



THE VERIFICATION OF FAITH

Synthesis by Fr. Francesco Ferrari
to the Equipe of University Students of CL

La Thuile (Aosta), August 29–September 1, 2023

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Közimniñ qarasy (The Pupil of My Eye)

La Sua Figura (Giuni Russo)

Hoy arriesgaré (Oscar Clemotte)

The songs and today's morning prayer alone would be enough to end these wonderful days that God has given us. "I miss the presence of his image," sings Giuni Russo. It is another way of expressing what we have prayed: "Come, says my heart, 'seek God's face'; your face, Lord, do I seek!" (Ps 27:8).

A friend said that to see Christ is to see people in high spirits. No, not at all! To see Christ is to see a man, who has a face, who has a figure, who has characteristic features.

1. THE EXCEPTIONAL TRAITS OF CHRIST

This morning I will not summarize the abundance that these days have been, I just want to elaborate on what, also together with the friends of the *Centro del Clu* [Center of the CLU], we have recognized as the most important themes that have emerged.

The first is surely the following: the face of Christ, the exceptional features of Christ.

Christ was a Jew who lived in Palestine 2,000 years ago. He spoke a poor, meager language; he almost certainly wore a tunic, as they all did; he tended to be dark-haired; he must have been physically fit, given how far he walked and how much he endured during the Passion; he must also have been a handsome man, considering that at one point a woman cries out to him, "Blessed is the womb that carried you!" (Lk 11:28). Surely he was a good man, of an immense goodness that we cannot even imagine. He was an intelligent man who knew how to respond to the provocations of reality with originality: "Then repay to Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God." (Mt 22:21). He explained life through parables. He was a man who very much loved to be with people, but

also, often, to stay in silence. He especially loved the most despairing—prostitutes, widows, tax collectors, lepers—but he also did not mind spending time with the wealthy, like the rich young man he even wanted to make his disciple, or with the powerful, like Nicodemus. He was a free man, he spoke with freedom, he did not depend on anyone's judgment. Above all, he was a man who performed exceptional deeds, which no other man could, he performed miracles, miracles of various kinds: there were the healings, the resurrections, but also the miracle of understanding man's heart in a way that no one else could. The Gospels use a Greek term that could be translated as follows, "Jesus looked within." Regarding the rich young man, the Gospel says, "Jesus, looking at him, [looking within him], loved him" (cf. Mk 10:21). He had a miraculous understanding of the heart; no man could read the hearts of people like that. Christ performed exceptional deeds.

2. THE DISCIPLES BEFORE HIM

The disciples who followed Him were fascinated by these gestures, these very special features. They were fascinated by the more outward, simpler features. Indeed, it must have been fascinating to watch this man, how He spoke to people, how He related to the world—think of the person you esteem most and multiply that by 500 million!—and then they were attracted by His extraordinary actions. The more they were with Him, the more they followed Him, and the more these exceptional features amazed them, left them speechless. The more they lived with Him, the more these exceptional features referred back to something hidden, secret, to a heart that the disciples wanted to reach out to. They referred back to something that provoked a question, "But who are you? Who is this man? Where does all this beauty, all this strength, all this exceptionality come from?" And the more they followed

him, the more urgent this question became. The disciples wanted to understand what the origin of this exceptionality was.

Not everyone wanted to understand. These days, one of us asked, "What need do I have to say, 'Christ'?" None, no obligation, it depends on what you want. It is a choice.

Not everyone wanted to understand who that man was, so many settled for what they already knew. Not the disciples, the disciples wanted to understand. But in front of the question, "Who are you Christ, who are you really, where did you come from?" the disciples did not know and could not answer; not on their own. It was impossible.

And in fact, to this urgency of theirs, to this question of theirs, it is Christ who answers, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. I am the Son of God. I am the meaning of your life, the meaning of your existence, of the existence of the whole world. I am the reason why you are there, why you live, why you love, why you suffer, why you desire. I am the meaning of all suffering. I am God." Let us try to take away all the obviousness with which we use this word, Christ. "I am God." Think back to the first time He began to say these words, "I am the way and the truth and the life." (Jn 14:6). It is as if I were now saying to you, "I, Francesco, am the Truth!" Think of the bewilderment and surprise you would be overcome with.

