquired infallibility, but from the fact that when I say *I*, always more this saying *I* coincides with recognizing myself part of a *we* on the journey, part of a communion that embraces me and sets me going continuously. In this way, we can understand more deeply the famous phrase of Lobkowitz about CL: “You are the only ones that I know for whom friendship is a virtue.”<sup>28</sup> If the friendship were pure spontaneity, then it would not be a virtue. That it is a virtue means that the friendship among us requires an ascesis, a work, so that this friendship may grow and become ever more true. What is this work? We have said it: the work of sharing, of confronting the concrete problems of life—a confrontation that is not at all easy, especially in a world like ours in which privacy and self-determination are considered more holy than the Blessed Sacrament. Contemporary society tells you: if you want to be free, you have to judge everything by yourself, you must not let anyone else invade your personal space. We are saying the opposite: we are saying that it is communion that liberates the I (in fact, we call ourselves Communion and Liberation). And what do we mean by the

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. L. GIUSSANI, *Il rischio educativo* [The Risk of Education], Milan: BUR, 2016, Italian preface. Our translation.

word “communion”? The communion with Christ present among us, the communion with that Christ who continuously bends down to wash my feet using those “hands” that are the faces of brothers and sister with whom he calls me to walk.

In synthesis: “Unless I wash you, you will have no inheritance with me”,<sup>29</sup> Jesus says to Peter. Which means: what makes it possible for Peter to enter into the feeling of Christ<sup>30</sup>—the phrase of Giussani which we quoted the other day comes to mind: “Your problem is that you do not feel like me”—what can bring Peter to feel as Christ feels, is not his effort in following Christ with his own strength (we know how it will go when he tries to do this),<sup>31</sup> but to let ourselves be loved by Him, to feel on our own skin the hands of this Jesus who is so happy to lower himself and wash our feet. The same is true for us: our communion must be, and ideally is, the place where we experience this passion of Christ for our destiny—a passion that in time is communicated to us, passes into us without our even recognizing it, just like a baby learns gratuitousness watching the joy, feeling on his skin the love with which his mother is there to give him a bath (I, instead, always rebelled when my mom tried it, because I was an unruly, rebellious child!).

## **2. Correspondence to the heart and obedience: a possible reconciliation**

I want to pose now an objection to what I said earlier. Wait a minute, Father Paolo: how does this fit with the natural desire of the heart? Are we sure that all this corresponds to the heart? Isn't it kind of crazy this rejoicing at “washing feet and letting our feet be washed” that you keep talking about? The objection is not banal, and it is not easy to respond well to it. In this seat, I limit myself to throwing out one observation (one that is a little provocative):

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<sup>29</sup> John 13:8.

<sup>30</sup> “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness” (Philippians 2:5–7).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. John 13:36–38; 18:15–18; 18:25–27.

everything depends on what we mean by the *natural* desire of the heart. It is clear that from the worldly point of view, that is, from what the world considers “correspondent,” Jesus seems crazy—just like Saint Francis seemed crazy at first. It struck me yesterday, following the explanation of Brother Felice on the frescoes in the upper Basilica, the scene where Francis strips himself in the midst of the town square of Assisi: we see the father who is about thrash Francis and, behind him, a secret meeting of conformists who chuckle at him. So, is it not a kind of variation on what already happened with Jesus in the upper room? Let’s not forget the instinctive reaction of Peter: “Are you going to wash my feet?... You will never wash my feet!”<sup>32</sup> Which means: “This doesn’t make sense, it is something crazy that you, who are the Messiah, are washing the feet of me, the servant. This cannot be!” So here the true question becomes clear: is it the gesture of Jesus that is crazy or is it Peter who is still incapable of glimpsing the beauty, the greatness, the glory of that gesture? “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will understand later,”<sup>33</sup> Jesus responds. Which means: “It is not my gesture that is crazy. You are the one who does not yet understand.” And why does Peter not understand? Good question! For different reasons, but here I want to underline just one (don’t worry, I’m not going to give a lesson in exegesis!): because if Peter had understood *all at once*, then he would not have needed to follow behind Jesus, in order to enter into a new *point of view* on reality—that new point of view that, as the School of Community that we are doing says,<sup>34</sup> is the point of view that Christ came to introduce to us. In order to enter into the point of view of another, to see the world with the eyes of another, I have to move, I have to change my starting position in order to bring myself where this other is, to assume the point of observation of this other. It is something physical; we cannot escape it. In the same way, in order to enter into the point of view of Jesus, of Jesus the *teacher* (by the way: we could not un-

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<sup>32</sup> John 13:6b.8b.

