



EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

“What Surprises Me, Says God, Is Hope”



RIMINI, APRIL 12-14, 2024

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RIMINI 2024

On the cover: Luca Della Robbia, *The Visitation*, detail, glazed terracotta, around 1445, Church of San Giovanni Fuorcivitas, Pistoia, Italy. © Foto Scala, Florence..

“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme, ‘What surprises me, says God, is hope,’ the Holy Father sends his warm greeting, with the wish that these days of prayer and reflection will kindle the desire to allow ourselves to be seized by the risen Christ so that no defeat, failure, or suffering can halt the journey toward the fullness of life, opening hearts to trust. With these wishes, the Holy Father assures you of his prayerful remembrance and gladly imparts his apostolic blessing, the pledge of every desired good.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness,
April 3, 2024

Friday, April 12, evening

Franz Schubert

Fantasy for piano op. 15, D 760 "Wanderer-Fantasy"

Piano, Alfred Brendel, Spirto Gentil n. 34 (Philips), Universal

■ INTRODUCTORY GREETINGS

Daive Prospero

Let's begin by invoking the Holy Spirit to accompany us on the journey of these days, never abandoning us to our own devices, and asking Him with all the energy and humility of which we are capable for the grace to be open to the call to each of us He is renewing as He gathers us together today in this assembly of our Fraternity.

Come Holy Spirit

I'll begin by reading the Holy Father's telegram:

"On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme, 'What surprises me, says God, is hope,' the Holy Father sends his warm greeting, with the wish that these days of prayer and reflection will kindle the desire to allow ourselves to be seized by the risen Christ so that no defeat, failure, or suffering can halt the journey toward the fullness of life, opening hearts to faith. With these wishes, the Holy Father assures you of his prayerful remembrance and gladly imparts his apostolic blessing, the pledge of every desired good. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness."

Once again, we are profoundly grateful to Pope Francis for his continued paternal closeness to our journey. Let's make his wishes our own, that each of us may truly allow ourselves to be seized by the risen Christ in every moment of these days.

With the end of the limitations on gathering together imposed by Covid in past years, we thought this year we could return to sharing

the gesture of the Exercises in person, here in Rimini. Clearly, we were aware of the difficulties and sacrifices this choice would require of many of us in these days, in particular in the transit to and from the hotels, and for this reason, right from the beginning, we encourage you to take these moments as opportunities to observe silence and reflect on the content that will be communicated to us. Notwithstanding the difficulties, we wanted to propose that once a year we gather together for a gesture, physically when possible, so that during the rest of the year the memory of belonging to this companionship will be enlivened and strengthened. Well, we were surprised by the answer and the many very beautiful testimonies from friends who made big sacrifices to be here. It is true that among the many letters we received, some complained about the difficulties, advancing age, health issues, logistical and financial problems, the thought of having to return to work Monday already tired, and someone even spoke of increased entropy and environmental pollution. But notwithstanding all this, here we are, entrusting ourselves more to the reasons of our companionship than to our own perplexities (understandable as they are). For me, this is the first great sign of the awareness of a people that is growing and does not want to remain closed within the walls of its own measure. There are many testimonies of gratitude for this opportunity given to us after several years. Allow me to read one of these letters, which struck me because it describes the trajectory of a change.

“A few days ago, the letter for next April’s Exercises arrived. Reading the part dedicated to those who cannot be present (among them myself, due to a combination of age and various pathologies), my first reaction was anger in seeing the request to explain briefly the reasons and, if accepted, to proceed with payment of the participation fee, which, by the way, is three times that of the Covid years. Who would analyze my request, and what titles and qualifications would they have to do so? What criteria would be used? And what about my *privacy*? Well, I had a string of objections, some of them comic. My second reaction was rebellion. I told myself I wouldn’t go, and if all went well, I’d read the booklet. But as time passed, I was restless. I didn’t think much more about it, and considered the objective fact that there must be an explanation, or that maybe the biggest objection was me, in me. I felt a surge of gratitude. Certainly, the Exercises are

important. Certainly, the sacrifice is important. Certainly, being there and staying there is important. Certainly... I returned to the starting point of the letter accompanying the instructions for the Exercises, then read the various letters from Prosperi, the one about Santori's and his meeting with the pope, and before that, the audience with the whole movement and last year's Exercises. I perceived the radicalness asked of us not as an obligation but as maximum and total adherence because it is the foundation of my life, capable of overcoming all objections and obstacles of conformism, and reaching the heart. This is asked of us, and this is important for life. It must be given with full joy and gladness. After the anger and rebellion, I felt joy and gratitude. Even though it was not possible for me to be physically present in Rimini, I could offer all the smallness that I am for the glory of God and the unity of the movement."

It is true. At times the frenetic rhythms of life, the levels of comfort we are accustomed to, and certain limits maybe due to age, seem to resign us to acknowledging that we have lost the initial impetus that always prioritized the fascination of the ideal over any calculation, that we have lost that approach, that human posture that enabled us to set out on a long and tiring pilgrimage without too many calculations, even taking risks, because the questions to put into the Lord's hands were too urgent and important. And yet, seeing us together today shows that the impetus that gushed from our hearts thanks to our encounter with Christ is not buried, but rather, even with all of our burden of problems, difficulties, joys, and sufferings, that that flame is anything but extinguished.

Twenty-one thousand of us are present in Rimini attending the Exercises. Other friends are connected with their communities in twenty-one nations, and in the next weeks those in another seventy nations will experience this gesture, following the videos. The Exercises are translated simultaneously into six languages. In addition, about three thousand people will participate at home via computer because they cannot travel. This is the photograph of our gesture. There are more participants than foreseen, even more than the number before the pandemic, and the secretariat was asked to work extra to make it possible for everyone to participate, as far as possible, up to the last minute. We are grateful for this, too!

I have to tell you I am truly moved. The theme of this year's Exercises is hope, and here we have the first sign of hope, a people that lives, and desires to live and experience concretely a unity, the unity the Holy Father called us to in the letter he sent us of January 30.

As you know, the 2025 Jubilee will be dedicated to the theme of hope, so let's live these days as a stage on the journey toward that event. I have always understood Jesus's words to the rich young man, "Go, sell everything, leave it all behind and follow Me,"¹ as a call to hope. In fact, paradoxically, we see that often the biggest obstacle to experiencing true hope in life is when we place our hope in what we possess, what we already have, our things. Jeremiah said: "Cursed is the man who trusts in human beings, / who seeks his strength in flesh, / whose heart turns away from the LORD. / He is like a barren bush in the desert / that enjoys no change of season, / But stands in a lava waste, / a salt and empty earth."² The title of the Exercises refers exactly to this difficulty. In fact, God Himself is amazed because the more we go forward, the more it truly seems difficult to have hope, and so we often try to suffocate our heart's cry for the infinite, filling it with an expectation of little things to fill the void, to fill the absence of hope that we sense. This is not just a problem for those with no faith: it concerns everyone, it concerns us. From a certain point of view, it is the dramatic symptom of the gravest disease of our times.

The theme of hope, as many of us remember, is not new. In 2021 the Exercises by video connection were entitled *Is There Hope?*³ Why propose it again so soon? For two reasons. The first is that after working on "faith" all year, we want to continue the journey exploring the theological virtues, following the teaching of Fr. Giussani. The second is that the question has become even more urgent. We do not feel like "sleepwalkers," as the most recent CENSIS report observed about the current situation. We do not feel superior to others, but we do recognize we are on a road that educates us not to yield to that unreasonable attitude of flight from reality that would seem to be the only antidote to the lack of hope. For this reason, we ask whether one

¹ Cf. Mt 19:21; Mk 10:21.

² Jer 17:5–6.

³ Julian Carrón, *Is There Hope? The Fascination of the Discovery* (Human Adventure Books, 2021).

can still hope in the world we are living in, with the looming specter of wars, violence, and devastation, and in the ocean of evil on which our raft struggles to stay afloat. This is the question we are invited to examine in these days. Is it still reasonable to hope?

Before turning it over to Bishop Giovanni Paccosi, who accepted the invitation of the Fraternity Diaconia to preach these Exercises (for which we thank him), I would like to introduce him to those who do not know him. Fr. Giovanni is the bishop of the Diocese of San Miniato, in Tuscany, and a member of the Fraternity Central Diaconia as the leader of the regional pastoral group for Latin America, where, specifically in Peru, he was a missionary priest for many years.

Why this choice? In the last years of his life, Fr. Giussani had different movement leaders preach the annual Exercises, the most important gesture of the Fraternity. This is a method we want to follow now, in the furrow of continuity, full of gratitude, within our history. Fr. Giovanni and others who will follow are involved in the responsibility to preach the Exercises as an expression of communal leadership.

Allow me once again to thank Fr. Mauro Lepori, who preached the Spiritual Exercises in the last two years. They were very meaningful in a particularly delicate moment of our journey. I thank him also for being here with us. Shortly he will celebrate Mass, in confirmation of a great friendship and communion that continues.

Finally, as a further sign of this communion expressed in unity with the entire Church, I would like to thank His Eminence Cardinal Farrell, who will be present this year as well at the Fraternity Exercises. Tomorrow he will be with us and will celebrate Mass.

Allow me one final word about the image associated with the title of the Exercises, which Fr. Giovanni proposed. It is a detail from Luca Della Robbia's *Visitation*.⁴ Our Lady is represented as a young girl whose sweet face, decisive and at the same time peace-giving, spontaneously attracts our gaze. On the four glass walls that surround the tomb of our Fr. Giussani we read this invocation: "Oh, Our Lady, you are the certainty of our hope!"

⁴Luca Della Robbia, *La Visitazione* [The Visitation], glazed terracotta, ca. 1445, Chiesa di San Giovanni Fuorcivitas, Pistoia, Italy.

We begin this gesture, asking her, the living source of hope, to accompany our journey in these days.