"I am the origin and meaning of that promise that defines your life, the fulfillment of that heart you have, of all desires." "Come," says my heart, 'seek God's face; your face, Lord, do I seek!' (Ps 27:8). Christ, at a certain point, revealed his face, his most real and deeper face.

3. THE BEGINNING OF FAITH

It is here, in the face of what Christ said about himself, that faith was born. For faith, Giussani says, is recognizing a presence. The disciples, at some point, began to recognize that presence: not simply the exceptionality

of that man, but who He really was. Jesus says to the disciples, “But who do you say that I am?” Simon Peter said in reply, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” (Mt 16:15–16). Christ means: the Messiah, the one sent by God, God.

When Peter gave this answer he recognized that presence in its deepest truth. But when Peter gave this answer before his eyes he had a man; he did not see the divinity of Christ, he saw a man! The same man he had seen an hour before! Peter began to believe what the man had told him about Himself. He had faith in Him, confidence in what that man had told him about Himself. And because of that he really saw Him, saw Him more, unlike all the others, who had been content to say of that man what they had decided.

“You are God”: faith is this trust in the words of another that leads you to greater, truer knowledge. “The disciples saw humanity, but they believed in his divinity,” Martino told us yesterday. They saw humanity, but they believed in his divinity, that is, in what He had told them.

Projected image:

Christ the Saviour, by A. Rublëv.

This is an icon from the early 15th century. Since the beginning of Christianity, art faced the problem of figuring out how to paint a man as God. How do you depict through human features that which by definition is not human? The artistic culmination of this desire is represented by an icon. This is why icons are never exceedingly realistic: its focus is not physical realism, but to represent within a human reality that which is all but human. In fact, icons were painted while praying, as an act of searching, “Come, says my heart, ‘seek God’s face.’” The disciples saw a man, but they believed in His divinity, that is, in what that man had said about Himself. This led them to see more, to understand more, to recognize more.

That act of faith in what that man had said about Himself is a grace: it was a grace to meet Christ (the disciples did not decide to meet Christ); it was a grace to be faithful to Christ in living together; it was a grace to truly recognize His presence, to believe in His words; it was a grace to believe in His resurrection, that is, to believe that that face was no more ending, that He had conquered all limits, that He was really God. This is the beginning of faith.

4. A MATTER OF FREEDOM

This recognition is a grace. As we said, the disciples could not answer the question, “Who are you?” on their own. It is Christ who helps them answer it. It is a grace: the Spirit comes into life to help man recognize Him. But to say that it is a grace is not to say that the disciples were not free; in fact, not everyone recognized Him, but everyone (the disciples and others) had to take a stand before Him.

There is a famous page from Giussani where Kierkegaard’s *Journals* are quoted: “The basest form of scandal in human terms is to leave the whole problem of Christ without a solution. The truth is that the Christian imperative—you must—has been completely forgotten. That Christianity has been announced to you means that *you must* assume a position in Christ’s regard. He himself, or the fact that He exists, or the fact that He existed represents the one decision to be made in life.” This is the page of the *Journals* quoted, then Giussani continues, “There are certain provocations that, because of their radical nature, man cannot eliminate or censure [certain provocations from life: “What beauty I have seen,” I can no longer censure this] once he has perceived them, if he is to act as a man. Man is forced to answer yes or no. The mere fact that he has heard the news that one man declared, “I am God,” means that he cannot be indifferent to it. He must arrive at his own conviction as to whether

the news is true or false” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, trans. Viviane Hewitt, Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998, p. 33), whether that man can be believed or not.

If a fruit seller says he has the best apples in the country, I can easily dismiss them! But how can I disregard a man that claims to be God?

The disciples, like everyone else who had met that exceptional man, had to take a stand at some point, use their freedom, decide whether to trust Him or not. “Why do I have to say, ‘Christ?’ You don’t have to, but you have to take a stand though, that is. The exceptionality you see is a call on your freedom.