<sup>33</sup> John 13:7.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. L. GIUSSANI, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, “A New Mentality,” pp. 58–62.

derstand why they called him teacher if he did not have anything new to teach), in order to enter into the eyes of Christ, I have to in some way "go forth from the land"<sup>35</sup> from my point of view on things—on love and work, on what is glory and what is not glory, etc.—to enter "into the land" of His point of view. This requires a path, an "exodus"—to return to the image from which we set out on Friday—a journey.<sup>36</sup>

If it were not like this, it would mean that Christ did not come to change any of my categories, would mean that the categories with which I reasoned before meeting Him were already perfect. But this—the logic is undeniable—is equivalent to making faith useless, existentially useless, because faith, as the encyclical of Pope Francis *Lumen Fidei* says,<sup>37</sup> is exactly this: to enter always more into the eyes of Christ, that is, into the *point of view* from which Christ sees everything,<sup>38</sup> not only His Father but also wife and husband, work, children, etc.; a point of view that to the natural man—even if he had the religious sense of Gandhi or even Moses—is inaccessible, because it is the point of view of God, the point of view of

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Genesis 12:1ff.

<sup>36</sup> "That our awareness may be converted to Christ, our way of thinking, our affection, our way of loving, means that such an awareness and such an affection are continually carried, transported, where they would not have thought, are continually called to go out from themselves, are continually brought within a terrain, within a territory that is beyond what we conceived or felt before. It is always in the unknown that these things are introduced, it is a measure that grows: awareness and affectivity are continually introduced, into an unforeseen horizon, beyond our own measure." L. GIUSSANI, *La familiarità con Cristo* [Familiarity with Christ], Cinisello Balsamo—Milan: San Paolo, 2008, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> "Faith does not merely gaze at Jesus, but sees things as Jesus himself sees them, with his own eyes: it is a participation in his way of seeing. In many areas in our lives we trust others who know more than we do. We trust the architect who builds our home, the pharmacist who gives us medicine for healing, the lawyer who defends us in court. We also need someone trustworthy and knowledgeable where God is concerned. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who makes God known to us (cf. John 1:18). Christ's life, his way of knowing the Father and living in complete and constant relationship with him, opens up new and inviting vistas for human experience." POPE FRANCIS, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, 18.

<sup>38</sup> "The first effect on the life of a man who has the imitation of Christ... is a new mentality, a new awareness that cannot be reduced to any law of the state or social custom; a new awareness as the source and echo of a working relationship with reality, in all the details implicit in existence." L. GIUSSANI, *To Give One's Life...*, pp. 58–59.

the only one who “has come down from heaven”<sup>39</sup> and therefore sees things—not only those up above but also the things down here!!<sup>40</sup>—from the perspective of heaven, from the perspective of God and not from the perspective of the world: “Reason cannot understand—the School of Community says—all that Christ says, because Christ reveals, unveils what is new and unimaginable, and He does this only once—pay attention: only once, after!—people are bound to him.”<sup>41</sup>

Now, does this mean that in order to follow Jesus we have to renounce the heart as a criterion, does it mean that my heart, with all its structural needs, is not infallible? No, it does not mean this. It means rather that Christ came to fulfill the *authentic* needs of our heart and not the images of happiness, the images of fulfillment that crowd our heart (here again is the biblical idea of the idol, that we spoke about in the lesson: idol, from the Greek *eidolon*, means image, the ideal is an *image* of the divine “made by human hands,” fabricated by my mind). Christ came to fulfill the true needs of the heart, not the images of happiness that we have in our head. And so, if we want to see the fulfillment of the promises that Christ made to us when we met Him, if we want, that is, to experience the hundredfold here below that Jesus promises to the one who follows Him, we have to leave these images behind and follow Him. There is no alternative, I am sorry. There is no hundredfold—Jesus says

<sup>39</sup> John 3:11–13; 31–32, etc.

<sup>40</sup> “Amen, amen, I say to you, we speak of what we know and we testify to what we have seen, but you people do not accept our testimony. If I tell you about earthly things and you do not believe, how will you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man” (John 3:11–13).