Bishop Giovanni Paccosi. Good evening to everyone! Thank you for the invitation, which, even though it caused me a bit of difficulty in the preparation, deepened my gratitude for this story. I would like to say a few words in two languages. The first is in the Florentine dialect: I'm just a "bischero qualunque," an average guy, maybe a bit slow on the uptake, and it is only because of this history that for me, as I believe is the case for all of you, hope is not just a word, but a reality I experience every day. The second is in Spanish for all my friends, from one part of the world to the other: *Quisiera saludar a mis amigos hispanohablantes porque, sin la belleza del carisma que nos ha alcanzado, no podríamos estar tan llenos de alegría y de esperanza. No podríamos estar así, con la mirada llena de gozo, en medio de un mundo que parece que se desmorona por todos los lados, pero con la alegría y la fuerza para construir un pedazo de mundo nuevo. En estos dos días tratamos de ir al origen de nuestra esperanza.* [I'd like to greet my Spanish-speaking friends because without the beauty of the charism that has reached us, we could not be so full of gladness and hope. We could not be this way, with our eyes full of joy, in the midst of a world that seems to be collapsing everywhere, with the gladness and the strength to build part of a new world. In these two days we will try to go again toward the origin of our hope.]

■ INTRODUCTION
Giovanni Paccosi

*An irrepressible impetus for self-realization,
an innate desire for happiness*

“Hope does not come on its own. To hope, my child, you would have to be quite fortunate, to have obtained, received a great grace,”⁵ said Péguy in *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, from which we drew the title for these days. This is the hope we want to look at in these Exercises, and we want to do it by following the steps that Fr. Giussani gave us, above all in the two texts: *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* and *Is It (Truly ?!) Possible to Live This Way?*⁶

In *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Fr. Giussani said: “The great grace represents, assures, a present in which a strange seed is planted through which hope will flower tomorrow. ‘Our hope for days unending now blossoms with the dawn.’”⁷

Hope gives our poor life an infinite and eternal outlook. Christian iconography has always used the symbol of the anchor for hope, an image contained in the letter to the Hebrews, which says: “This [hope] we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered on our behalf.”⁸ For the Jews, the Temple of Jerusalem was the place God lived in the midst of His people. Therefore, hope introduces us into the dwelling place, into the eternal, infinite dimension of God. The author of the letter to the Hebrews did not use the image of a rock, but that of an anchor, because hope does not eliminate the storms, but establishes a solid point that does not give way. Though we can be tossed about

⁵ Charles Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, trans. David Louis Schindler, Jr. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 12.

⁶ Luigi Giussani, *Is It Possible To Live This Way?: An Unusual Approach to Christian Experience*, vol. 2, *Hope* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008); Luigi Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?* [Is it (truly?!) possible to live this way?] (Milan: BUR, 2011).

⁷ Giussani, *Is It Possible To Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 13.

⁸ Heb 6:19–20.

by the waves of life, we are not carried away. As the pope said in a homily in Sant Marta in 2013: “‘Hope was an anchor’; an anchor fixed on the shore of the other world. Our life is like a journey on the rope toward that anchor.” And he added a question: “Where are we anchored?”⁹ Let’s ask ourselves this! What is our hope founded on? Péguy said that just as the anchor keeps the ship firm even in the midst of stormy seas, so little hope pulls along faith and charity. It is small, but hope is the one who moves us along.

Saint Augustine said that a man would not even take a step if he were not sure of the destination. Hope is anchored in the next life and draws us toward the destiny and fullness that we would not be able to reach on our own.

I’ll read the verses of Péguy that we chose as the title of these Exercises, together with those that precede and follow them: “But hope, says God, that is something that surprises me. / Even me. / That is surprising. // That these poor children see how things are going and believe that tomorrow things will go better. That they see how things are going today and believe that they will go better tomorrow morning. / That is surprising and it’s by far the greatest marvel of our grace. / And I’m surprised by it myself. / And my grace must indeed be an incredible force. / And must flow freely and like an inexhaustible river. [...] / What must my grace, and the strength of my grace, be so that this little hope, vacillating at the breath of sin, trembling with every wind, anxious at the slightest breath, / be as constant, remain as faithful, as righteous, as pure; and invincible, and immortal, and impossible to extinguish; [...] //What surprises me, says God, is hope. / And I can’t get over it. / This little hope who seems like nothing at all. This little girl hope. / Immortal.”¹⁰

Let’s allow ourselves, too, to be surprised and amazed (after all, God is surprised!), because it truly seems almost impossible to speak of hope without the deep-down bitterness with which we say, “Let’s hope so!” Let’s allow ourselves to speak about it today in this world at war, in this society that no longer looks to Christ, and in the awareness of our sinfulness.

⁹ Francis, “La speranza, questa sconosciuta” [Hope, this unknown]. Morning meditation at Santa Marta, October 29, 2013. Our translation.

¹⁰ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 6–7.

However, as Péguy says, it does not depend on us, but on the power of the “wellspring and like an inexhaustible river,” on that vigorous power that is not ours: it is entirely His, from His grace that reaches us now in Christ, that happens now, anew. The anchor has been cast into the next world, but in the next world that has come toward us, that has looked upon us and called us into this history.

Just entering here this evening, in the fact, as Davide said, which is not to be taken for granted, that there are a great number of us here (with all the sacrifices required), in the music, in the moving songs, in the faces we’ve known for years, and in the new ones of our companionship, and another wellspring happens (“it is like an inexhaustible river”) that is not us, that is not me, a wellspring that renews the hope for change, like a wind of new life over the dry bones of our aridity. Do you remember the text of Ezekiel 37? “He asked me: Son of man, can these bones come back to life? ‘Lord God,’ I answered, ‘You alone know that.’”¹¹ We are here because of this hope that an Other, who is happening now, can bring us back to life.

God is surprised at our hope, because as we said, it is not easy or obvious. Pain and death (the text we have just read comes right after the part in which Péguy speaks of the prayer of fathers who have lost their innocent children) are the great objections to hope. It is something that we cannot generate ourselves. This is why it is called a “theological virtue,” because it comes from God, is given by God, is a grace. It happens, and we are here because Christ happened in our life. Here you see the bond with faith, which Fr. Lepori guided us to reflect upon last year.

What won us over when Christ happened in our life the first time, when the first encounter happened and when it happens again now, did and does so because it found and finds in us an immediate recognition. We have a heart that recognizes Him! In fact, it is a grace that is grafted into “the natural desire for happiness,” as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses it. The Catechism continues: “This desire is of divine origin: God has placed it in the human heart in order to draw man to the One who alone can fulfill it.”¹² Saint Augustine speaks

¹¹ Ez 37:3 (cf. the entire chapter).

¹² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1718.

of it this way: “We all want to live happily; in the whole human race there is no one who does not assent to this proposition, even before it is fully articulated.”¹³ Is this true now for me, for you? “Who is the man who delights in life, who loves to see the good days?”¹⁴ This was the title of the Meeting of 2003, which was inspired by Fr. Lepori, and refers to the prologue of the Rule of Saint Benedict, where Benedict asks this question as the root of the decision to become a monk.

Fr. Giussani helps us not to skip over this affirmation of the Catechism and the Christian tradition as if it were an obvious premise, and go on to do a theological treatise on hope. These Exercises will not be a theological treatise on hope, which would start with the explanation of the doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, in the Church Fathers, and from a theological reflection. Today, in these Exercises, our starting point for speaking about hope is here, in its natural and human dimension. Pedagogically, Fr. Giussani spoke of hope as the fulfillment of something that already cries out in our life, of the desire that naturally constitutes us as human beings, of this “natural desire for happiness,” as the Catechism calls it.

We find this desire to be happy within ourselves. It is a movement of our nature that desires and awaits fulfillment, even if we cannot give it to ourselves. So then, let’s look at this “configuration of promise” that sustains our being in the world here and now.

The human heart is promise

In a short text from 1961, republished in *Porta la speranza* [Bring hope],¹⁵ entitled: “Dalla speranza alla pienezza della gioia [From hope to the fullness of joy],” which will accompany our itinerary in these days, Fr. Giussani introduced the theme of hope with these words: “From the fact of things, from the datum of one’s existence, the human person draws knowledge of one’s self and destiny. [This

¹³ Saint Augustine, *De moribus Ecclesiae catholicae*, 1, 3, 4: CSEL 90, 6 (PL 32, 1312).

¹⁴ Cf. Ps. 33:13. Rule of Saint Benedict, Prologue, 15.

¹⁵ Luigi Giussani, “Dalla speranza alla pienezza della gioia (1961)” [From hope to the fullness of joy], now *Porta la speranza: Primi scritti* [Bring hope: Early writings] (Genoa: Marietti 1820, 1997) 155–62. Also in Luigi Giussani, *Realtà e giovinezza: La sfida* [Reality and youth: The challenge] (Milan: Rizzoli, 2018), 139–46. Our translation.

statement is very familiar to us from these months of reflection on *The Religious Sense*:¹⁶ in experience, we discover who we are.] The first note of the human fact is that it arises as an irrepressible impetus for self-realization.”¹⁷

From experience as an objective datum each of us discovers that we were born and launched into life as “an irrepressible impetus for self-realization.” This is the first note, the first accent of the human fact: we are defined by this impetus and it motivates our every gesture. Then he added: “From the most overblown instinctiveness and the banality of comfortable effusions to the most noble urges of conscience and the highest adventures of thought, an ‘industrious strength wearies us from movement to movement’ (Foscolo), a ‘spur almost jabs us’ (Leopardi) toward actuation of one’s original seed, in intense articulation of meaning and efficacy, ‘to realize ourselves’.”¹⁸

Even our least conscious gestures, even those we would not even call gestures, are moved by this “spur.” We often see in Fr. Giussani’s early writings the use of an extremely succinct and fascinating word choice. The expression “overblown instinctiveness” carries the range of self-aware or often almost unconscious attempts at self-realization in the venting of instinctiveness.

If we think about it, the “banality of comfortable effusions” can mean the search for entertainment at all costs, the need to be well, the anxiety to be seen well, expressed for example in the obsession to constantly post on social media the images of our travels and the food we eat, as if they were expressions of a desired and ever elusive happiness.