Why is it important to emphasize this dimension of personal decision, of personal freedom? Because only if faith is my decision, only if faith is an act of freedom, and therefore an act of mine, can it be my faith, can it be a human act, can it be an act of love.

Christ, in presenting himself to our life, always comes seeking and respecting, begging for our freedom. That is why he chose such a fragile, discreet, easily misunderstood sign as our companionship. Or, even more: he chose a fragile, discreet, even more easily misunderstood sign like the bread and wine in the Eucharist.

This discretion of Christ is his way of begging for our freedom. Péguy said so in one of his famous pages: Christ is so discreet, He passes through the fragile sign of a companionship and a Eucharist, a piece of bread, because He wants to be loved freely, almost gratuitously, that is, out of love, not out of constraint. Like a lover who never forces the beloved’s “yes,” He awaits it. It is God who speaks: “Does one love to be loved by slaves? [...] / Having once known what it is to be freely loved, one no longer has any taste for subservience. / Having once known what it is to be loved by free men the prostrations of slaves no longer mean anything to you. [...] / So I love to find in

them a certain gratuitousness, / a reflection of the gratuitousness of my Grace. [precisely because it is a grace, it must be an act of freedom: grace is an act of love and requires a loving response]. // Which is as if created in the image and in the resemblance of the gratuitousness of / my Grace. // I love that in a certain sense they pray not only freely but also gratuitously. / I love that they fall on their knees not only freely but gratuitously. / I love that they give one another to each other and that they give their heart and that they try again, they carry and esteem not only freely but gratuitously. / I love that they love infinitely, says God, not only freely but gratuitously” (“Il mistero dei santi innocenti” [The Mystery of the Holy Innocents], in C. Péguy, *I misteri* [The Mysteries], Milan: Jaca Book, 1997, pp. 322, 327).

This is the call of a Christ who wants to be loved by free men.

5. OUR SITUATION

We, too, were confronted with an exceptional humanity, marked by exceptional traits. A concrete humanity, as Christ was concrete, His appearance, His tunic, the fringe of His cloak. We found ourselves before a concrete humanity, that of Luca, Francesco, Caterina. Concrete: faces, circumstances.

And as then the disciples had seen exceptional gestures, so we have seen and see exceptional gestures. Thinking about these days, I could stand here for hours telling you, telling you the exceptional gestures that I–I Francesco–have seen in these days, signs of the exceptional nature of Christ’s miracle, that is, a gesture that is not fulfilled in the sum of its elements.

Let us give some examples.

An unthinkable familiarity. Our friends who were on Erasmus in Norway talked about it yesterday, or Cecilia with her Portuguese friends. A familiarity, a communion, a unity that has no meaning other than Christ.

Ester said, “We were not united on account of our affinity, on account of our similarities. This familiarity was born out of faith.”

A welcome—here we have another outstanding trait—without limits, to the point of forgiveness. Alfio told us yesterday, “I am a chronic betrayer, but I have always been forgiven.” Folks, in this world which forgives nothing and condones everything, as Chesterton said, there is a place where a chronic betrayer (as he called himself) has always been taken back; thus, an infinite welcome, to the point of forgiveness.

A deeper intelligence of reality: for me this is Alexandre’s beautiful account, which showed how from the education he received by going to charitable work arose in him a different gaze of the medical circumstances of the people he was visiting, a new gaze that saw deeper, a truer gaze, even truer than his professor, who had studied much more than him. He told us, “I never went to charitable work to look for scientific questions, but gratuitousness generates a gaze on reality that allows you to see all sorts of new things.”

A truer love between man and woman, as Alexandre has always witnessed to us.

An unthinkable gladness, even in the face of the most mysterious dramatic situations. An unthinkable gladness that is not the sum of our faces, as some friends told Tobia on the last night of their vacation, or so many of you in so many stories, as you thought about certain difficult issues at home.

Last—but I could go on and on—, the experience of sonship, the experience—not the feeling!—of being loved, the certainty of being wanted even where life seems to have abandoned you. “I am the son of promise,” Yuri told us.

