

JONE ECHARRI CARRASCOSA

Good afternoon everyone. First of all I wanted to say one thing: what I will now say to you has its origin in a long and grateful belonging to the movement. The second thing is the fate, or rather the grace, of having assisted Father Giussani in the final years of his illness. These are, let us say, the origins. I am Jone, a neurological physiotherapist; I have worked for 42 years and now it has been my turn to experience infirmity on the other side.

Guillain-Barré disease destroys the myelin sheath that allows the transmission of all nerve impulses at great speed; this sheath disappeared from all the nerves in my body, causing total paralysis of the musculoskeletal system; it also damaged my chewing, swallowing, breathing, sensitivity, speech, everything. I knew I was in bed because I saw it, but not because I felt that I was in bed. I entered the hospital on my feet and within a few hours I was in intensive care, intubated, with tubes everywhere and even a machine to assist my breathing.

Then—in that moment—I said to myself: “But who am I?”, because I remembered Father Giussani and the depth with which he said the word “I”. This he taught to us all. In that moment, I came to say: “I am You.” And so in that moment there, so serious, I said to this You: “Yes, yes, yes.” Three times! And there my adventure began. There I immediately received the [answer] to the question: “Who am I?” Immediately afterwards. I experienced that my person had a dignity that did not come from outside, it was He who gave it to me; paralyzed and without any attraction, I realized that my dignity came from belonging to Him.

The intensive care unit is, as those who have been there know, a rather unpleasant place. I was also remembering a lot Father Gius’ suffering in his last days and immediately, seeing his realism, I asked him: “What is my place? What is this situation called?” Immediately I understood, immediately I gave it a name: the name was ‘cross’, that was the cross. But there I understood that the cross... I wanted to understand more and I remembered this phrase that Father Giussani had said so many times: “The circumstances through which God has us pass are essential factors of our vocation.” So there I said: the cross is also this fidelity to the vocation for the knowledge of Christ, but it is a knowledge that does not end there. I was also given this knowledge to affirm and enjoy His resurrection.

There, in that occasion there, I saw that the Lord was manifesting himself to me alive and active through many signs. And what are these signs? Because otherwise this may seem something stratospheric. But no, the sign He gave me, the first sign, is peace. But not a psychological peace, not as the world gives it. How can I define it? I experienced an affective satisfaction that one experiences when they know that their life is strongly sustained by a greater Other. This for me was experiencing peace. I experienced a gladness and sometimes even a cheerfulness—as I will mention later—in the midst of extreme weakness.

Faced with these facts, it was as if my reason was forced to recognize what was happening in me and in others, which I will talk about now. Because [in front of] what was happening in me the doctors and nurses realized something and one even named it. I will tell you this fact: he was a professor who came in with seven medical students. He stood in front of me and said to his students: “Look, we have come here to learn from these very serious patients, but there is also another kind of knowledge, one is faith and this lady who is before us has it.” I was amazed because I did not speak, [I] said to myself: “How is this possible?” I was moving my eyes, opening and moving my eyes saying: “Yes, yes, it is faith, that’s what it is,” but clearly I could not speak.

Another small fact is that the doctors gathered to talk about the ICU patients and then also talked about me. Then [they] said to me, four or five doctors: “Jone, we have to sedate you because you are intubated and the situation is quite unpleasant”; and another doctor said: “But why do we have to sedate her if she is calm?”; and they did not sedate me.

Another surprise was that in intensive care, people stay for a short time; instead days, weeks, months would pass, and I would be there; and then I would say to myself: "Look, the Lord has called me here and here I wish to respond to him." And so that place, which was unpleasant and continued to be unpleasant, became beloved—it became loved. Do not ask me how that was [possible]; I do not know, but I know who did it.

The second thing I understood there, in that moment, was the value of the instant that you, Davide, a short while ago, were saying about Giussani, that from the moment he heard Corti there was no trivial instant. So, it also happened to me that in that circumstance I had no more than the instant, but I did not want that circumstance to be a parenthesis in my life. That is why Giussani always said that the instant is for eternity. I said to myself: "Every instant, even if it seems trivial—because for the world there is [nothing] more trivial than depending on everything—, following Father Giussani, has the dignity of the relationship with Christ; precisely because of that relationship it has this dignity and when it enters into that instant it fills it with meaning and eternity, because everything that Christ touches is eternal, and then the instant is no longer lost because it is eternal." And I became aware of a phrase by Cardinal Tauran that has marked me greatly in my life, whom many of you will know. He said to me: "Jone, time is not for something that passes, but for someone who comes." And that gave me great courage. I understood then that what is trivial to the world, has immense value if it is offered.

I also realized that, in his loving plan, God may also allow pain and suffering, but always, always, it is for a good, and for a greater good. I can testify to this. Then I realized that Christ had won in me; and if he had won in me, he had won in me, in you and in the world. And there a great joy came over me, because I saw that those four walls opened wide to the world.

I was paralyzed, but I was alive and active, because I knew that everything had a meaning that gave me an Other: the value of the moment. But I also had my struggles with Him, because I offered that, but it seemed to me at times that He took more from me than what I offered Him, because I had many 'electric currents' and so on. And I said: "Enough, it is too much!", and for a while I did not offer Him [anything] any more.

I will open a parenthesis that has helped me a lot in life, and I think it can help you too. One day I asked Father Giussani: "Listen, Gius, are you always before that Presence? Do you always live from memory?" He told me: "No, sometimes I offer, I want to offer everything, then I get into reality, I start doing things and many times I feel outside of myself [pay attention to the words: 'outside of myself']. And when I come home and I see the chasm, and that I have been caught in this chasm, I become aware in that moment and I recover the ten hours that I was outside of Him."

So this—back to the offering I was talking about—helped me a lot to understand what was happening to me, because at a [certain] point I was not offering [anything], but I was not happy, I was not calm, serene. I used to say: "I lack an ultimate foundation of surrender, of trust." Then my own freedom gave way and I said: "I totally adhere." That was my first reason, that my freedom gave way; but the second reason was this, I said: "But if I do not adhere to Him, I curb the freedom of Christ to continue to manifest Himself to me." And so I said something to Him: "Look, there is no time or space in you, so I offer you what I did not offer you yesterday, the day before yesterday, and the day before yesterday, I offer it to you now." And then I also realized something very important: that we offer with our human heart, but He takes everything with His divine power, and there is a big difference, quite a difference!

Now everyone says to me: "Look, you have been through a lot, forget about everything, look ahead, do not worry." I reply: "No, no, I do not need to forget about anything, not a thing. No, because it is true that the suffering, the 'electric currents', the so many other things that I have experienced were not positive, but all of this has been filled with such great positivity, with

such a great knowledge of Christ, that I do not need to forget anything, because what I have been given has been so much more than what I have suffered.”

So, all this that I have told you about would be impossible to live without the vocational companionship, and the first companionship I have to take into account is Carras, my husband, who has helped me so much, [and then] the groups of friends, really dear friends, even priests, and also *Memores*, especially our *Memores* neighbors who have helped me so much in living this situation.

Lastly, I must tell you something, that when I was in hospital, a vicar—who is from the movement—and his bishop came, because that hospital belonged to their care, and so they asked me: “What happened to you?” In half a minute I told them, but I [also] told them this: “The most important thing is not so much the illness, but what I have learnt: that Christ does not deceive, because as he said to Martha: ‘Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing.’ Then I realized that this ‘One’ corresponds exhaustively to the heart even in an extreme situation like mine.”