

“WITH AGE-OLD LOVE I HAVE LOVED YOU; SO I HAVE KEPT MY MERCY TOWARD YOU” (Jeremiah 31:3)

Message of Pope Francis and Greeting of Davide Prospero*

Introduction

Father Fabio

“With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you” (Jeremiah 31:13). These are the words that God brought forth on the lips of the prophet Jeremiah while the people of Israel found themselves in great difficulty, in exile, far from their own beloved land, under the dominion of other regimes, with the temptation to serve idols. God, to raise them up, to reawaken them, to show His faithfulness to His people, through the voice and the face of Jeremiah, says to them: “I have loved you, I continue to love you with an age-old love; from always and forever I continue to be faithful to you.” Through our poor faces and our miserable lives, we would like to stay in front of these same words and this same Face, that is, the face of God, to help each other in these days.

As Matteo Severgnini (Seve) told us before, each of us knows well how we got on the bus this morning (or last night!), what we bring in her heart, what situation we find ourselves living in our family, what events we are facing at school and with our friends, what desires are stirring in our hearts! And so, just like the people of Israel was reborn and continually built up by leaning on the faithfulness of God to His Covenant,¹ so each of us can rise up, by putting ourselves on the path again, by recognizing the title of this Triduum as personally addressed to us. Another prophet, Isaiah, “develops” these words further. Think about the tenderness with which God turns to each one of us: “I will never forget you. See, upon the palms of my hands I have written your name; your walls are ever before me.”² “I have called you by name: you are mine.”³ This is not the same old invitation to the Triduum (even for those who belong to GS!), the initiative that God takes with you, the God who calls you, invites you and speaks your name!⁴ “For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, »

* [Message of Pope Francis and greeting of Davide Propseri to the young people of Gioventù Studentesca gathered in Rimini from 28-30 March for the Easter Triduum.](#)

¹ “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

² Isaiah 49:15-16.

³ Isaiah 43:1.

⁴ “You are not here by accident. The Lord has called you, not only in these days, but from the very beginning of your days. He called you by name. Let us listen to the word of God that called us by name. Try to imagine these three words written in large letters. Then consider that they were written within you, on your hearts, as if setting the direction of your lives, the meaning of who you are: you have been *called by name*. Each of us is *called by name*. You, you and you, all of us here, myself included; all of us have been called by name. Not impersonally, but by name. Think of this: Jesus called me by name. His words are inscribed in our hearts, and we come to realize that they are written in the hearts of every one of us, as a kind of title that tells people who we are, who you are. *You have been called by name*. None of us is a Christian by chance; all of us were called

» your savior... Because you are precious in my eyes and glorious, and because I love you... Fear not, for I am with you."⁵ We are not just here individually; we are His, we are children of the Church, which is the body of which Christ is the head.⁶ This is a deep truth: we are together, we are His members.⁷ The Movement is the story that has taken hold of us through the charism given to Father Giussani.⁸ And it is for this reason that now, in so far as we are members of the body of Christ, animated by the Holy Spirit, called together by the Holy Spirit, with attention and delicately, without making noise, we stand up, and pray together singing the *Descend, Holy Spirit*.

Descend, Holy Spirit.

Now, Seve has already done the "official" greetings, so permit me to take only a few seconds for a couple of greetings of my own. First of all, a warm welcome to those who are here for the first time: I am not thinking only about the kids in first or second year of high school, but I also address those who have been invited here for the first time (maybe in third, fourth, or fifth year) and who have accepted the invitation of a friend or an adult. You are truly welcome! Next, another greeting to those who were here last year, and "survived!"—can we say that?—and chose with awareness, because of all that you saw and experienced last Triduum and during the year, to return again to Rimini! Then, another greeting is for those who maybe do not have much conviction, or for those who maybe belong to another religious tradition: Father Giussani loved to walk a part of the road with anyone he met, because of his passionate love for the destiny of each person, and therefore another welcome to you from the heart!

1. The desire for a unified life

And so—as you will have noted!—we have started in "fifth gear," putting our attention right away on the title of the Triduum, precisely because we have in our heart this desire to help each other to stay in front of the face of God the Father (as we heard in the song): "Thou my great Father, I Thy true son."⁹ And so we can't wait to tell you all: you are here, you exist, »

by name. At the beginning of the story of our lives, before any talents we may have, before any shadows or wounds we may be carrying in our hearts, we were called. Why? Because we are loved" (Francis, *Welcome Address at World Youth Day*, Lisbon, Portugal, 3 August 2023).