In these days I read a couple of articles about a book¹⁹ (I don’t think it is important to cite the title) that explains in terms of a “scarcity loop” why it is so easy to spend so much time on social media and to fall prey to the flattery of online games, to the point of even spending all our money. It draws upon the intuition of a certain Si Redd (William Redd), the American entrepreneur who was the first

¹⁶ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi, rev. ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 155. Our translation.

¹⁸ Giussani, 155.

¹⁹ Michael Easter, *Mai abbastanza* [Never enough] (Milan: Roi Edizioni, 2024).

to invent pinball machines and jukeboxes, which then led to online slot machines. One of these articles said that Redd identified “a powerful peculiarity of the human mind. Behaviors that happen in rapid succession, from gambling to binge eating [...] are manifestations consequent to the scarcity loop.”²⁰ Another article commented that “this vicious cycle is the true trigger for the mindset of scarcity, which seduces us with small immediate gratifications like those on social media. Every notification we receive, be it a ‘like,’ a comment or a direct message, brings an emotion like the uncertainty of a slot machine spinning. The simple act of scrolling through our feeds drags us into a continuous cycle [our desire, which tends toward the infinite, remains trapped here in a closed circuit] in search of emotions: happiness, sadness, irritation, indignation, envy, and surprise. This compulsive behavior of endless scrolling activates a rapid and practically infinite repetition, keeping us glued to the screen in expectation of the next wave of emotional stimuli. In this way, social media creates a self-feeding loop of expectation and reaction, keeping users in a state of constant expectation and desire for social affirmation.”²¹

I refer to this phenomenon because I think it helps us understand how we, too, easily place ourselves into closed loops that start out from a true desire but then go nowhere and turn in on themselves, leaving us emptier than before. This does not happen only with online games and on social media. Don’t we perhaps recognize ourselves a bit in these lines?

Fr. Giussani helps us to recognize that these loops (and it must be admitted, we all have to deal with them in ourselves and in others) are in any case reduced and harmful ways in which we express our humanity, moved by the same thirst for self-realization, a thirst that can also move the highest thoughts and the most noble intuitions of our heart. This is the way we are made, always in movement toward fulfillment. I think this is important, because the human sets out on a

²⁰ A.D. Signorelli, “Mai Abbastanza, il libro che spiega come la tecnologia ci faccia desiderare sempre di più” [Never enough, the book that explains how technology makes us want more and more], Repubblica.it, April 2, 2024. Our translation.

²¹ Lucia Tedesco, “Cos’è il loop della scarsità, che ci fa desiderare ciò che non ci serve” [What is the scarcity loop, which makes us want things we don’t need], Wired.it, March 22, 2024. Our translation.

search that is made by God so that we may reach Him. We must not renounce it. We will see this better tomorrow.

In the 1961 text, Fr. Giussani said: “There is a fundamental phenomenon that expresses this original impetus: *yearning, desire*. It is a fundamental phenomenon for every gesture of ours, kindling it and launching it into the warp and woof of reality. The phenomenon of desire, so free and inevitable, is [...] a *promise of fulfillment, accomplishment*. The promise is also a fact, and desire documents that the promise is the fact at the origin of the entire human event.”²² Desire kindles every gesture. What a beautiful expression! To “kindle” means that it starts it, fills it with light and warmth, and launches it *into the warp and woof of reality*, drives it toward the adventure of the search for fulfillment. He added that desire is a “*promise of fulfillment*” and that the promise is a fact, “the fact at the origin of the entire human event.” We find it in ourselves. We are promise. As it says in the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, which we have read in these recent weeks: “‘What a great thought it is that truly *nothing is due to us*. Has anyone ever promised us anything? Then why should we expect anything?’ Perhaps [Pavese] did not realize that expectation is the very structure of our nature, it is the essence of our soul. It is not something calculated: it is given. For the *promise* is at the origin, from the very origin of our creation. He who has made man has also made him as ‘promise.’ *Structurally* man awaits; *structurally* man is a beggar; *structurally* life is promise.”²³

We know well, as Davide reminded us in the conference a few weeks ago in Recanati,²⁴ of Giussani’s deep fondness for Leopardi, because the poet was entirely determined by the indomitable desire for total satisfaction, which his experience of the insufficiency of things did not quell, but rather, deepened.

In the section on hope in *Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, Fr. Giussani dedicated very beautiful pages to Leopardi, entitled “Già similmente mi stringeva il core” [Once, in just such a way, clutched

²² Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 155. Our translation.

²³ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 55.

²⁴ “Cara beltà: Un pensiero sorgivo in Leopardi e Giussani” [Dear beauty, a wellspring thought in Leopardi and Giussani], Dialogo con Davide Prospero, Presidente della Fraternità di CL, organizzato dal Centro Culturale Giacomo Leopardi, [Dialogue with Davide Prospero, president of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, organized by the Giacomo Leopardi Cultural Center], Recanati, March 23, 2024, clonline. Our translation.

at my heart],²⁵ and I believe it would be important for us to read it in its entirety at home. He said: “I would like to cite a human case where you see clearly how hope is a human word, and it is there, where there is a desire and one hopes to satisfy it. [...] I am speaking of the experience of Leopardi [...] because of the human dimension of his testimony. [...] The life of Leopardi is a document of the fact that Christian hope [...] is a human word.”²⁶ We are made with infinite desire: let’s look it fully in the face.

This is the experience of Leopardi, who wrote: “The inability to be satisfied by any worldly thing or so to speak, by the entire world. To consider the inestimable amplitude of space, the number of worlds, and their astonishing size, then to discover that all this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind; to imagine the infinite number of worlds, the infinite universe, then to feel that our mind and aspirations might be even greater than such a universe; to accuse things always of being inadequate and meaningless; to suffer want, emptiness, and hence boredom [you would think that this boredom would be the ugliest thing, and yet]—this seems to me the chief sign of the grandeur and nobility of human nature.”²⁷ For Leopardi, the nobility of the human person compared to all the other creatures lies in this contradiction, in the drama of never finding anything that corresponds to the breadth of desire, so that “all this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind.” Here emerges the full sublimity of feeling the “eternal mystery of our being,”²⁸ because also the “tragedy of a daily contradiction is like a land where an exaltation of the human being springs forth: the human person is exalted.”²⁹

Leopardi reached the apex of this nobility when, notwithstanding his ideological affirmation of nothingness as the ultimate horizon, he nonetheless could not silence the heart-thawing yearning of desire.

²⁵ Giussani, “Già similmente mi stringeva il core” [Once, in just such a way, clutched at my heart], in *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 323–40. Our translation.

²⁶ Giussani, 324. Our translation.

²⁷ Giacomo Leopardi, *Pensieri* [Thoughts], translated by W.S. Di Piero (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), LXVIII, 113.

²⁸ Giacomo Leopardi, “On the Portrait of a Beautiful Lady,” vv. 22–23, in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, translated by Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 285.

²⁹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 330.

I'll conclude the reference to Leopardi with these words of Fr. Giussani: "Even in the contradictory experience to which it gives rise, reality exalts the human soul and in this exaltation a dreaming breath is born that dominates her entire life. That which arises from the contradiction, the no, is the response of the head, but the heart is a heart-melting yearning; it is not a no."³⁰

In the 1961 text, Fr. Giussani concluded with the affirmation that acknowledging the structure of promise of our life, which is expressed dynamically in desire, trusting in it, "creates the foundation for inexorable fondness for your own being and life, and thus enables you to pay attention to yourself, generates that 'sense of self' that is not mere awareness, but something more intense, a loving acknowledgment of destiny charged with value."³¹

From fondness for ourselves comes the prayer of the beggar

Just yesterday I received this testimony, and I'll read you some lines. It was from a teacher who said that during an end-of-the-year dinner with the students, a girl who had always seemed a bit distant, after listening to Chopin's piece, Prelude 15, "The Raindrop," and hearing the teacher read Fr. Giussani's commentary, told him: "Ever since I was little, I had always thought that there was something wrong inside me, a restlessness, a stabbing pain. I was closed in on myself and cried often; at night I could never get to sleep. Instead, after that lesson, the restlessness I felt no longer hurt me or made me afraid, because there was someone who experienced and described it this way. That drop, that apparent torment, was not a bad thing: it was the desire for happiness. Ever since then, I've always slept peacefully." Then, the teacher wrote, "She told me that she had a raindrop tattooed on her body as a constant reminder of that moment."

A human stature so full of dignity and consciousness of destiny, aware of the breadth of one's own desire that presses toward a boundless horizon, reminds me of a very beautiful statue of Saint Ignatius of Loyola from the 1500s, maybe by the Sevillian sculptor Juan

³⁰ Giussani, 330.

³¹ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 155. Our translation.

Martínez Montañés, in the stupendous sacristy of the Church of the Jesuits in Lima, Peru, where I lived for many years. Those who look at it are struck by the gaze of Ignatius, directed to a faraway horizon, beyond everything, but at the same time with the decisive expression of an adventurer, not a dreamer. When I saw it, I thought: “Certainly, it’s exactly the image of a Christian looking at an infinite horizon.” We are struck by this gaze, so lit by the desire of the beyond, and at the same time full of concreteness, almost that of a warrior. That gaze doesn’t carry him away from reality, but on the contrary, fills him with the energy and will to do everything to reach that beyond. But who could maintain this purity and concreteness without a great grace, without discovering, as Saint Ignatius did in encountering Christ, that there was an answer to his heart that was full of an expectation of great things?

We today, at the beginning of these Exercises, are grateful because Jesus came to us and reawakened our hope, because He draws us out of the loops, the closed circles where we take refuge, and, like Saint Ignatius, we can look at our humanity that yearns for fulfillment with fondness, with “loving acknowledgment” of a great destiny, said Fr. Giussani, to which God has called us, giving us life and this heart burning with desire.