We, too, in the face of this exceptionality, these exceptional features, are the receivers of an announcement: all this new life that you see, friends, all this exceptional life that you see, originates from the person of Christ, originates from that face, from that figure,

originates from the person of Christ. This is an announcement that is made to us, it is a word that is said to us, “Faith comes from what is heard” (Rom 10:17). And the thing that counts is to have heard these words. We have heard them, and we will say them again and again, as long as it serves: all the beauty we can encounter in this stumbling company of ours comes from Christ; it is a sign of His presence among us. This is the Christian announcement.

6. FAITH

Before this announcement, we too are challenged in our freedom, we too are called to a decision. And perhaps—I hope—today, after these days, we can understand more what it means to be called to take a stand. “I am not capable of saying, ‘Christ’”: is the objection I often hear. But no one is claiming that you be capable of saying, “Christ.” The question is whether you, my friend, can and will trust what you are told.

I will read you a passage from Giussani that helps us understand how trust in someone else’s words (faith) is not something unreasonable.

“If the Mystery is the truth of man and as Mystery the truth cannot be known, if the Mystery coincides with that man there, the truth is that man there. [...] It is this **present man**. This is the leap of faith against which all the men of these centuries have rebelled.” Why have they rebelled? Because to trust another on such a thing is to depend on someone else. And man, in his prideful conceit, wants to be his own master. “If one says so [Christ’s announcement, ‘I am God’]: either he wants to deceive you in the most tawdry, most terrible way, and he must be killed—indeed!—, or he is right (i.e., I have no reason to object). Who is he? I am compelled to repeat his words, [to answer this question] I am obliged to repeat his words, because I have no facts of experience to counter his words. I only have facts of experience that pre-con-

firm his words [all this beauty, all this exceptionality]: they confirm them. And the more I repeat his words, the more I understand. [...] The question that has to be answered is shoved in as the fundamental characteristic of your responsibility, as the supreme expression of your humanity [the question we have to answer is precisely embedded inside our lives]: ‘And you, who do you say I am?’ ‘And you [all of you], who do you say I am?’ And the only answer [that is, the most reasonable answer] is to repeat what He said, ‘We know that you are God because you said so.’ Indeed, no one can do these things but God [...]. This is the Christian: a witness of what He says about Himself. Thus he is not a theologian, but he is the friend of that man there: he is the man who believes Him. One believes because of the testimony He gave of Himself, and one accepts His testimony because there is no one who has done, knows how to do and say things as He did and said them; not only is it not normal, but humanly it is unexplainable. Faith is to assert something because He says so. Period. [...] it is reasonable for one to accept something because He says so, insofar as there is a historically graspable and affirmable exceptionality of behavior, an exceptionality of performance, that cannot be found anywhere else.” (L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Can One (Really?!) Live Like This?]*, Milan: Bur, 1996, pp. 92–94). This is faith, this is the announcement that is made to us, this is faith that we can live by: believing in the announcement and the words that are given to us.

Believing the word of another is not an insult to my reason, because it is the word that most brings me into that exceptionality that I see.

7. COMPANIONSHIP AND PRAYER

The mortal leap (as Giussani calls it) frightens us, as it feels like we are losing ourselves, losing ourselves in affirming and thus bind-

ing our lives to this leap. But not only that: as we have been saying these days, there is a deadly weakness in us, a softness whereby there are moments when we sense, when we trust, but then it all seems to collapse.

So what sustains us? As we have already told each other at the Exercises, Giussani pointed out two great safeguards to the Christian journey: companionship and prayer. The journey of faith is a need and an act that has to do with me. What place then does community have, the fact that we are here together? I will recall the quote from Benedict XVI that Davide used, “I cannot build my personal faith in a private dialogue with Jesus, because faith is given to me by God through a community of believers that is the Church [...]. Our faith is truly personal [truly mine], only if it is also communal: it can be my faith only if it dwells in and moves with the ‘we’ of the Church,” (*General Audience*, October 31, 2012). Why can it be “my” faith only if it is “our” faith? Because at the beginning it does not matter what you know how to say, it matters what is said to you, the announcement you receive, and the faith you give to that announcement. It is only in a relationship that you experience faith; no one invents faith on their own.