⁵ Isaiah 43:3-5.

⁶ "The Church is Christ's continuance in history, time, and space, the means by which Christ continues to be present in history in a particular way. It is also the method by which the Spirit of Christ mobilizes the world towards truth, justice, and happiness. In summary, the Church stands before the world as a social reality filled with the divine. In other words, it presents itself both as a human and a divine reality. This is the crux of the problem: a human phenomenon claiming to be the bearer of the divine" (Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2001, p. 119).

⁷ "The Church, however, is not only a body built in the Spirit: the Church is the Body of Christ! And this is not simply a catchphrase: indeed, we truly are! It is the great gift that we receive on the day of our Baptism! In the sacrament of Baptism, indeed, Christ makes us his, welcoming us into the heart of the mystery of the Cross, the supreme mystery of his love for us, in order to cause us to then be raised with him, as new beings. See: in this way the Church is born, and in this way the Church is recognized as the Body of Christ! Baptism constitutes a true rebirth, which regenerates us in Christ, renders us a part of Him, and unites us intimately among ourselves, as limbs of the same body, of which He is the Head (cf. Rm 12:5; 1 Cor 12:12-13). What springs from it then, is a profound communion of love" (Francis, *General Audience*, 22 October 2014).

⁸ "I express my personal gratitude for the good it did for me, as a priest, to contemplate some of Fr Giussani's books—as a young priest—and I do so also as universal Pastor for all that he knew how to sow and spread everywhere for the good of the Church. And how could those who were his friends, children and disciples not remember him with heartfelt gratitude? Thanks to his impassioned priestly paternity in communicating Christ, they grew in faith as a gift that gives meaning, human breadth and hope to life. Fr Giussani was a father and teacher, he was a servant to all the human anxieties and situations that he encountered in his educational and missionary passion. The Church recognizes his pedagogical and theological genius, deployed from a charism that was given to him by the Holy Spirit for the 'common good'" (Francis, *Audience with the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, 15 October 2022).

⁹ "Be Thou My Vision," Irish Hymn, VIII Century.

» because you have been created and loved by a God who is Father and has made you His children by means of Baptism!¹⁰ But then, why are we here? Each of you received a letter of personal invitation and we are here in these three days to help each other stay in front of this Face, fixed upon which we can *sing with a reason*, that introduces us to the discovery of encountering and knowing *That for which we are made*.¹¹

Reading your contributions—I really thank you from the heart: there were so many and I have to say they were really profound!—there emerged in a powerful way the need that your life, that our life, not run on two parallel lines that do not meet and, to infinity, will never meet: on the one hand the line of GS, the Raggio, Sunday Mass, prayer, on the other hand the line of everyday life, that is, study, sport, free time, relationship with your girlfriend, with your boyfriend, school, family, music... Just like two parallel lines that never meet!¹² When I am at GS, I “adjust” myself to a certain logic or dynamic, but then, when I am at a party on Saturday night, or when I want to organize a New Year’s celebration with my friends, I use another logic, another criteria. Many of us have experienced, instead, the desire for a united, not a fragmented life. Here is what one of you says: “Recently, I feel stronger than ever the need to live life to the full, walking toward my destiny. In this sense, I want a life that does not close up reality into stagnant compartments, I want to grasp the presence of what I think is a greater Love.” “Take yourselves seriously, help each other to look at everything, everything!, with eyes and heart open,” wrote another girl! So, we recognize the need for a life that not “schizophrenic,” we want to begin to taste and to savor a faith that coincides with life, that rediscovers in daily life the whole benefit, the pertinence of Christ and of Christianity to our own existence!¹³ We want to discover truly how that eternal and faithful Love reaches me in life, how we can experience Him in life, taking hold of my flesh and my blood: “In both moments [the writer is referring to the meetings of GS] it seemed to me that we were speaking about nothing! Put yourselves in my shoes: how can this give a meaning to my waking up tomorrow, in the concrete? Many times, what we speak about at the Raggio dissolves in front of this question. I have a visceral need, though. The philosophizing that »

¹⁰ “Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit (*vitae spiritualis ianua*), and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission: ‘Baptism is the sacrament of regeneration through water in the word’” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1213).

¹¹ Francesco Ventorino, “The Truth Is the Destiny for Which We Were Made,” Rimini Meeting, 20 August 2007.