<sup>41</sup> *To Give One’s Life...*, p. 60. Giussani goes on: “In the modern era, by losing the true nature of reason, rationalism makes *confusion between religious sense and faith* quite habitual, thus emptying faith of its true nature... The confusion between religious sense and faith makes everything confused. The collapse of faith in its true nature, as it is in tradition, that is, in the life of the Church, the collapse of faith as recognition of ‘Christ all and in all,’ as identification with Christ, and imitation of Christ, has given rise to the *present-day bewilderment*” (p. 62). And elsewhere he writes: “All modern consciousness is bent on tearing the hypothesis of Christian faith away from man, and on reducing faith to the dynamic of the religious sense and to the concept of religious experience. Unfortunately this confusion also penetrates the mentality of Christian people.” (L. GIUSSANI, S. ALBERTO, J. PRADES, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, p. 16).

it, not me—unless we are open to leaving everything behind and following Him.<sup>42</sup>

But then where does the criterion of correspondence end up? It doesn't go anywhere. It remains valid all the way through, that is, from the beginning to the end, but *not in a single sense, according to an invariable measure*, so to say—here is the delicate point!

I will try to explain myself: the comprehension that I have of my heart, that is, of the true object of my desire, evolves, gets refined, matures the more I follow Christ.<sup>43</sup> When the famous Andrew, the day after the famous encounter, went to Peter and told him, “We have found the Messiah!”—on the strength of what could he say this, with such an enthusiasm that even grumpy Peter could not remain indifferent? We know it: on the strength of a correspondence, a correspondence to the heart that didn't compare to what he had experienced before. A correspondence that was so great that Andrew told Peter: “Yes, it is Him, it is the One we were waiting for, it is Him!” And yet, does this mean that John and Andrew already understood everything about Jesus, already understand at that first encounter *in what consisted* the fulfillment, the new life that Jesus had come to bring? No, not at all. Rather, to use the perfect expression of Father Giussani, they had it *as a presentiment*.<sup>44</sup> An infallible presentiment, certainly, and this is the paradox of the grace of faith. And yet a presentiment that lived in them together with the images of fulfillment, that is, the images about the Messiah that everyone had, that were the same images that everyone had. Was the correspondence that they had experienced any less true because of this? Was their faith any less true? Not at all. It was

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<sup>42</sup> “Amen, I say to you, there is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come” (Mark 10:29–30).

<sup>43</sup> “In this sense, faith in Christ *surpasses and clarifies* the world's religious sense. Faith reveals the *object of man's religious sense*, the object that reason could not reach.” *To Give One's Life...*, p. 60.

<sup>44</sup> “The path of the Lord is as simple as the path of John and Andrew, Simon and Phillip, when they began to follow Christ: out of curiosity and desire. There is no other path, in the end, than this desirous curiosity that arises from a presentiment of the truth.” L. GIUSSANI, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In Search of the Human Face], Milan: BUR, 2007, p. 125, Our translation.



true and *certain*. But it was still immature. In *content*, it was immature. Did Simon believe that Jesus was the Messiah, the One his heart was waiting for? With all his heart. If there was someone who could be said to have had an encounter, it was Peter. The gaze of Jesus—which had pierced through and through (*emblemsas*, the Greek text says, which means: looking within him)<sup>45</sup> from the moment he said “You are Simon, son of John; you will be called Cephas” in a way that embraced all of him, the past and the future, what was and what was to come—that gaze he could not help but carry with him. It remained within him. And yet that same man, Jesus of Nazareth, that man who by then was the center of his life, Simon did not understand. He didn’t understand Jesus! Or better: he only understood in part. He understood that Jesus was the Messiah, he understood that here was the One who not only Simon the son of John, but everyone, all of Israel, had been expecting for centuries. He understood this. And yet—it drove him crazy—he understood that he did not understand Him. What did he not understand? He did not understand what it really meant to say that He was the Messiah, he did not understand where Jesus was going with that logic that was so different from everyone else, to such an extent that His way of moving was so different from everyone—correspondent, yes, like nothing else, and yet so often unsettling, bizarre, sometimes even shocking: “What I am doing now you do not understand, but you will understand later.”