And yet we are so weak. I don’t know if you have read the lines by Fr. Giussani projected on the screens, commenting on the Schubert piece we listened to as we entered the hall, which speak about us who are so weak. Hope is the hope of the poor, he said. We know well that as soon as we shift a millimeter away from Christ, as soon as we shift a millimeter away from His presence in the Church, from this companionship born of Fr. Giussani’s charism, we immediately fall prey to that subtle nihilism (of which we will speak tomorrow) that penetrates us like polluted air, dirtying the purity of desire, like a dead weight that reduces us to “overblown instinctiveness” or “the banality of comfortable effusions” and leads to that subtle presumption that presents itself as uncertainty and doubt about ourselves and, still worse, about the human reality of Christ. It seems to us that we no longer need Him, that He is no longer capable of responding to our expectancy.

Among the contributions sent to me, some spoke of placing their hope in God, but in a sense that carried a bit of skepticism, as if to say:

“I have desired this for so long, but when will God answer me?” as if the measure of God were our measure. This is a judgment we make on God, too. In this way we can distance ourselves, judging on the basis of our desire reduced to our measure. Maybe without realizing it, we can even distance ourselves from the concrete, current proposal and thus from this companionship, from the movement or even from the pope who leads the Church. It happens! But in doing so, we lose the great grace we have received and remain with a reduced desire, without the chance to open our horizons again. We no longer identify with those who lead us, and so, millimeter by millimeter, we detach ourselves from the concrete, historical, objective presence of Jesus. Grace flows from this source, which reaches us now in the Church, but this reduction of ourselves, of the consciousness of the immensity of our need, takes away the simplicity of our adherence.

In my experience as the leader for Latin America, I see instead that those who live at greater risk because of the situations in which they find themselves, those who suffer many limitations, have a more candid desire for fullness, with no ifs or buts. They have neither the time nor the desire to judge the pope or the movement. They love him with simplicity and gratitude, not out of naivety, but from a deep awareness that they cannot meet their own need themselves. They cling to the great grace and beg for it every day; they follow as if it were a prayer, or rather, they pray following, because they need to do so to live. And so they experience the hope that blossoms in apparently impossible situations. In fact, hope begins afresh every day as prayer.

When we acknowledge with simplicity that we are full of limitless desire, prayer wells up in us as the most human expression of the expectancy that Another will fulfill the promise, a prayer stripped of the claim to define how the mystery should respond to our cry. This is the prayer of the beggar, the poor in spirit.

In 2008, with the publication of *Uomini senza patria* [Men without a homeland], the book of the CL university students' équipe, I was truly struck by a page in which Fr. Giussani offered an image to explain the prayer of someone who is poor in spirit. I'd like to read it so that it may accompany us tonight and help us begin these days with an adequate attitude, the only true one, that of the beggar. He wrote: “The person who is poor in spirit is someone who has nothing. You

have to imagine him as someone with his mouth open and eyes wide, looking at heaven and earth with amazement, amazed: his openness is physiologically evident. [...] A person who is poor in spirit has nothing except one thing for which and by which he is made: endless aspiration. This is openness and willingness: boundless expectation. It is not boundless because the heap of things one expects is endless [scrolling through our phones and our projects]. No, he does not expect anything, but lives a boundless openness, and he does not expect anything! [...] It's as if [this is the image that has remained in my mind] in that meadow [they were at the meeting of CLU leaders in the Dolomites], we imagined a person who is poor in spirit, and we would have to imagine him sitting there with his legs spread, his face up, looking at the sky, the earth, the mountains, and everything, with this total dilation of his heart without any set image in mind: 'Well, I would like a roof, a home, a wife, children, money.' Nothing, there is nothing! This is the original nature of the human person, and in fact the original nature of the human person is expectation of the infinite,³² without formulating any image of it. We are this person, poor in spirit!

This evening we must cry, beg, for this absolute simplicity to rediscover ourselves as pure expectancy made of boundless desire, certain and glad to gather here by grace on the threshold that allows us to hope, certain of the hope that does not defraud, so poor and beggarly in front of Him. Therefore this evening and in the hours of these days, let us seek silence. Let us take advantage of the great opportunity given to us to beg Christ, who so loves our humanity as to have made us desire Him, to fill us with His grace.

³² Luigi Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982–1983)* [Men without a homeland] (Milan: BUR, 2008), 298. Our translation.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 5:34–42, Psalm 26 (27); Jn 6:1–15

**HOMILY BY FR. MAURO-GIUSEPPE LEPORI
GENERAL ABBOT OF THE CISTERCIAN ORDER**

“Jesus went up on the mountain, and there He sat with His disciples.”

We, too, are here because in one way or another Jesus has attracted us to follow Him to a high place, set apart to sit with Him, to listen to Him, to savor His presence and friendship, to be aware of the pleasure He feels in being with us, and the pleasure we feel in being with Him. It is beautiful to stop and concentrate on Jesus, on His presence with us, so simple, like sitting together with a group of friends. It is beautiful to stop to listen to Him, to hear Him speak, to listen to His words of eternal life, which rekindle in us a desire for fullness, for overflowing life, the life of God. It is also beautiful to discover each other equally attracted by Him, to feel how much Christ’s love makes us feel at ease with each other, makes us friends, unites us. All His, and precisely for this reason all belonging to each other in a stronger and more eternal bond than any bond of friendship or kinship. But in that little group, there were some who were already friends before meeting Jesus. There were brothers like Peter and Andrew, James and John. Even this friendship, even this kinship, everything in being there around Christ was intensified, it was discovered as new, it was torn away from so much instinctiveness, from so much obviousness, from so much exhaustion in our limits.

But that pleasure of being alone with Him, together with Him, where did it lead them, what sense did it have? Where does it lead us, what is the meaning of our being here around Christ, looking at Christ, listening to Christ, loving Christ? Where does our predilection for Christ lead us?

We understand it with the same simplicity with which we docilely followed Him as He left the crowd and led us to a quiet place. We understand it with the same simplicity with which we sat down in a circle around Him. We understand it listening to Him, looking at Him, opening ourselves with a poverty of heart, that is, with gratitude, to

the event that He is, that His person is, that His word is. We understand it by fixing our gaze on His face. “Jesus raised His eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to Him.”

We were looking at Him, blessed in His beauty, the correspondence of that face with our heart’s desire for beauty and goodness. And here we see Him raise His eyes above our heads, toward the horizon. Instinctively we turn to look with Him beyond our little group, beyond our pleasure at being with Him and each other. With Him we see the crowd.

Then there is the temptation to feel disturbed and irritated. What’s that crowd got to do with our pleasure in being together with Christ? What’s that noise got to do with our being in silence and listening to Him? What’s all that human misery got to do with the pleasure of contemplation of the Lord?

But His gaze is inexorable because His compassion is inexorable, the compassion that reached us and looked upon us one day, as now He is looking at the crowd coming, all of humanity.

All of our being with Him, all the beauty we experience with Him, is not voided or denied, but has a meaning and direction defined by His gaze. Nothing is eliminated of the friendship and predilection He accords us, to which He calls us, but this friendship and predilection are of an infinite vastness and embrace everything, everyone. In this, we are given to perceive and experience the heart of God, what it is like, what the heart of God is like. The intimate depths of His heart are a universal embrace. The intimacy with Christ granted to me is all the more true, all the more deep and real, the more it embraces everything and everyone. Exactly because He presses me to His heart, I do not leave the world, but I enter into it fully, to the ends of the earth. Christ’s heart, God’s heart, which Christ’s gaze reveals, is the mercy that, by pressing us to His heart, presses us to everyone in a movement of passion for humanity that no longer has limits, my limits.

But our heart cannot expand to this measureless measure on its own. It needs the Holy Spirit, like the Virgin Mary. It needs to offer itself to the gift of God that is the Paraclete, consolation in person, the Spirit who makes the Son flesh in our flesh, presence in our presence, humanity in our humanity.

How can this happen? As it did for the Virgin Mary, for the little boy with five loaves and two fish: offering all the nothing we have, offering all the nothing we are. This is our hope. Then everything in and among us multiplies, everything comes to sate the hunger of humanity, because in reality everything becomes the Body and Blood of Christ, the Redeemer of the world!

Saturday, April 13, morning

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Concerto for piano in D minor n. 20, K 466 Piano, Clara Haskil

Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux–Igor Markevitch, Spirto Gentil n. 32 (Philips), Universal

Angelus

Morning Prayer

Daive Prosperi

Once again this year, His Excellence Bishop Nicolò Anselmi of Rimini has come to greet us and bring us his blessing. Thank you.

Bishop Nicolò Anselmi

Thank you for the invitation, for being here, but I think I've understood that you feel quite at home in Rimini. I thank you for all the good you do in the Church, all the good you do in our communities, in society. In this year, which the Holy Father has dedicated to prayer in preparation for next year's Jubilee, "Pilgrims of Hope," the fact that you are so numerous makes me feel in my heart that the need for prayer, to be with the Lord, to allow ourselves to be guided by His Spirit, concerns us believers, but I believe that also the world has a great desire for depth, for rediscovering the presence of God and of the Lord Jesus in concrete life, as we will hear in tomorrow's Gospel, for Jesus who sits down to eat some fish, walks on the water, frees us, and brings light to the darkness.

Thank you, truly. Let us feel united. There is also a part of our diocese that is praying with and for you. May your holy Exercises go well; have a blessed Easter season, and a fruitful mission in the world and in your communities. Thank you again.

Blessing

Prosperi

Thank you.