¹² “Confessing with the lips indicates in turn that faith implies public testimony and commitment. A Christian may never think of belief as a private act. Faith is choosing to stand with the Lord so as to live with him. This ‘standing with him’ points towards an understanding of the reasons for believing. Faith, precisely because it is a free act, also demands social responsibility for what one believes. The Church on the day of Pentecost demonstrates with utter clarity this public dimension of believing and proclaiming one’s faith fearlessly to every person. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us fit for mission and strengthens our witness, making it frank and courageous” (Benedict XVI, Apostolic Letter in the form of “*Motu Proprio*” *Porta Fidei*, 11 October 2011, n. 10). “The new things which God gives to our lives are lasting, not only in the future, when we will be with him, but today as well. God is even now making all things new; the Holy Spirit is truly transforming us, and through us he also wants to transform the world in which we live... How beautiful it would be if each of you, every evening, could say: Today at school, at home, at work, guided by God, I showed a sign of love towards one of my friends, my parents, an older person! How beautiful!” (Francis, *Homily*, 28 April 2013).

¹³ “The educational line of the Movement tends to arouse an event in life. In order for life to be reawakened we need to abolish every dualism (for example, between the community and the private sphere in which our individual interests are condensed). What destroys dualism is the judgment that the love of Christ is the reason for which it is worthwhile to live. If faith as the uniting value is lacking, there emerge instead only partial judgments of value and this divides: in consequence, the mystery of communion is not the factor from which we face everything and therefore there is no longer a unitary point at the origing of things. If this is destroyed, dualism becomes a real cultural presence” (Luigi Giussani, “Comunità cristiana e cultura” [Christian community and culture], edited by Laura Cioni, *CL Litterae Communionis*, n. 6/1977, p. 9), translation ours.

» often characterizes Raggio is not enough for me." Another contribution we received puts the question even more dryly: "Is there something for which it is truly worthwhile to live?! To get up in the morning?!"

In the letter we wrote to all of you, we wanted to pose this pro-vocation ("pro," in your favor, in favor of your life, of your "vocation"): "The gestures that punctuate the life of Gioventù Studentesca—the Triduum, the Beginning Day, the Winter and Summer Vacations, the Équipe—desire to be a help to a seriousness of life with ourselves and a boost for 'living reality intensely...without denying or forgetting anything,' such that they introduce us to the 'meaning of reality.'" We invite you to these gestures not as a parenthesis, for a "how beautiful," and then come another four months of sleeping, then another grand experience, which are followed by another three months in the tunnel...No, we want instead to recover in these days a unity of living, a seriousness of life, not in the sense that we are always serious and thoughtful, but in the sense that we do not want to censor anything of what happens in order to grasp the connection between the particular that we live and the Whole.¹⁴ There is war between Russia and Ukraine: how does this challenge me? How does it challenge my faith? There is war between Israel and Palestine. How does this pose questions to my life? In France, there was constitutionally declared the right to interrupt the innocent human life of a baby in the womb: how does this call on me? Are there adults with whom I can face these questions? In my school there is a sit-in, and so how does this provoke me? In my school a guy killed himself, as one of you wrote: "A little while ago, one of my friends took his life. In front of such a great evil I was not able to understand the fact that 'he took his life,' and not that 'it was taken from him.' And yet, we say that 'The greatest gift that was given to us is life,' but how can this be true? I continued to be angry, because something or someone had brought my friend to say that 'there is nothing here for me anymore.' This pain in seeing my friend take his life makes me think: 'What allows me to go on in life?' It is not enough to have a girlfriend or to get good grades like my friend had, and so what is it that allows you to go on and not fall in life? What keeps us alive? What holds us in life?" How does this provoke me, what does faith have to say to me and my friends, or about the way we are together and use our time? Father Giussani is a father to us when he assures us: "I simply want to say that faith, by corresponding to our life each day, having a power to change—to influence and to change—everyday life, faith is useful, in every sense. Saint Paul says it: *pietas*, piety, the sense of God, is the highest factor with which to resolve things, because it contains the promise for the future and for the present."¹⁵ Giussani is here echoing a phrase of Jesus, "Whoever follows Me will have the hundred fold here below"¹⁶ that is, I can taste life a hundred times more, can love my classmates a hundred times more, can love my girlfriend a hundred times more, can love my boyfriend a hundred times more, can love my days a hundred times more, my parents, to love the present, not flee from it! If faith were not useful to life, what would we be doing here?! What we will live, speak about, and hear in these days, then, is not a »