As it was for Peter, so it is for us. We cannot enter into the point of view of Christ violently. We recognize it violently, but we enter into His point of view little by little and never without a struggle, never, that is, without the necessity that something breaks in us, something opens up, like the womb of a woman giving birth.<sup>46</sup> But

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<sup>45</sup> “Jesus looked at him and said, ‘You are Simon the son of John; you will be called Kephas’ (which is translated Peter).” (John 1:42)

<sup>46</sup> “The worldly mentality puts all its deception to work on *the global horizon* of that to which man educates himself to as he grows. The new mentality finds it hard *to take the place* of this and has to fight for it... ‘Christ entered the world in controversy with the world,’ Monsignor Garofalo said. But we would say that He didn’t enter the world ‘in controversy’ with the world, but He entered the world revealing and communicating Himself, His Mystery. So, He came as a proposal, and it is the world that rises up against him.” *To Give One’s Life...*, p. 59.

the fruit of this travail is truly the entrance into a freedom that is always greater and into a knowledge of Christ that is always richer.

### 3. The virtue that is asked of us

For this reason, because of all we have said, it is reasonable to follow also when we might not understand everything. Not putting our reason and our heart in parentheses, but through an openness and a faithfulness to the fact we have encountered, which is with one person or another, or rather, through one person or another with something much greater than the person, that is, with Christ present in the reality of this companionship guided toward destiny. One can possibly not understand, feeling lost in front of certain changes of course, as Peter and the other felt lost when Jesus began to say things that seemed absurd—like this, which caused many to take off: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you".<sup>47</sup> "Does that mean we have to become cannibals?" poor Simon Peter might have asked himself. And yet he did not leave.

"Jesus then said to the Twelve, 'Do you also want to leave?' Simon Peter answered him, 'Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God'".<sup>48</sup> Why did Peter stay? Out of faithfulness to a fact that he had encountered, out of fidelity to the experience he had in the encounter with Jesus, an experience that had led him to say, even without a full clarity of what he was trying to say: "Yes, You are the Holy One of God, and so it is with You that I have to stay in order to have life." The same is true for us. One can possibly not understand everything, can feel at times the same repulsion of Peter and the others in front of certain proposals of the Lord. But if it is true that the encounter you have had is with something greater than a certain fascinating testimony or a certain accent, then you have to follow the objectivity of the flesh

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<sup>47</sup> John 6:53.

<sup>48</sup> John 6:67–69.

of Christ, of that piece of the body of Christ that has seized you. You have to persevere, out of that fidelity to what has happened to you—not turning off your reason, your heart (which means: not to renounce asking for reasons and even to object, when you don't understand, as Peter did with Jesus!) and yet always making yourself open, maybe even with great effort (and therefore with great generosity)—to verify in time if the change that is asked of you, the step beyond what is asked of you is for something more, in order to deepen what has begun or not. Freedom, the drama of freedom plays out in this alternative: the alternative between the openness to follow, putting in play all your reason and affection, and the closing in on yourself, in your own measure.

Certainly, as the recent teaching of the Pope has made really present, we do not have to identify the authority that has been indicated with the infallible megaphone of the Holy Spirit. The guide of the movement is not Jesus, and so the analogy between Peter who follows Jesus and ourselves is always (very!) imperfect. We have to follow in an intelligent and dialogic way. We have, that is, to follow in such a way that our personal responsibility is lived to the point that if one is fully convinced that he sees something the authority does not see, he has to feel that he has the right and the duty to make it known, thus contributing to the good of everyone. The critique, the question, even the objection, if it is cordial and constructive, is not opposed to following and to communion, but enriches it, as not only the story of the Church but also our own story demonstrates.<sup>49</sup> We are together to help each other, and the new spark that illuminates everyone, as we have always said, can come from the last young kid who raises his voice in the midst of

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<sup>49</sup> "Morality is doing everything for something greater, which is Christ, as we say in *Morality: Memory and Desire*. And what is the opposite? The opposite of morality, that is, immorality, is acting by reaction. And what is reaction? On the plane of intelligence, it is opinion; on the practical level, it is instinct. But woe to us if we adore our own opinion instead of Christ! Conversely, the Spirit of Christ guides a community by means of the 'head' of individuals, the conscience of individuals; that is, through the experience of individuals. Therefore, putting your experience in common with the Superior's contributes to creating a context from which the communal judgment emerges." L. GIUSSANI, "On communion judgment," *Traces—Litterare Communionis*, n. 6/2001, p. 40.

the crowd, as the young Daniel does in the story of Susanna.<sup>50</sup> That being said, the principle remains valid: if you are within a history it is reasonable *first of all* to give credit to that history, putting at the same time actively in play all your sensibility and richness of experience. "And when it is difficult?" When it is difficult we have to ask the Spirit for that highest virtue of heart which Father Giussani called availability or poverty of spirit—it is highest because it is the virtue of the heart that makes the greatness of that woman whom we rightly venerate as the greatest in history, "humble and higher than any creature": Mary of Nazareth.