■ FIRST MEDITATION
Giovanni Paccosi

From desire to Christian hope

Each of the songs we've just listened to has helped us return to the point we had reached when we ended last night. *Imposibile*³³ is a cry full of pain because everything one desires does not respond to the desire of the heart. It seems impossible, it would seem impossible, that what we heard in this morning's first song, *Il mio volto* [My face] did not happen: "My God, I look at myself and I discover / that I have no face; / I look deep inside and I see darkness / without end." The perception of my inability to fulfill my life, to achieve the promise of a good that I do not know, that I cannot imagine, makes me understand that if I am sincere, I can only ask, beg in "boundless expectancy" as we saw at the end of the Introduction. In front of this expectancy, still undefined, I realize that something happens without any merit of my own, something new. "Only when I realize that You are, / like an echo I hear my voice again / and I am born again like time from memory."³⁴

So voice and eyes are not useless because there is someone who responds to the voice's cry, to the aspiration in our eyes. In acknowledging Him, my "I" is reborn, no longer like an undefined desire, or as we saw yesterday, reduced to an image of mine or an impatient question, but as awaiting, the awaiting of the poor in spirit, of the beggar, and hope in Him who promised me fulfillment, mysterious but real.

Sins against hope (instead of signs, dreams)

Let's return to our reflection and Fr. Giussani's 1961 text. After showing that hope as promise of fulfillment is the very stuff of the human even when we fall into instinctiveness or what is comfortable (Fr.

³³ Atahualpa Yupanqui, "Vidala del imposible," from the album *Mi tierra, te están cambiando*, 1973, © Odeon.

³⁴ Adriana Mascagni, "Il mio volto [My face]," in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 196.

Giussani said that even this, paradoxically, demonstrates that we are desire, expectation, and promise), he stressed that there are “sins against hope.” “But the genius of the human [he said “genius” a bit ironically] seems to consist precisely in grasping powerlessness as the ultimate lesson of experience. Thus the virtue of hope is fiercely fought by *sadness* (the *tristitia saeculi* of Saint Paul) and *sloth* (the *acoedia* of which Saint Thomas spoke), with a resulting *lack of openness* to the positive sense to which nature introduces us from the beginning. From this lack of openness arise attitudes contrary to hope, the sins against hope.”³⁵

The lack of openness to remaining in a state of expectancy is caused by the fact that we do not accept that we are creatures, made as a promise of fulfillment that will happen not according to our ways and as we want, but through the work of a You, a You who is more me than myself. Even solitude, as we have meditated on in School of Community in this period, is full of companionship. In fact, *The Religious Sense* says: “Before solitude there is companionship, which embraces my solitude. Because of this, solitude is no longer true solitude, but a crying out to that hidden companionship.”³⁶

But we do not recognize this. Not acknowledging it, being unwilling to await, is the fruit of sin, yes, but also of an attitude characteristic of the history of these recent centuries, in which men and women have asserted a growing claim to autonomy that has made them ever less willing to recognize this mysterious companionship. This demand, that we also breathe in while living the Christian faith, favors our yielding to the sad temptation to define exactly when the answer to our desire should arrive and what it should be, and so we find that we are unwilling to wait expectantly.

Regarding the roots of this unwillingness and the creation of this closure against Him who is more me than myself, against the “You-who-make-me,”³⁷ I invite you to look again at *Spe Salvi*³⁸ by Benedict XVI, numbers 16 to 23; the very beautiful numbers 101 to 121 of *Laudato Si*³⁹ by Pope Francis; the pages of *La coscienza*

³⁵ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 156.

³⁶ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 58.

³⁷ Giussani, 146.

³⁸ Cf. Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi*, 2007, nn. 16–23.

³⁹ Cf. Francis, Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*, 2015, nn. 101–21.

za religiosa nell'uomo moderno [Religious consciousness in modern man],⁴⁰ and those of *Why the Church?*,⁴¹ which help us to understand better how this claim to autonomy came about in the passage from the medieval mindset to the modern way of thinking of oneself as autonomous. This history is reflected in the history of each of us.

According to Giussani in the 1961 text, the attitudes that emerge from this unwillingness are interesting to explore.

“The first and easiest is the *evagatio mentis*, distraction in its usual sense, which coincides with a withdrawal into the mediocre melancholy common to everyone, allowing ourselves to get snagged on small, well-known sentiments or continually become absorbed by the banal voices of the environment.”⁴²

The *evagatio mentis* leads us to accept (even knowing in advance that we will not feel satisfied) lazing in small satisfactions, one after the other in a row, on the weekend or in our free time, seeking distraction so that in our daily life of work, relationships, the use of time and money, we can easily renounce the things that would call us to the ideal: prayer, the faces of certain friends, School of Community, Mass (who goes to daily Mass?).

I'll open a parenthesis here. Do you realize that the sins against hope that Fr. Giussani described are not infractions of certain rules, but retreats from our humanity, reductions that suffocate the greatness of the cry that prompted Atahualpa Yupanqui, the singer who made the song *Imposible* famous, to exclaim: “So why did You make my eyes? And why do I have eyes if I cannot see?”⁴³ The inevitable dissatisfaction would be the *sign* that could set us into motion again, and instead it ends up in *evagatio mentis*. Rather than perceiving dissatisfaction as the point of departure for opening ourselves to the other, we easily close ourselves into the sphere, or better, *soap bubble*, of dreams without the breath of the infinite.

In this way we go uncertainly, justified by the tangle of ifs and buts, the maybes and the I likes or I don't likes that reduce our heart,

⁴⁰ Republished in Luigi Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno: La “questione umana” e la novità del cristianesimo* [The sense of God and modern man, the “human question” and the newness of Christianity], (Milan: BUR, 2010, 79–137). Our translation.

⁴¹ Luigi Giussani, *Perché la Chiesa* (Milan: BUR, 2014), 27–65.

⁴² Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 156–57. Our translation.

⁴³ “Para que quiero mis ojos? / ¿Mi ojos para sirven?,” Atahualpa Yupanqui, “Vidala del imposible.” Our translation.

tricking it into a sad fog. In this regard, some texts of Fr. Giussani's are striking. For example, in *Uomini senza patria* [Men without a homeland]: "In front of the presentiment, the foretelling, the intuition, the glimpse of truth, the buts, the ifs, the maybes, and the howevers are an affront, a lack of courage, a lack of adherence. It's like when someone shakes your hand like a friend, and you give a limp hand with your fingers downward, your thumb not even lifted to grasp his. [...] Well, in front of life, all those buts, ifs, maybes, and howevers are an ambiguous flaccidity, not even sad [...], but ignoble, stagnant, muddy; no, rather [he said], not muddy, but like that sliminess of certain bodies of water, marshy; there, a 'slimy' hand."⁴⁴

Brrrr! Living out your days in a slimy, marshy way. This is a striking description of the flaccid reduction of our humanity to which we are led every day without realizing it. This neglect of ourselves (proud, because it does not ask), is the manifestation of our yielding to an evil power, "the" power of evil, the devil, who tries to rip us away from Christ by separating us from our own humanity, drowning us in the quicksand of a superficiality that becomes dubious, as it says in *The Religious Sense*: "all of these 'but, if, however, and perhaps,' [...] are a defensive volley of gunfire, a smokescreen protecting a person's retreat from a commitment to reality itself."⁴⁵

I found this retreat from commitment described in an article from January 6 of this year concerning an inquiry by the COOP Office of Studies, which spoke of Italy as "a county on pause" (last night Davide quoted the CENSIS Report, which captured a "sleepwalking" Italy). "There is the desire for change, but nobody believes in it. The repercussions fall on the big projects [...] In fact, through postponements and renunciations, Italians organize a life made of little things and live by subtraction rather than addition, and the future of the country is contracting in a temporal dynamic dominated by the present."⁴⁶ Yes, but in a present without a past or a future, without hope; the present of little things in which one can laze.

⁴⁴ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria*, 123. Our translation.

⁴⁵ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 133.

⁴⁶ Irene Scalise, "Un Paese in pausa e con poche speranze: gli italiani si rifugiano nei piccoli sfizi" [A country on pause and with little hope: Italians take refuge in small pleasures], *la Repubblica*, January 6, 2024, p. 7. Our translation.

The second sin against hope noted by Fr. Giussani is *stoicism* as an attempt to no longer desire great things. “Deep down, it is the claim to commensurate everything with your own energy, to measure and face the weight of everything through your own willpower. [...] It is the presumption that limits the dimension of the human person in the fierce attempt to affirm oneself. One is drawn to quote Shakespeare: ‘There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.’”⁴⁷

This attitude identifies the fulfillment of desire with images we produce ourselves: I’ll be happy if I have a woman or a man, if I earn enough, if I have children and good children, if... if... In 1961 Giussani saw how this ideology, which is basically nihilist, masked itself as *hope placed in the change of society according to a collective project*, but today we can see that the utopian illusion of power, “the presumption that limits the dimension of the human person in the fierce attempt to affirm oneself” (except in countries where this ideological illusion continues to feed dictatorial powers that make the life of entire peoples sad and bitter), has been reduced in our society to the affirmation of so-called *individual rights*, to the negation of any objective datum except the choice of the individual (if I have a cry inside me, as we heard in the song *Anyone*– “Is there anyone?”⁴⁸– this question is deemed absurd), so there is fluidity at all levels, from changing flags and opinions according to the moment, to the negation of sexual difference as an objective datum in the various forms of *gender ideology*, which Pope Francis has several times⁴⁹ indicated as the vanguard of the “ideological colonization” underway. You should

⁴⁷ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 157–58. Our translation.

⁴⁸ “*Is there anyone? / I need someone, oh / Anyone, please send me anyone / Lord, is there anyone? / I need someone* (Demi Lovato, “Anyone,” from the album *Dancing with the Devil... the Art of Starting Over*, 2021, © Island).

⁴⁹ A recent occasion was his address to participants in the international conference titled “Man-Woman: Image of God, Towards an Anthropology of Vocations” (March 1, 2024), in which, among other things, Pope Francis said: “It is very important for there to be this encounter, this encounter between men and women, because today the worst danger is gender ideology, which cancels out differences. I asked for studies to be made on this ugly ideology of our time, which erases differences and makes everything the same; to erase difference is to erase humanity. Man and woman, on the other hand, stand in fruitful ‘tension.’ I remember reading a novel from the early 1900s, written by the son of the archbishop of Canterbury: *The Lord of the World*. The novel speaks of the futuristic and it is prophetic, because it shows this tendency to erase all differences. It is interesting to read it, if you have time, because there are these problems of today; that man was a prophet.”

read the most recent document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Infinita*, because it is truly a great help for understanding where this point lies. In the beginning it distinguishes between the ontological dignity that each person has, and other presumed dignities, which actually are the negation of the dignity we have because of how we are made. More than once, the pope has compared this ideological colonization with that described in the novel we know well, Robert Hugh Benson's *Lord of the World*,⁵⁰ which reaches the point of euthanasia and tremendous intolerance toward those who have a deep gaze on the human and on reality.