¹⁴ "The verification is, begins, from the fact that faith gives you an interest in everything, that is, as the document says, it makes you present also in the elections. We participate in university elections, we will be present, because of a fact of new life that makes us interested in everything, wherever we are; a fact of new life that, if on the one hand identifies us, on the other hand calls us to be, to react to things. Our true difficulty is not that we are uninterested in the elections, but rather that our humanity has not been grasped from within by the faith, is that we do not have faith, faith is still at the level of a three year old, of a five year old, of a ten year old, of a twenty year old, of a fifty year old, of all those Christians around us, despite the encounter we have had. Here is the point." (Luigi Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza*, 1975-1978 [From Utopia to Presence], BUR, Milan 2006, pp. 154-155), translation ours.

¹⁵ Luigi Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere* [The I, power, works], Marietti 1820, Genoa 2000, pp. 140-141, translation ours.

¹⁶ Cf. Matthew 19:29.

» brush stroke, a veneer of religion on the wall of our lives, a spray of a couple drops of religious perfume on our body, but a help to discover the pertinence of Christ to the needs and evidences of our heart and our reason¹⁷

2. Going to the root of our questions

In order to discover the benefit and pertinence of faith in the Father, revealed in His Son, by means of the Holy Spirit, we have to descend to the depth, to the deepest root of the question, as one of you expressly asked in a contribution: "To understand the root of the question, the fundamental question, is a decisive step. Those questions about which Giussani speaks: these are the root of everything. A simple oral exam in class became the occasion of a question, in general, about who I am and what I truly desire. Can you help me to travel this road?"

So, in order to enter into this discovery, it seems useful to read together a text that had pierced me through when I read it in Seminary during our class on Theological Anthropology and Eschatology: "For a few days now I manage to sit on the bed only for half an hour and for the rest of the day I am immobilized. My heart does not want to beat. This morning the professor [the doctor came by to check on him] said something that sounded like 'be ready.' For what? Certainly it is difficult to die young! I have to be ready for the fact that at the beginning of next week I will have passed away; and I am not ready. The pain digs at me in an almost unbearable way, but what seems to me to be truly unbearable is that I am not ready. The worst thing is that, when I look to heaven, it is dark. Night falls, but there is no star that shines over me in which I can immerse my eyes. Mama, I have never thought about God, but now I feel [I realize!] that there exists something [Someone!] that we do not know, something mysterious, a power into whose hands we fall, to which we have to give an answer. And my pain is that I do not know who he is. If only I knew him [Keep in mind this 'if only I knew him,' because tomorrow it will jump out in the songs and the lesson]! Mama, remember how you, with us kids, used to walk in the forest, in the darkness that was falling, to meet dad when he returned from work? Sometimes we ran ahead of you and we found ourselves all of a sudden alone. We went forward a few steps in the dark: what fear with those unknown steps!"—Imagine, let us imagine the scene: the mother remained a little behind, she cannot "protect" us, we are outside her sphere of "security," dad is not yet home and the fear increases. . . you are in the middle of the forest, in darkness, and you ask yourself: What is that getting closer to us? Could it be a wild animal? Could it be a dangerous man? What could it be!?... "What joy when we recognized that the step was the step of the dad we loved. And now, in the solitude [here in my bed!], I hear again the steps that I do not know. »

¹⁷ "I have always asked my students at school and at the university, and even those whom I have met in subsequent years, to compare what they hear, the judgments they read, and even the ideas that I have communicated to them, with their own elementary experience, with the needs and the constitutive elements of their humanity. I never asked them to accept my words as truth, but instead to learn this method, because it is only in this way that the essence of intelligence is in action. In my educational work, I have always sought to respect this method which I consider essential for anyone in education who intends to be true and honest with themselves and with those they teach. Only in this way, in fact, can the educational relationship become a source of freedom, a possibility for true understanding and an authentically critical conscience. Thus, the content of an education cannot be communicated except by its relationship and correspondence to life's needs. For this reason, the one who educates is 'constrained' to always remain young, that is, to always be wide-open to reality, and to always feel the newness of the words he uses, even if he has been using them for many years. This method and purpose of education forced me to demonstrate how Christian faith is pertinent to life's needs, and even an exaltation of rationality. I felt this was very important in my first years as an educator when during the 'raggi'—the meetings we used to have at school for reflection on one's human experiences—there were all kinds of students, from atheists to Jews to Protestants. We were interested in taking our own humanity seriously, in going to the depths of the original reality that is at the depth of each one of us, in the comparison with a proposal that could give more reasonable sense to lived experience and the needs one feels" (Luigi Giussani, "[Seriously Engaged in One's Own Life](#)," edited by Holly Peterson, *Traces*, n. 10/2005).