Don Gius wrote in the letter to the Fraternity in 2003, one of his last and most profound writings: "Our Lady totally respected God's freedom. She saved God's freedom. She obeyed God because she respected His freedom. She did not oppose it with her own method."<sup>51</sup> She did not oppose God's freedom with her own method, that is, she did object to the strange, even inconceivable, way that the Mystery, in His infinite freedom, came to meet her. In front of the announcement of the Angel, an announcement never heard before—because it certainly had never happened before that a woman conceived without knowing man—Mary could have said: "It is impossible." And instead she said: "How is this possible?" She opened herself to this newness with a simple, available heart. And herein lies her greatness, her highest greatness. You are great and right and totally beautiful, O Mary, because in you the finite universe opened itself, threw itself open to the point of becoming the dwelling of Immensity: "May it be done to me according to your word."<sup>52</sup> I am here, Lord, but you must expand my measure, expand the womb of my measure, to the point of making me capable of welcoming and understanding this new thing that you are doing.

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<sup>50</sup> "As she was being led to execution, God stirred up the holy spirit of a young boy named Daniel, and he cried aloud: 'I am innocent of this woman's blood! All the people turned and asked him, 'What are you saying?' He stood in their midst and said, 'Are you such fools, you Israelites, to condemn a daughter of Israel without investigation and without clear evidence?'" (Daniel 13:45–48).

<sup>51</sup> L. GIUSSANI, *Moved by the Infinite*, Letter to the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, June 22, 2003. *Traces—Litterare Communionis*, n. 7/2003, Page One, I.

<sup>52</sup> Luke 1:38.

I come thus to a final “nota bene,” with which I want to conclude this synthesis. We are not the Virgin Mary, none of us is as simple and pure as she always was. From here comes a fact that, even though everyone knows it, I think it crucial to keep always in mind: like the guide that is put in front is not the Second or Third Person of the Trinity incarnate (not even the Pope, why while he is infallible when he speaks *ex cathedra*, is not the re-incarnation of Jesus Christ and not even the incarnation of the Holy Spirit), so none of us is the Virgin Mary, none of us is poverty of spirit incarnate. We do not have a pure heart like the Virgin Mary had. We have a heart with infallible criteria, certainly, but we do not have a pure heart. And for this reason, when we judge, often and willingly and without even realizing it, we use criteria that have little to do with the original structure of the heart—criteria that have been corrupted by others outside of us (see the first premise of *The Religious Sense*),<sup>53</sup> or dictated by our own taste, by our own feeling (see the third premise of *The Religious Sense*).<sup>54</sup> We are not the *Immaculate Conception*. Therefore, even poverty of spirit, even that love for the truth more than for ourselves, that Father Giussani calls *availability*, is ultimately a miracle that we can only ask for. In this sense, everything truly comes down to the question, as one of you said in such a simple and clear way yesterday: the prayer to the Spirit

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<sup>53</sup> “And so, let us ask ourselves: ‘Where can we find the criterion that allows us to evaluate what we see happening in ourselves?’ There are two possibilities: either the criterion on which we base our judgment of ourselves is borrowed from the outside, or it is to be found within ourselves. If we pursue the first possibility, we shall slip into the alienating situation described earlier. Even if we had undertaken an existential inquiry, and, therefore, refused to turn to investigations carried out by others, the result would still be alienating if we drew from others the criteria for judging ourselves. Our meaning would still depend on something outside ourselves.” L. GIUSSANI, *The Religious Sense*, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2023, pp. 6–7.

<sup>54</sup> “Therefore, depending upon a person’s stance and temperament, a known object touches him or her, provoking that emotion that we have identified with the word feeling. We can thus say that *feeling* is the inevitable ‘frame of mind’ that follows upon the knowledge of anything that passes across or penetrates the horizon of our experience. But, we must be cautious here for, as we have said, reason is not just some mechanism that can be disconnected from the rest of our ‘self.’ Rather, reason is related to our feeling and conditioned by it as well. Hence we reach this definitive formula: in order for reason to know an object, it must also take into account feeling, the ‘frame of mind,’ through which it is filtered and with which it is, in any case, involved.” *Ibid.*, p. 26.

to make us open to the path that has been proposed, open to say "yes, I am here—with all the weight of what I am, my sensibility, my ideas, my history that can be different from yours—I am here."