But also the deep motive of the wars that fill us with dismay in these times is this reduction of the *expectant awaiting* to fulfillment of one's own project, whose objective fruit, as we observe every day, is rubble, annihilation of the human, and desperation. Here we see that the *dream* of human self-affirmation, the dream of an autonomous response to one's desires, truly becomes a nightmare.

Faced with this reduction of desire to a demanded freedom to decide for ourselves what can gratify it, *dream* and not *sign*, many young people whose hearts are still alive, notwithstanding everything, are uncertain about themselves, their own value and place in the world, having never been educated to love their own heart in its entreaty for the infinite. The other day as I was visiting an internationally respected research and treatment center for neurological, psychiatric, and psychological disorders of children and adolescents, I entered a room and found about ten young girls with eating disorders. What struck me was their eyes, so lightless and sad. They have remained in my heart! The doctors told me about the exponential growth in the number of young people affected by these and other mental disorders. Those eyes seemed truly devoid of hope. Visiting another structure for adolescents with psychiatric disorders, there was a girl who seemed normal, but the doctor told me her story, about situations in which she no longer has anyone who tells her: "You are loved. You are wanted." One would think: "I'm the one who chooses who I am," but actually, without a relationship with another person who can fulfill your "I," you are left hopeless and lose your humanity.

⁵⁰ Robert Hugh Benson, *Lord of the World* (Seawolf Press, 2023).

Looking at these girls and boys, it seemed evident to me that with their wings of hope for total fulfillment clipped, how could they ever fly? What freedom is it when you are condemned to have to decide by yourself who you are, and then you realize it's not enough? In the lack of hope, in this resignation to the void, abandoning oneself to despair, there is a growth of violence toward yourself and others. It seems to me that the demand to lower the level of desire, reducing it to something that I decide, is an evident form of the destruction of the human.

But if we are sincere with the impetus of our nature, with the desire that constitutes us, every desired thing leads us as a sign to the source of everything, to God. Allow me to quote a passage from Dante, a man who truly loved desire as the road to God, even though he sensed that alone, without His help, we would be lost! In a very beautiful page from *Purgatory*, he described the soul, each of us, with truly marvelous words that we all know: "Forth of His hands whose brooding tenderness / Loves her or ere she comes to be, [the soul comes forth from God's hand, who seems to let it fly away like a butterfly. He looks upon it with admiration, with a Father's love, almost admiring it before it exists. He thinks of it and creates it in His love] is brought, / Laughing and weeping, like a babe that plays, [laughing and crying like an innocent child] // The simple, infant soul, that, all untaught, / But moved by a glad Maker, [because it was put into motion by this Maker, by the infinite, by God, full of joy toward it], turns with pleasure / To this or that by which her fancy's caught. [The yet inexpert soul knows nothing and only knows, moved by Him who gladly creates her, to turn willingly toward that which delights her; in other words, she would like to return to the joy that is the only joy that can fill all the space of her being launched into that reality] // First she's attracted by some trifling treasure, [the simple soul enters into the world and finds something that attracts it] / Then runs, beguiled, in hot pursuit to scour, / Save manage sway her love with the curb's pressure. [Right away she tastes the savor of a small good, and would be immediately fooled, running after the first thing that attracts her, if there were not someone who guides and curbs her and directs her love forward, further beyond].⁵¹

⁵¹ Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy, Purgatory*, Canto XVI, vv. 85–93, translated by Dorothy Sayers (Middelsex, U.K., Penguin Books, 1955), 190.

In another very beautiful text, Dante said that the human being in front of reality is like a person in front of a pyramid. In the beginning there is a small good, like a child who sees some roasted nuts and falls in love with them, then after a while they are not sufficient and he sees a game, and it is not enough, and then he sees a horse, and then a girl. Then he sees money, and then, Dante said with great realism, he wants more money and after that he wants even more money. But all these things, commented the poet, are not against the structure of our humanity; they are not desires that turn us away from God, on the condition that we realize they are not enough and are steps on a journey that brings us to recognize the one good that suffices. For Dante, desire is good, not to be cancelled, because it is a step toward destiny.

I was struck by an interview of Norwegian Bishop Erik Varden that appeared in last month's *Tracce*. I imagine you have read it, too. I'll re-read a part: "Desire is the expression of our being made by God. It is something intrinsic to human nature. An echo, a call dwells in us. It is the Lord who causes the similarity to Him to sing in us. Desire is the engine of my life because it orients it toward fullness, which is communion with God lived also in relationships with others. Our sin is a sabotage of desire [do you see? Sin is not the infraction of a rule, but the destruction of ourselves] that fragments toward many different objects. But if we look where that deep desire leads us, we see how relative all things are, and how they cannot fulfill it. At the same time, we recognize them in their truest value, because only in the light of what quenches the thirst of life [God], does every little thing reveal its meaning."⁵²

The great grace

What beauty! We have encountered this experience of the valorization of all of our being as women and men.

Today more than ever, in the world in which we live, in the concrete situation of these days, to hope truly one needs to have received *a great grace*. For this reason, I will review the passages that Fr.

⁵²Erik Varden, "Allargare il desiderio" [Give more space to desire], interview by Anna Leonardi, *Tracce* no. 3 (2024), 18. Our translation.

Giussani used to help us understand what an encounter with Jesus generates within the structure of desire that constitutes us, without cancelling it but, instead, bringing it to fulfillment. In the beginning of the chapter on hope in *Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, he summarized the points of his reflection with a passage from *Alla Ricerca del Volto Umano* [In search of the human face], which was proposed in the 1996 Easter poster: “Hope is a certainty in the future because of a present reality. Therefore, it is the presence of Christ, made known by memory, that makes us certain of the future. And so a ceaseless journey is possible, a limitless striving, setting out from the certainty that He, since He possesses history, will manifest Himself in it.”⁵³

1. A presence

Commenting on this text in *Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, Giussani affirmed: “*First*. there is a presence, the life of the human person has a presence, has within a presence, the presence of people and things. These presences exercise an attraction, and so the person’s soul sets out with desires that constitute the spring of every dynamism. The human person is not a ‘bump on a log.’ The attractions of this presence evoke the ideals of life: beauty, truth, creativity, work (creativity is work). All the attachment to these ideals—because the human person holds onto these ideals—and, therefore the esteem felt for the desires, [however,] blind the person to their provisional nature. The person does not see that all these things are signs, signs along the road.”⁵⁴ Giussani’s words seem to summarize the entire journey we’ve made from last night to today, and maybe now, precisely because of the journey we have made, we understand them a bit more.

As we saw yesterday, the point of departure for talking about hope is reality, the presence, the positive nature of desire, but also the deceptions to which we easily fall prey. Presences, which cause desire to vibrate, evoke an attraction that moves us. However, this positive movement can be debased right away, attaching to the immediate presences that evoke the desires, instead of living them as a

⁵³ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 265. Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In search of the human face] (Milan: BUR, 2007), 92. Our translation.

⁵⁴ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 265–66. Our translation.

gift and sign directing us beyond. This generates a *lack of openness to expectant awaiting* that transforms desires into dreams and closed loops, which instead of setting us on the road, closes us off.

2. The Ideal happens

At this point, Giussani took another step: “*Second*. A presence happens [among many presences], the presence of the Word of God made man in the womb of Mary, the presence of Him through whom all people and things were made, Him who created the world, and therefore all created realities are a sign of Him and find their own truth (otherwise they are lies) and their own fulfillment (otherwise they are vain) in Him. All the ideals awakened along the road are in function of Him, the Ideal [with a capital I]. The desires of the human person are true and effective only if lived in function of the desire for Him. Experiences of love, of seeking truth, of fruitfulness, of constructiveness are forms for entering into the experience of His mystery. This is the ideal of life of the human person after He came to remain until the day of His glory. Living this expectant awaiting is the hope of every hope.”⁵⁵

Thus the presence of Christ—made known by memory, certain gestures, certain relationships, certain moments like Morning Prayer today, the sacraments and Mass, which are instruments of this memory that causes us to immediately recognize the presence for which our heart is truly made—puts things in their place: everything is good, everything is agreeable, because everything is sign, a step toward entering into a relationship with Him.

a. The leap from desire to expectant awaiting is brought about by Christ

Jesus comes and transforms our desire, the ideals that arise on the journey, into calls to expectant waiting for Him, into certainty that the One we await is coming. It is like a transformation, like a step within our ontology, a recovery of our true ontology. In a memorable Easter Vigil homily, Benedict XVI spoke of “a qualitative leap in the history of ‘evolution’ [that happened with the resurrection of Jesus] and of

⁵⁵ Giussani, 266. Our translation.

life in general towards a new future life, towards a new world which, starting from Christ, already continuously permeates this world of ours, transforms it and draws it to itself.”⁵⁶

I’ll return once again to the 1961 text we started with yesterday. Giussani spoke of this kind of “upgrade” of the human, which enables us to pass from desire, from human hope, enveloped in uncertainty and thus easily confused with dreams that often become nightmares, to Christian hope, which embraces all human hope, but opens it to an unforeseeable and infinitely greater, limitless horizon we can await with certainty. He said in that text: “An event, a new fact changes the terms of the problem profoundly. God personally entered into this dramatic situation of the human person: He entered through Christ. First of all, Christ reveals the unsuspected expanse of human destiny [...]. Christ reveals the meaning of existence, which lies in the destiny of a personal and supernatural relationship with God [...]. In the second place, in Himself Christ offers us the concrete opportunity to reach that unforeseeable and mysterious destiny. [...] I become your journey. I am the pledge of the solution, and the road to it. *Gratia Dei*: the fulfillment of the human person is a gift, much more a gift than the unforeseen and unforeseeable origin of the human person itself.”⁵⁷ We are made this way: hope, expectant awaiting open to the infinite, and the presence of Christ who offers Himself as the road enable us to reach the fulfillment of the desire that constitutes us.