» Why do I not know him? You told me how I have to dress and how I have to behave in life, how to eat, how to succeed. You were worried about me and you didn't get tired with all this worry. I remember that you, on Christmas Eve, went to Mass with us kids. I remember also the prayer in the evening that you sometimes suggested to me. You always directed us to be honest ["Listen up, behave well!"]. But all this now for me is melting like snow in the sun. Why did you speak about so many things and never said anything about Jesus Christ? Why did you not help me to know the sound of his steps, in a way that helped me to recognize if it is him [like the father] who comes to me in this last night and in the solitude of death?"¹⁸ In such a way, that is, that I could know if the one who awaits me is a Father?!

Here, I think, there is little to add... It is so present in the depth of our heart,¹⁹ maybe buried under interminable hours on social media or TV series, or maybe forgotten behind some transgression, which in any case is no longer much a transgression because it is so widespread. "I am always bored, laziness is destroying me, I don't have any more passion. All that I liked to do is now boring to me. Before, however much I struggled, I was interested in finding a girlfriend, doing well in school, drawing, doing things that made me happy, but now I am only looking for sex, alcohol and joints, getting high. Not thinking helps me do better. My life in these months consists in sleeping as much as possible and partying, drinking, and smoking. Around me I see people that are always better, happier, and I see them always further away from me, others instead who are dying inside and I do not know how to trust ["if only I knew him"] those I would ask for help because everyone seems so far from me and unable to help or understand me. I recognize the beautiful things that the adults and my friends tell me and I understand them and I am convinced that they can help me, but I am not able to do it: when I have a choice in front of me between getting high and staying sober, I always choose to get high and it is not that I do it with bitterness, I am really happy to do it. So I don't know how to move myself because this is not enough for me." But what kind of happiness is it that, in order to be happy, has to forget about reality, not to think, has to flee, to escape from reality and annihilate itself in the exile of unconsciousness!? Is this the most we are able to aspire to for the next eighty years!? There is a gravitational pull—that pulls us down: "I would like to do good, but I find myself doing evil," said Saint Paul about himself.²⁰ This is what we call sin: "*Aversio a Deo et conversio ad creaturas.*"²¹ So, if this is the deep root of the question, if this is often the way we resign ourselves to "living," maybe the invitation of Virgil to Dante is more reasonable: "It is another path that you must follow," he answered, when he saw me weeping, "if you would flee this wild and savage place."²² »

¹⁸ Francesco Scanziani and Cecilia Pirrone, *I figli ci parlano di Dio. Una psicologa e un prete in dialogo con la famiglia* [The children speak to us about God. A psychologist and a priest in dialogue with the family], Ancora, Milan (2008) 2014, pp. 161-162, translation ours.

¹⁹ "No-one can avoid this questioning, neither the philosopher nor the ordinary person. The answer we give will determine whether or not we think it possible to attain universal and absolute truth; and this is a decisive moment of the search. Every truth—if it really is truth—presents itself as universal, even if it is not the whole truth. If something is true, then it must be true for all people and at all times. Beyond this universality, however, people seek an absolute which might give to all their searching a meaning and an answer—something ultimate, which might serve as the ground of all things. In other words, they seek a final explanation, a supreme value, which refers to nothing beyond itself and which puts an end to all questioning. Hypotheses may fascinate, but they do not satisfy. Whether we admit it or not, there comes for everyone the moment when personal existence must be anchored to a truth recognized as final, a truth which confers a certitude no longer open to doubt" (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the relationship between faith and reason *Fides et Ratio*, 18 September 1998, n. 27).

²⁰ Cf. Romans 7:18-25.

²¹ "Aversion from God and conversion to creatures," Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, 12.6. "Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience; it is failure in genuine love for God and neighbor caused by a perverse attachment to certain goods. It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity. It has been defined as 'an utterance, a deed, or a desire contrary to the eternal law'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1849).

²² Dante, *The Inferno*, translated by Robert and Jean Hollander, Anchor Books, New York 2000, Canto I, vv. 91-93.