I conclude therefore with another citation from the final words of the Act of Consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary that we recited yesterday, on the feast of the Annunciation, in response to the invitation of the Pope and together with the whole Church—I don't know about you, but it gave me chills to hear our 300-plus voices pronouncing these words [which contain among other things a citation from Dante which is dear to us, the words that are written on the tombstone of Father Giussani] with one voice: "Our Lady of the 'Fiat,' on whom the Holy Spirit descended, restore among us the harmony that comes from God. May you, our 'living fountain of hope,' water the dryness of our hearts. In your womb Jesus took flesh; help us to foster the growth of communion. You once trod the streets of our world; lead us now on the paths of peace. Amen."

*Sunday, March 26*

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## CONCLUSION

Davide Prospero

I want simply to say—besides thanking each of you for these days we have spent together—that, as often happens, when we arrive at the end of the journey, we understand better what was said at the beginning. Now in fact we understand more clearly what it means that the question is not “why me?” or “what am I doing here?”; now it is more clear that the point is not how we arrived here, but how we are going to go away from here, how we face what has been introduced in these days in our lives so that we may recognize the road we are traveling on even more as a sure road, one that is made for us. And it is secure because it is for us. Certainly, just like every road has its stages and so the promise that is made to us is not just “okay, I gave you the supplies, now go,” but it is the promise of a road together. You have certainly seen (I say it because so many of you have told me) that even the form of the gesture suggests the kind of path we are invited to walk. I did not invite you here to give you the “line of the movement” but rather to share a friendship. And in sharing this friendship we understand also a little more what is the content of the proposal that the movement is making to us, clarifying the task that has been entrusted to us. Because, as I always say, when one is the object of a preference it is either an injustice (think about your friends that were not able to come here because unfortunately there was not enough space for everyone) or this preference indicates a task. Or rather, through each of us this preference may expand, may become our own responsibility. Pay attention, this responsibility does not translate into a role: let us brush aside immediately this error from the horizon of our expectations. This preference translates into a responsibility that becomes actual in

the same way it has reached us; thus, just as it reached us as an offer of friendship, so it is communicated to others as an offer of friendship. I mean to say: to be here does not mean that starting tomorrow you are part of every diaconia on the globe. Or better, I don't know but, in any case, it doesn't matter. What matters is that we are on the road and that every step of the path is like a new beginning of the road which we take up with renewed energy. When we stop for a moment, we grab something to eat and then keep going with greater strength. For this reason I would like to see you all again and to make another appointment. We will see in what way and we will see where: we saw each other here in Assisi this first time because of the link with Saint Francis and in effect the place has had an important impact on the modality of the gesture and in the content of our dialogue. We will see for the next appointment: we will also involve others and the idea could be—considering that we are all, some more some less, already very busy—to see each other again in the fall (in the middle there are the vacations that each of us will have with our own community). One of you sent me a little while ago a message that contains two phrases that Father Giussani said here in Assisi exactly 45 years ago, at a gathering of teachers in 1978. I will read them: “The call to faith must reach people precisely where the dominant culture forms its mentality. The second character of this life [he is speaking about the second point of a discourse that he develops but it is the point that I am interested in sharing] is the physical proximity to a reality of communion that constitutes you. ‘I have learned by being within this companionship’ [I have learned by being within this companionship, the road about which Paolo was speaking! The companionship is the path to understand]. The companionship is a life and not an organization. Unity, communion, is not a juxtaposition or a convergence from the outside, but is reached by going to the depth of the experience of faith.” I think that we will have to take up again the content of the synthesis that Paolo made because it describes the modality of the path, not only the goal. And here is the second phrase of Giussani: “To be Christian means to be a part of the mystery of Christ and therefore members of one another.



But we cannot live in communion except by following.”<sup>55</sup> I would say that, 45 years later, we are here again. We have kept to this path for 45 years, so we can be in peace.

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<sup>55</sup> L. GIUSSANI, “Second Part: Assisi 1978,” in *Agli educatori. L'adulto e la sua responsabilità*. [To the educators. The adult and his responsibility], Quaderni, 7; suppl. to *Litterae Communionis CL*, n. 6/1985, p. 54.



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