The initial encounter happened in a companionship, the exceptionality that strikes me is within a companionship, the announcement that is made to me is made to me from a companionship, from a specific place. Then, as with the apostles, it is in living with this company—that is, in belonging, in dwelling in it: Fr. Pietro said, “[it is] by osmosis, by contact, by proximity!”—that I can walk in faith. The evening on Adriana Mascagni made me listen again with amazement to the words I have been hearing all my life. They are striking: “The evil I do, it’s not my evil, [this weakness, this softness I do not want]. I am more miserable than I can believe.; / The evil I have within my bones, / Father, it keeps me far from you. [...] Let me

encounter, He who can suffer, / He who can give, right till the end, [who knows how to live suffering, who knows how to love to the end], / He who is sincere, He who is real, [he who possesses the traits of a truer humanity!] / He who I can at least follow (“Non son sincera [I am not sincere],” *Canti* [Songbook], Milan: Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, 2014, p. 206). This is true companionship: a place of witnesses, a place of truer humanity which redeems us from our evil and therefore we can follow; people touched by faith, by the announcement of faith, surrendered to this announcement. This is the Church. Without this company I cannot have faith. We are obviously not talking about faith in the companionship, but in Christ! It is a faith in Christ that is given only through a belonging, a trust, an obedience, a following, a being, a life within a company. It is because of this faith in Christ, because of this greater and more beautiful goal to which the company leads me, as we said to each other in the past few days (when we spoke about the destination points of our hikes), that I can even accept, even to the point of welcoming, the scandal of the limitations of this same companionship.

The other safeguard, the other instrument is prayer, entreaty, because if it is true that faith is a grace, but if it is also true that it is an act of freedom, then we have to ask, to ask precisely to be able to say yes. In our communities we must pray. Our companionship must sustain everyone’s faith, must call us to a life that we instinctively would not live. If there is no prayer, the true horizon of our companionship is missing, and then only our stumbling humanity will remain, without any reminder. And we fall into forgetfulness of Christ.

And so our life is really a ritual of grace and entreaty, where my faithfulness and my journey in this companionship is possible because of His faithfulness, because of His grace. But His grace, being constantly

revived, arouses in us more and more the desire for faithfulness, that is, to love to the end, to answer to the end.

8. THE VERIFICATION OF FAITH

Faith is trust in what Christ has told me through the companionship I have met. And Christ—let’s say it again so I never forget it—declares Himself to be the answer to all my heart’s desire. But “if Christ is truly the answer to my life, to our life, this somehow has to be ‘seen’” (L. Giussani, “Milano 1954: cronaca di una nascita” [Milan 1954: Chronicle of a Birth], *30 giorni*, no. 11/1988, p. 45).

The beginning of the journey of faith, that is, of this trust in the words of Another, can be difficult. Let us free ourselves, however, from saying: I am not able to say, “Christ,” that is not the problem! You are invited to trust in the words of another: that is how you come, by grace, to say Christ! The beginning of this path of faith and trust also immediately opens up the path of the verification of faith.

The verification of faith, then, consists in verifying whether, by having trust, faith, in the announcement of Christ that is made to me, my life changes, my whole life changes. Not whether I can change myself, but whether my faith (the Presence I recognize), my trust in Him makes life new, that is, whether my life begins to be filled with the exceptionality I have seen, whether I begin to experience in me, in my life, in all the “continents of my life,” the victory of Christ present.

“Verifying, realizing the truth of the announcement that has been made to us: but through what, in what way? By trying to face all the problems of our life keeping that thing in mind, having that faith in our hearts, in the light of faith; and if faith is the recognition of a presence, face all the problems of existence in the light of that presence” (*ibid.*).