» If this path leads me to the nothing of boredom, if this path leads me to tears, if I want to flee from this wilderness, I need to follow another path! And what is that other path? It is the reason why our heart is not left alone and orphaned, in its strength as well as its insufficiency! We need something to sustain this heart! We need someone to knock on it, to love it, to take it in hand, this heart, and in a little while you will understand why!

3. Christ: God made Himself encounterable

We hear how this "other path" begins and continues in this contribution from a girl who the first time she participated in a GS meeting ended up meeting...Seve! From that day last May her whole journey began, a journey that led her to desire to come the Triduum: "Mama, can I go?" "No," she answers." Her letter continues describing what happened in her: "I write you because I have a huge desire to come to the Easter Triduum, but my parents unfortunately do not want to let me come. But when your invitation letter arrived, after having read those words, which contained so much truth, I decided that it could not go unobserved, I wanted to have my mom read it, because if I, now, am able to love her in this purer way, a way that is truer for me, it is because I have come across a truth that I couldn't get past. In fact, if someone is not stupid, she cannot help but go out to meet the beautiful thing she has seen! This is what I did. I did not expect her to change her mind about letting me go to the Triduum, I simply wanted her to understand at least why I hold it so dear, why I hold GS so dear...Seve, unfortunately I will not be there at Rimini, because my parents didn't change their minds, but what I did I would do again a thousand times! And you know what the most beautiful thing was for me? [Keep in mind the title of the Triduum: "With age-old love I have loved you"]. You know what the greatest thing was for me? A year ago, I rediscovered the love of Christ for me, and now I am discovering my love for Christ. Like you said that day in May: 'The heart is made to be knocked on, loved.' I think that this opening the door of my heart to Him again has been one of the most beautiful choices I have ever made. Surely there will also be something great here in the days I have to stay at home." This is what pulls us out of the swamps, out of the quicksand of boredom and lack of meaning, this is what pulls us out of the quicksand of life and makes it flourish: to adhere to a proposal, of life, to a fact that has happened, by verifying it.²³ Let us imagine ourselves drowning in the quicksand: if I try to pull myself out of the quicksand by trying to raise myself alone with my own hand and my own arm, taking myself by the hair, with only the strength of my own desire, of my heart, and I get all agitated, where do I go? I sink! It is only if I grasp the hand of Another that drags me out that I am saved, only when this heart is taken, grabbed, and supported! Christ and the Church, and for us gathered here, the story that has reached us, are the anchor of salvation!²⁴ "With age-old love I have loved you," "Come to me, all you who labor and »

²³ "Christianity is this: it is a fact! A fact. Just as if I punch him and break his glasses, it is a fact that I have broken his glasses, so also this happened: a man who said He was God, or God who was made man, because of which this man says: 'I am God.' The essential category of an answer to the question: 'What is Christianity?' is that of a fact: a fact like Moscow exists, or a fact like he is a priest: he was ordained, it is a fact...Anyway, what is Christianity? It is a man who said He was God, which means, a man who said: 'I am the salvation of your life. I am the meaning of your life'" (Luigi Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza*, op. cit., pp. 305-306), translation ours.

²⁴ "To begin with, the Church's function on the world scene is already implicit in its awareness that it is the protraction of Christ: this means that it has the same function as Jesus in history, which is to educate all men and women to the religious sense, precisely in order to be able to 'save' them. In this context, the religious sense or religiosity means, as we have already pointed out, man's exact position towards his own destiny in terms of conscience and his attempt to live it in practical terms.

Now, within the horizon of this formula lies the question of liberation that Jesus, the Saviour, came to bring. Salvation is generated by the truth of man's position in regard to himself and his ultimate destiny. The definitive word on the structure of each individual person—of our 'I'—and on the history of man cannot come from any

» are burdened, and I will give you rest,²⁵ in a little bit we will see how this love is made concrete in history:²⁶ in the celebration of Holy Mass, in which Christ is really present in the Eucharist. This love is made present through Jesus's washing of the feet of His disciples, through God who knelt down in front of man with this tenderness. We will contemplate it tomorrow afternoon in the *Via Crucis*, when Christ will let his side, his wrists, his feet be pierced. This love is concrete when it becomes flesh and blood in the companionship of friends that surround you!