Let’s return to what Fr. Giussani identified as the highest and most profound moment of the human and poetic vicissitudes of Leopardi, in the comment he wrote in *Is it (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*: “Christ came to clarify this game: ‘Everything is a sign of Me. Everything speaks of Me.’ Everything that is great in the life of the human person is a prophecy about Him. [...] When a person has a presentiment of this, as Leopardi did at the culmination of his human trajectory in the hymn *To His Lady*, the soul immediately bends in humility to await the other thing: even in front of what one can grasp, one awaits another thing. The soul grasps what it can grasp, but it awaits something else. Hope does not lie in what you can grasp, but

⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *Easter Vigil Homily*, April 15, 2006.

⁵⁷ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 159. Our translation.

in something else. Something else ... [...]. Therefore, the hope that Christ kindles and nourishes is human hope, which by grace is spared the illusion that comes from all things, not because they are negative in and of themselves, but because their positive nature points to something else, otherwise they become idols. Christian hope is the hope of human desire, but its content carries a different world.”⁵⁸

Thus, those who encounter Christ have not “left behind” human hope, which remains a “courageous situation of expectant awaiting for a future good, arduous and difficult for the gaze of the present,”⁵⁹ said Fr. Giussani. Those who live the encounter with Christ have discovered the future good, which in any case remains a mystery, because in no way can we define it. It has a face in the present, that is, Christ Himself.

The discovery that an everyday thing is a sign of Christ makes it eternal, forever. When you give your beloved a rose to express your feelings, in time it wilts and dies, but the meaning it carries as a sign, the love of the giver, remains forever and even once it has wilted, this makes it in some way a participant in the perennial meaning it served to express. For the person in love, that rose does not stop being a rose, but it takes on an incomparably greater meaning. Maybe the girl keeps it; she has it dried and mounted in a frame. She would not do that for just any flower. She does it because “that” flower becomes a sign, points to a meaning.

This is what we live. In the religious history of humanity, it is what the religious person calls a *sacred* reality. If the mystery manifested itself in a certain cave or on a certain stone (think of an apparition of Our Lady or the burning bush), that stone remains a stone, but it will never again be a stone like the others, because the fact remains forever that it was the vehicle of the eternal, the mystery, the infinite, and its value becomes unplumbable and perennial, *sacred*. We priests know this well, because we find little statues or images of saints left by someone who had to get rid of them but did not feel they could throw them in the trash, since they were sacred images. “Let the priest take care of it...,” as if to say that the priest can decide, since he’s consecrated. The thing that “bears” the meaning of reality leaves behind the

⁵⁸ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 337–38. Our translation.

⁵⁹ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 156. Our translation.

vulgarity of normal things and draws upon the eternal forever. This is not simply superstition, but shows that we are made to recognize each thing as a sign of Him who made it.

Just think what a gaze on others, on creation and on the world, is possessed by a person who sees and recognizes *each thing, each person* in its flowing from the mystery who is its meaning, and therefore makes it *sacred*. There is no longer the separation between *sacred* and *profane*, because, since everything is relationship with Christ, everything becomes in some way *sacred*. From the perspective of the eternal who communicates to us in Jesus, one understands that also the things we perceive as great contradictions of hope, that is, sin, pain, and death, are touched by the awareness that only in Him do they find a meaning that maybe we do not know yet. So, you could almost say that they are made sacred in the sense that they point to Him, as an entreaty for meaning and forgiveness, and in this sense are vanquished by Him, as the whole liturgy of this Easter season announces in full exultation. Since Jesus is risen, everything is brought within this definitiveness; even death is vanquished—already, now, and forever.

b. His presence recognized in faith transfigures the present and the future

Thus, this present in which He is as presence, around which everything orders itself in a new and sacred way, makes us certain of tomorrow. This is the difference between the gaze on the future of the person who has this structure of desire but has not encountered Christ, and the person who has received the *great grace*. Fr. Giussani said: “What does the Christian life do instead? It makes you live in the present with great attention towards all the things of the present; and paying attention even to the sea in front of you, you spot on the sea’s ultimate horizon a little point; and it isn’t a ship that’s moving off, but one that’s coming towards you. It’s destiny that’s coming to you; and the day in which you become aware of that little point that is destiny that’s about to arrive is a great day, as it was for Christopher Columbus: that day when he began to glimpse a little stretch of land was a great day.”⁶⁰ For this reason, this expectant awaiting for the

⁶⁰ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 14.

future is without uncertainty: even though you do not know it yet, you know that the destiny is certain and good, because it is in the hands of Him who loves you.

3. His presence multiplies our efforts a hundredfold

Let's return to the summary of *Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, which continues this way: "Third. Therefore, He must enter to determine all the attempts in which human hope (hope is the driving force!) seeks the supreme and ultimate experience that makes the foretastes that are our everyday human experiences a hundred times more exalting. The consequences are a capacity for familiarity or lovingness with Christ, an increase in the value of work, an exaltation of affection, a protagonism in history as creation of the people of God."⁶¹

For this reason, you can be attentive to all things of the present and open to what comes from the mystery, and no matter what form it takes, you know deep down that it is the good for you. He possesses history and we, too, possess the present in a possession already given. The accent is on this participle: given. Christ enables me to possess the present because He is in the present and thus, in receiving the content of the present as His gift, I possess it truly (everything becomes sacred) and I am certain about tomorrow, whatever it may be.

Jesus promised His apostles that they would possess present and future reality in fullness like Him, and that they would even do greater things than He did when they received the Holy Spirit, as affirmed in the fourteenth chapter of John's gospel: "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones [do you understand? greater ones!] than these, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in My name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything of Me in My name, I will do it."⁶²

In our certainty about Him we become protagonists of a newness that enters into everything, but our hope is always and only Him. In *Is It Possible To Live This Way?*, Fr. Giussani quoted the episode of the apostles in chapter 6 of John's gospel, when in the Capernaum

⁶¹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 266. Our translation.

⁶² Jn 14:12–14.

synagogue Jesus said they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, and everyone abandoned Him, believing Him mad. So He asked his own, who remained even though they did not understand: “Do you also want to leave?” Peter spoke up for them all and answered, “Master, to whom shall we go?”⁶³ Giussani commented: “What was Peter, John, and Andrew’s hope in Jesus based on? For them, Jesus was one whom they called ‘you,’ He was a Presence: [...] it was that man, to whom they accepted to belong, who founded their certainty for the future.”⁶⁴ The power of His presence made them certain of the future.

I could tell you about my own experience in this regard, my going to Peru twenty-three years ago, or my nomination as bishop last year. In both cases they were enormous choices that demanded “burning the ships,” to use an appropriate image, as this is what Hernán Cortés did when he arrived in America, as a vow never to turn back. It meant saying yes to a total change of my life. It was not my project. Sincerely, up to the day before they asked if I was willing to go, I had not even thought of it. I accepted not because I knew what would happen, but because I recognized how that step was a gift from Jesus and so I could bet on it, take the risk. You know the One to whom you entrust yourself and your future, which you do not know and cannot even imagine, but you know it is the way He has you journey toward fullness, toward destiny.

The day before the proposal that I go to Peru, I thought I had a good and fulfilled life. I had been recently appointed parish priest of Coverciano, a famous neighborhood in Florence. When the archbishop said, “I’m sending you to Coverciano as parish priest,” I was almost ashamed because my first reaction was: “The parish is only half a mile from the stadium!” Looking back on it later when I was in Lima, I thought, what a leap in the quality of the consciousness of Christ and thus in the consciousness of myself! What a hundred-fold multiplication of grace in understanding the charism, to which I already belonged (I had met the movement when I was sixteen), but of which I had seen only the tip of the iceberg! What power of newness and intensity of life I was given with the great story of the move-

⁶³ Cf. Jn 6:67–68.

⁶⁴ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 14–15.

ment in Latin America, which the day before had almost nothing to do with me, if not singing, “Red evening, Belo Horizonte, my eyes have never seen you...”⁶⁵ I had always thought I could never live in a place where I couldn’t see the dome of the Florence cathedral, so fond was (and am) I of my city. Instead, from then on it has been an adventure that continues to question my faith and set it in motion.

The same happened last year: I already felt questioned and engaged but also in some way satisfied in my new situation. I was a parish priest in Florence, and had recently left various diocesan responsibilities entrusted to me in previous years that, to tell the truth, had weighed on me a bit. My archbishop, Cardinal Beteri, had left me free for the new responsibility and entrusted it to me in August 2022 as the leader for the region of Latin America for our Fraternity. It was an enormous challenge. I remember I had made an appointment with Davide, because after a trip to Argentina, where there was the possibility of a very concrete ecclesial service, I thought that maybe it would be useful to go live there. Also, in my last conversation with my archbishop, he had said: “If you can, remain parish priest here.” Obviously, I had interpreted “If you can, remain” as “if you want, you can go.”

But the day came, the Monday before Christmas in 2022. I saw a call from Rome on my phone, but thought it was telemarketing so I turned it off twice. At the third call I answered, and it was the apostolic nuncio! He was looking for me to communicate my nomination as bishop of San Miniato. This was a new leap that I accepted, knowing very well that the responsibility frightened me because of my objective smallness and meanness. But how could I have said no? Even if I was just a “bischerò qualunque,” an average, dumb guy, I trusted. After all, the nuncio asked me: “What answer are you going to give the pope?” Could I say no to the pope? So once again I trusted in Him. But in this case, the “upgrade” was not entirely in the gift of the sacrament, totally His grace, but extends to the provocation that I have experienced every day since then, to my consciousness of Christ, in identifying with Him, to whom I am called without the possibility of misunderstandings.