The verification of faith then stems from a desire, a need that emerges in us in the encounter with Christ within the Church. It

is a desire for a totality: the desire that everything may have to do with the encounter (for if You are God, then everything has to do with You), with that exceptional man. Everything is charged with a promise of exceptionality. Everything can be made new by this encounter. It is only this totality that truly corresponds, to the core, to our heart (because our heart is infinite need). Let's listen to this passage from Bergoglio in the preface to *The Religious Sense*: "Human beings cannot be content with reductive or partial answers that force them to censor or neglect some aspect of reality. In fact, however, we do neglect some aspect of reality, and when we do so we are only running away from ourselves. We need a total response that comprehends and saves the entire horizon of the self and our existence. We possess within us a yearning for the infinite, an infinite sadness, a nostalgia [...] which is satisfied only by an equally infinite response. The human heart proves to be the sign of a Mystery, that is, of something or someone who is an infinite response. Outside the Mystery [of God], the needs for happiness, love, and justice never meet a response that fully satisfies the human heart. Life would be an absurd desire if this response did not exist." (<https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2023/05/05/bergoglio-the-religious-sense>, L. Giussani, *Il senso religioso*, Milan: Bur, 2023, p. X). The verification of faith is the way to discover that Christ is true, more and more, and that He is the answer to my whole life, to my whole heart. The verification of faith is the discovery that Christ is the victory over the absurd, is the victory of the Mystery over the absurd.

9. TOTALITY AND JOURNEY

We have said that the verification of faith is a journey. This totality that we desire, to see that Christ changes all of life, that He has something to say about all of life's circumstances, is the goal of the journey. "What

made our friendship alive was the claim of totality" (L. Giussani, "Milano 1954: cronaca di una nascita" [Milan 1954: Chronicle of a Birth], *ibid.*, p. 46).

"There are whole continents of my life," we said to one another, quoting Biffi, "where the cross of Christ has not yet been planted" (G. Biffi, *La multiforme sapienza di Dio* [The Multiform Wisdom of God], Siena: Cantagalli, 2014, p. 114). As Martino rightly told us, this is a positive phrase, painfully positive, because it signals a lacking but promises a journey. A totality is the goal, but it is also an experience that is already in action; it is the goal and it is the journey, it is something that it is already in action. This life in the light of the Presence that we have encountered is like a dawn—according to Fr. Giussani's image—in which there is still darkness but light is already present. And this light that begins may be a tiny flame, but it is all loaded with the promise of the midday sun. When the sun is full it will warm, enlighten and make our whole life clearer.

10. A NEW LIFE

We desire to verify that Christ can touch all aspects of existence, and thus make them new. We can rediscover then the three dimensions of Christian life that Giussani quoted so many times and recalled as the expression of this new life. The three dimensions of Christian life are culture, charity and mission.

Culture. The verification of faith concerns first of all the judgment we have about reality, about ourselves and the world, that is, culture. One of you asked, "What does Christ have to do with engineering?" This question needs to be answered.

This work of verification, of discovering the connection between Christ and all of life, we have to live it first of all in our studies. We may say that regarding this aspect we are somewhat lacking. Not in the sense that we

do not study enough, but that we live out our study disconnected from the encounter we have made. On my visits to the communities during the past year, quite seldom the topic of study came up in our assemblies. This weakness of ours came out resoundingly—and amusingly—last night, during the beautiful testimonies of our friends on Erasmus: out of four testimonies, no one ever mentioned study!

I believe this also depends on the fact that we are immersed in a culture that makes us live college worrying all the time about deadlines, grade point average, the level that must be reached to earn the next step, career. When do we enjoy studying? When are we surprised by what we discover? When do we marvel at the beauty of a new thing we have discovered? Without leaving out all the other aspects, which are also important (of course the exam must go well), the real enjoyment in studying is the surprise of grasping the connection between what I study and my happiness, the surprise of the fact that what I study has something to do with my destiny, with my happiness, that is, it has something to do with Christ. We have to help each other in this. Study is the first area where we have to do this verification of faith.

The verification of faith is also played out in a judgment of current events. How many provocations is reality offering us, that are waiting for this verification, for this culture! What, for example, does the encounter we had have to say about the world's gaze on man, which is now shared by everyone in an absolutely standardized way, whereby everything thinks the same way about affection, about the meaning of birth and death, about man envisaged solely as a holder of subjective rights?