4. The adhesion of freedom

But between my heart that desires and the companionship of Christ who stretches out His hand, we must make another step: we need the energy of adhesion, of a freedom that makes the decision to engage itself, to grab hold and to risk the adventure!²⁷ There is a phrase of Saint Ambrose that hit me when I read it, for the first time, in Seminary: "No one can separate you from Christ if you do not separate yourself from Him." Father Giussani, in this regard, wrote a booklet entitled *Decision for Existence*: "Human existence represent first of all a decision about what we recognize as our own foundation [...]. It has to do with finding the *unum necessarium*, the one thing necessary, which means that which we recognize as the meaning of ourselves, and therefore as the foundation of all that we do. [...] To verify truly we have to engage all our person with clear and open attention [...]: the problem is the attitude with which we participate [...]. This correct attitude in front of things [...] is expressed by the word morality [...] and coincides with a true availability to that which is proposed, to the real call [...]. We have to throw ourselves in with energy and sacrifice [...]. We have to engage our own freedom in order to recognize the connection between Christian reality and our humanity [...]. There is only one way to block it, to keep it from being fully realized: the vile distraction in which we live, [...] or the wicked rebellion that we permit ourselves."²⁸ But—taking up again Father Giussani—before concluding, we have to ask ourselves: why do we adhere, hold on, decide to undertake this other path, to begin or continue to verify? Out of love for ourselves: "Man is [...] moved solely by love and affection. It is primarily the love for ourselves as destiny, the affection for our own destiny that can convince us to undertake »

impassioned introspection, any scientific analysis, or any of the ideologies which every epoch creates, as the projection of its efforts and limits. This is because all ideologies in history will be hindered by the conditions in which they are born; they will be irreversibly slanted according to the very point of view from which they draw life. The final word on the structure of each human being, and, therefore, on his immanent destiny and history, was made to emerge in history by God: the Word communicated himself to man by becoming flesh" (Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., pp. 147-148).

²⁵ Matthew 11:28.

²⁶ "I repeat this to each of you individually: Christ is alive and he loves you with an infinite love. His love for you is unaffected by your failings or your mistakes. He gave his life for you, so in his love for you he does not wait for you to be perfect. Look at his arms outstretched on the cross, and 'let yourself be saved over and over again.' Walk with him as with a friend, welcome him into your life and let him share all the joys and hopes, the problems and struggles of this time in your lives. You will see that the path ahead will become clearer and that your difficulties will be much less burdensome, because he will be carrying them with you. So pray daily to the Holy Spirit who 'draws you ever more deeply into the heart of Christ, so that you can grow in his love, his life and his power'" (Francis, *Message to Young People for the Fifth Anniversary of the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit*, 25 March 2024).

²⁷ "Freedom and grace. The grace of Christ is not in the slightest way a rival of our freedom when this freedom accords with the sense of the true and the good that God has put in the human heart. On the contrary, as Christian experience attests especially in prayer, the more docile we are to the promptings of grace, the more we grow in inner freedom and confidence during trials, such as those we face in the pressures and constraints of the outer world. By the working of grace the Holy Spirit educates us in spiritual freedom in order to make us free collaborators in his work in the Church and in the world" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1742).

²⁸ Now in Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In search of the human face], BUR, Milan 2007, pp. 95, 111-112, 114, 121, translation ours.

» this work to become habitually detached from our own opinions and our own imaginations [...], so that all of our cognitive energy will be focused upon a search for the truth of the object, no matter what it might be. This love is the ultimate inner stirring, the supreme emotion that persuades us to seek true virtue.²⁹ You see, we are here in order to recognize Him present and to enter into a relationship with Him among us, and we have to engage our own freedom in order to understand the nexus between Christ and our humanity.

Rainer Maria Rilke reached Capri on 4 December 1906, exhausted and in crisis, having just turned thirty years old, and in the house where he was welcomed there hung this sign on the door of his bedroom: "Here, there is a man still alive with a heart that is already dead. Please do not disturb." The heart by itself is not enough, because its question demands and implies the existence of an answer within reach!³⁰ The poet, standing there, tasting the beauty of creation and of the Creator, of being with his friends, sharing a different hypothesis of life, little by little, understands, recovers himself, and writes a letter to his dear friend, in which he says: "We have to hold on, Anita, to this heart that is so great, so difficult to use."³¹

"We have to hold on [reggere] to it." It is interesting that the word "correct" has this etymology: to "reggere" together, co-reggere. In these days, let us hold on together, help each other...and for our whole life! Thus, we finish this introduction with two indications: the first is to ask for humility of heart, not to be here with an attitude that is schematic or presumptuous, more worried about expecting something than about letting ourselves be surprised by what happens. When I go to the jail to do pastoral work, I am struck by some of the inmates who have been locked up for more than forty years! I remain impressed because the position of their freedom has stayed the same, immobile, and unchanged for all this time, they do not let themselves be touched by anything, they are still immobilized and blocked...so, instead we ask, we beg you to have the humility of an open heart, open and curious eyes in order to see what happens, a gaze of love, so we ask you for a humble and loving heart, like the heart of that girl who writes: "I am in love with that love with a capital L and I will never let myself move away from all that is linked to that loving promise." When one falls in love, every detail acquires its proper significance.³²

5. The value of silence

And then—as I think you have intuited (some of you told me that last year this was difficult for you), we also must propose to you the value of the goal of a sacrifice that helps us grow—the second indication is silence: usually we run away from silence, because in silence one has to come to grips with himself or herself and with the good God. Memories, questions, maybe even that which we do not want to admit to ourselves, emerge again. Because of this, in general, we immerse our lives in noise. In these days, precisely because we desire not to censor anything, we propose a true silence, in which the presence of God can find each of us as an interlocutor: *cor ad cor loquitur*, let us allow our heart to speak to the heart of God, and, at the same time, we will discover the surprising desire of God to speak to our heart. "The first indication that something new has happened in us and, therefore, grows (since »

²⁹ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2023, p. 34.

³⁰ Cf. Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, Chapter 5.

³¹ R.M. Rilke in S. Guidi, "Bisogna pur reggerlo questo cuore" [We have to hold on to this heart], *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 March 2024, p. 4, translation ours.

³² "In the experience of a great love the whole world is collected in the I-You relationship, and everything that happens becomes an event in its orbit. The personal element to which in the end love tends and that represents what is highest within the reality of the world, embraces, penetrates, and determines every other form: open space and countryside, rocks, trees, animals...All that is true, but it has a resonance only between this I and this You" (Romano Guardini, *L'essenza del cristianesimo* [The essence of Christianity], Morcelliana, Brescia 1962, p. 12), translation ours.

» the rain sent by God does not come down to earth without bearing fruit), is love for silence. Silence is a search for life, a begging for meaning, therefore for the fullness of life. [...] The first necessity of our journey is silence because only on this condition can we seek the Word of life, the One 'without whom nothing came to be.'³³ On the various bus trips, at our entrance and exit from the hall, on the *Via Crucis*, we love (we love!) silence. Therefore, let us turn off the smartphones, we don't need them now (I hope that you also turn them off while you are at the GS raggio or during song nights!), we are here with our friends, we are living a gesture that engages us totally, it would be a shame to distract ourselves! This, look, is a very human and reasonable indication, that is, if a person is speaking and the other is distracted by the phone, evidently he is not "in harmony" with the who is speaking to him. We are simply taking a step to be educated on this. "Grant, O Lord, that my relationship with You can also be the seed for the rebirth of the relationships with my friends" can emerge from silence, as one of you wrote to me: "I understood the importance of silence in my frenetic life that is full of commitments: in silence I discover myself in a dialogue with Someone else." A song by Mina says: "There are things in a silence / that I never expected [...] I hear you in my heart / you are taking the place / You never lost."³⁴ Silence allows us to let ourselves be provoked by the Event that is happening, like when in the mountains we are struck by the magnificence of the mountains and the vastness of the sky that is over us, or at the sea by its infinity, and we remain in silence in front of a fact that fills us with wonder, and just so the words we hear begin to stir up our mind, our heart.

We started from His faithful and eternal love and we conclude in the same way: we exist because we have been loved, we have been created, we have been wanted. For this reason, we exist: through the love of our parents, Another called us into being and a companionship sustains us! "I am loved because I exist, because there is someone who wants me and, in case I forget it, I know that I have a place that reminds me constantly: this." This is the most precious thing that someone can have. What a miracle that fills the heart with gratitude, to be able to turn around now, to look around us (from here where I am seated it is easier), and be able to recognize that we have around us faces that constantly remind us of this: you are wanted, loved, constantly, now!

Now we will celebrate Holy Mass and we remember two girls, friends of many of you, who were here physically last year, but now they are in the mystery of the communion of the Saints: they have already reached the destiny for which we were made.

³³ Luigi Giussani, *Tutta la terra desidera il Tuo volto* [All the earth desires Your face], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo–Milan 2015, p. 83, translation ours.

³⁴ Mina, "La voce del silenzio" [The voice of silence], text by P. Limiti, Mogol and music by E. Isola, Cover of the album *Canzonissima '68*, © PDU, translation ours.