Our friend was asking how to learn about the Church's teachings on life. I think this is a fair question, to be lived in a proper and beautiful way. The question is fair because if Christ has something to do with every-

thing, and the announcement of Christ is made to me in this company, then I want to know what this companionship's opinion on things is. This companionship—the Church—has been carrying out a verification of faith for 2,000 years. I would like us all to have the humility to ask those who have already done this verification what they think about life. It is right then, indeed essential, to desire to know and to understand what the Church thinks. It is clear, however, that if the way to know what the Church thinks were only to organize refresher courses, we would get tired of it, it would quickly become dry.

I recommend two ways to learn to look at the world and in light of the Church's teachings as well: the first is to live our proposals to the full, to assimilate the content we propose (I am referring to the School of Community, the judgments we suggest, the books we recommend, etc.). The second is to deepen the teachings of the Church starting from the provocations that reality puts before us. For example, at the *diaconia* in Milan at the end of the year, one of us asked a question about a meeting held at the Polytechnic University on same-sex parenthood. We said to each other that we are going to get help to explore this issue and give a judgment on it. I think this cultural work is important for all of us. It would be wonderful if some of us could make an effort to help everyone in this work of systematically judging current events, to support the journey of all of us towards verifying our faith.

Charity. The second aspect of verification is charity. Charity is a new love. We are called to look at others (dad, mom, classmate, friend, boy and girl) with this question, "What does Christ have to do with you?" Our relationships become filled with newness, trepidation, intensity, depth and capacity for expectation, respect, gratuitousness. Because if you have anything to do with the mystery of God, I kneel before you,

I adore you, I don't "grab" you like we grab an object we own. The culmination of charity is virginity, it is learning to look at the other person by loving him or her as a sign of the mystery of God, as being in connection with Christ. Think about what it means to look at relationships like this, to live like this, with this deep sense of the Presence of the mystery of God within, with a detachment that is not empty but full of the beauty of God! Hence that relationship with that friend has to do with the everything that I experienced in the movement, with these days, with the glacier we saw on the hike, it has to do with everything! That relationship in this moment is full of the whole of history, of the world, of God. The charity that comes from faith is to love Christ in every man. Egied Van Broeckhoven says in his book *L'amizizia* [Friendship], "Lord, make me meet in every man the unexplored land—the mystery—that you are." Charity even among us, this gaze among us, is an outstanding feature of Christ. He looked at every man this way: "They belonged to you, and you gave them to me" (cf. Jn 17:6).

Mission. There is one last aspect of this new life that I want to emphasize, mission.

Those who encountered Christ were struck by His love for man, by His boundless passion for every man, by His passion so deep that He gave everything for man: "He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end." (Jn 13:1). "While we were still sinners Christ died for us." (Rm 5:8). "God [...] has loved me and given Himself up for me" (Gal 2:20). The extraordinary passion for mankind was one of His characteristic features and was the fruit of His love for the Father, because He lived out His relationship with the Father in every encounter.

One of the characteristics of the new, exceptional life brought by Christ, the new life that we want to discover more and more, is the passion for all men. Our friends who

returned from Erasmus last night recounted this beautifully. For fellow students, for friends, for their own family, for everyone. It is a sincere, not contrived, and deep yearning that everyone may be as happy as we are. No one is indifferent to us anymore. It is the great victory over the withdrawal into self and individualism, the selfishness that so often grips our lives. It is victory over the pettiness of our narrow perspective, full of calculation. It is a life dominated by a passion for the other and thus for mission, so that everyone may know, so that everyone may be enlightened by that dawn of full happiness that is life with Christ.

CONCLUSION

Projected image:

Christ the Saviour, by A. Rublëv.

Let us return to our Rublëv icon. At some point in history, the trail of this icon was lost until it was fortunately found again. Being a fairly large wooden board, it had been used in a barn as a floorboard, with the image facing downward. It is all ruined because it has been in contact with moisture, as well as trampled on. Extraordinarily, however, the only part that has not been worn away is the face of Christ. When it was found, it was found that everything had been worn away, but that face remained. From the dirt on the floor of a stable that face emerged!

The point of our companionship is to be accompanied to discover "that" Face, which even today may be buried in dirt and forgetfulness. But Christ is faithful: no dirt and forgetfulness will ever wear down His face. This companionship accompanies us to discover Him again and again.