After the nomination as bishop, my relationship with Latin America has continued, which was unimaginable for me. I had imme-

⁶⁵ R. Ronza, “Rossa sera” [Red evening], in *Canti* [Songs], 266. Our translation.

diately taken for granted that my commitment to Latin America would have ended. But in the meeting with Davide that had already been scheduled, which covered various topics, he obviously asked: “Why can’t you continue?” and I said: “I have to ask the apostolic nuncio, my bishop, and Cardinal Zuppi, the president of the Italian Bishops’ Conference.” Unexpectedly, all three (I had not yet been consecrated as bishop) told me to continue. So I accepted because I have experienced that openness is for the hundredfold. This then translated into a solution to the problem that I would not be able go to Latin America often: the work would be carried out in communion with Fernando from Argentina, Stefania from Ecuador, Oliverio from Mexico, and others. A new way of guiding the experience of the movement has begun, thanks to their increased responsibility. This communal guidance was expressed in the assembly in March in Brazil with all the leaders of Latin America, and it was something spectacular. This very beautiful step did not happen because of an ideological project, but by obeying the given conditions. So to sum up, the experience of an entire life (a great grace) confirms that in saying yes to Jesus, who possesses history, the promise is fulfilled and destiny comes ever nearer, comes toward us.

4. “Only He is”

Fr. Giussani continued: “*Fourth*. Error remains as pain, not as an objection [and he quoted the famous line from *Miguel Mañara*]: ‘These things have not been. Only He is.’ In a real way, thought, heart ... all our capacity for relationships, almost without our realizing it, center on Christ.” This is not just any excuse. “Only He is”⁶⁶ means that even sin is no longer an objection. In fact, Fr. Giussani said: “‘Only He is.’ It is not the exclusion of my father and my mother, but the assumption into the exaltation of Christ of my father and my mother. My father and my mother enter with Him, into His figure. The most beloved person enters into His figure, to the heart, the center of His figure,”⁶⁷ that is, becomes sign, road. We can find everything in the uniqueness of His totalizing presence.

⁶⁶ Cf. O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara* (New York: Human Adventure Books, 2017), 89.

⁶⁷ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 266–67. Our translation.

Fr. Giussani did not hide from us that this lived hope is an arduous journey toward possessing a good. And the “Only He is” of *Miguel Mañara* does not mean that our sinfulness, our sinfulness that opposes Christ, is passed over without judgment. (Rather, do you remember how Miguel Mañara was so closed into remorse for the wrong he had done, into the consciousness of his intrinsic meanness, that he could not feel forgiven? He is told this because he could not emerge from his anguish over the harm he had done.) “He alone exists” is the promise that pain and repentance for sin are the introduction to gratitude, which then leads us to discover that Christ is everything; we can find again everything in the uniqueness of His totalizing presence.

Sin remains, and hurts, but they, too, become a cry to His infinite mercy.

This requires patience, Fr. Giussani reminded us. Jesus said in Luke’s gospel: “By your perseverance you will secure your lives.”⁶⁸ Giussani described patience with these words: “Patience is the capacity to carry everything with the reasonable courage to not reject anything and—watch out—to not refute anything.”⁶⁹ It is the patience to persevere in the journey Christ gives us, in the companionship that makes Him present to us: “Remain in me.”⁷⁰ Patience is this staying attached to Him, returning to Him after we sin, asking Him for forgiveness, and getting back on the road of following Him. It is so important to stay attached to the signs of His presence that changes us, attached to this companionship—the sacraments; frequent confession, in which we receive His forgiveness; Mass and the Eucharist, in which He gives us Himself.

“Remain in me.” The difficulty, the sin, the betrayal all remain, but they lose their ability to totally demoralize us and distance us from Christ. We still fall, we still go astray, we still fool ourselves into imagining that what we think, our opinion, fulfills the desire of the heart. Sin remains sin, but also to look at Him again, to cry to Him, to return to Him. Hope has a secret, that of the Father, His mercy and forgiveness that give us new birth. Listen to what beautiful words Péguy used to express this: “You may wonder, you may ask yourself:

⁶⁸ Cf. Lk 21:19.

⁶⁹ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 32–33.

⁷⁰ Jn 15:4.

But how is it / That this fountain of Hope flows eternally, / That it gushes eternally, that it springs eternally [...] / There must be a secret there somewhere. / Some sort of mystery. [...] / My good people, says God, it's not tricky. / Her mystery is not tricky. / And her secret is not complicated. [...] / But it's precisely with the impure water that she makes her springs of pure water. / And that is the reason she never runs out. // But that's also why she is Hope. [...] // New water from used water. // Springs from old water. / Fresh souls from old souls. [...] // How does she accomplish this, how does she go about it, / That, my children, is my secret. / Because I am her Father."⁷¹

Here is how Fr. Giussani commented on this passage: "To take up hope again after one of our errors is such a great gesture that the poet Péguy defines it as 'the secret mystery of hope,' because pardon of evil is a mystery in itself. 'The secret mystery of hope that with bad water makes pure water and makes fresh souls out of old souls.' It's rebirth. Baptism is the beginning of this rebirth, a principle that operates for one hundred years if someone lives for a hundred years, for 103 if someone lives for 103 years, that operates 1,299 times if one has committed 1,299 sins and 10,003 times if one has committed 10,003 sins."⁷² His mercy, the great grace.

5. The home of hope

This mercy, this purified water, this rebirth of hope, has a place, a home, a living companionship in which it flowers, as Claudio Chieffo sang in *Canzone del melograno* [The song of the pomegranate].⁷³

Fr. Giussani described it with these words: "*Fifth*. The place of this event is an ecclesial companionship. Ecclesial means people who come together for this reason: for Christ. Our companionship is only friendship. Our companionship is only friendship and, with the wish that we'll become ever better friends, let's go eat!"⁷⁴ This is how he concluded the summary of *Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?*, but we still have more to say before we go eat.

⁷¹ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 107–9.

⁷² Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 36.

⁷³ Claudio Chieffo, "Canzone del melograno" [The song of the pomegranate], in Paola Scaglione, *La mia voce e le Tue parole* [My voice and your words] (Milan: Ares, 2006), 268. Our translation.

⁷⁴ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, 267. Our translation.

The Church is this place, the home where hope is revived constantly, the place Jesus made to continually lift us up again on the arduous journey toward destiny, the place where we are looked upon with the gaze of God, who loved us before we existed. It is the place where He loves us in our weakness and where we are put back on our feet by the grace of the sacraments and the daily companionship of the “cloud of witnesses”⁷⁵ surrounding us. In the Church, in our companionship, made by His grace from our poor and sinful humanity, there is the presence of God who redeems us from evil and death.

For this reason, we must look at our friendship as something *sacred* that Christ wants to use to show everyone His face. This is how the pope sees it, as he wrote in his letter of January 30: “I am grateful to the Lord for the vitality that the movement continually demonstrates in its work of evangelisation and charity towards the men and women of today.” He also told us that this vitality requires our unity: “It alone, in following the pastors of the Church, will in time be able to safeguard the fruitfulness of the charism.”⁷⁶ Unity is a gift, because an Other has made us one thing. He has made us “one.” In *Why the Church?*,⁷⁷ Fr. Giussani draws upon three texts by Saint Paul that I’ll quote here: “For through faith you are all children of God in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendent, heirs according to the promise.”⁷⁸ How often Fr. Giussani stressed this: “You are all one,” that is, just one thing, one person, “in Christ Jesus.” “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.”⁷⁹ “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one

⁷⁵ Cf. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, *Our Eyes Are Fixed on Jesus, Who Is the Origin and Fulfillment of Faith*, Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation (2023), 28–29, available at <https://english.clonline.org/publications/other-texts/fraternity-exercises/our-eyes-fixed-on-jesus-who-is-the-origin-and-fulfillment-of-faith>.

⁷⁶ Francis, “Letter to Davide Prospero,” January 30, 2024, available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/church/2024/02/01/letter-pope-francis-audience-prosperi-january-2024>.

⁷⁷ Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Why the Church?* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 77–78.

⁷⁸ Gal 3:26–29.

⁷⁹ Col 3:11.

body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all given to drink of one Spirit.”⁸⁰

Our unity, in the great unity of the Church, is the road, is like a great river that leads to destiny, to the outlet, to Christ, to Him who fulfills expectancy and hope. The gush of new life that through Fr. Giussani has reached us and continually generates us, by pure grace of the Lord, is this concrete place, this *home of hope*. In the Church, in the movement, there are houses, homes, such as the *Memores Domini* homes, the homes of our families, the homes that are our Fraternity groups, called to be a reflection of the one Church, in the sacramental sense. Just as every consecrated host brings Jesus Himself, so we are together to recognize His presence among us and to help each other to follow it, to remain attached to the source, to flow in the great river of this unity that is granted us, but also sought and prayed for.

In *Why the Church?*, Fr. Giussani spoke this way about the articulation between the universal Church and the concrete community in which one encounters and lives the faith: “One must learn what the total Church is, and this is why we must explore the depths of the ecclesiastical experience one has encountered, providing that it has all the characteristics of a true ecclesiastical experience. This means obedience to the total Church, depending on it, organizing one’s life according to its rhythms, seeing oneself reflected in the other factors within the sphere of the Christian life. These are aspects which define the validity of gathering together. Otherwise, what gives value to our coming together is not the mystery of Jesus Christ who communicates himself to history and the world, but something that has diminished its import. Realistically, too, the local Church may only arise in a given place, a certain environment that is, in provisional circumstances. How can Jesus Christ be communicated in such an environment except through a group of Christians conscious of their true belonging to the Church proper? Without them, it would be as if the total Church in that environment did not exist.”⁸¹

In this articulation, what prevails as a concrete attitude in each person who is part of it is the love for unity, which is nourished through following. The pope invited us “to follow the path taken, under the

⁸⁰ 1 Cor 12:13.

⁸¹ Giussani, *Why the Church?*, 87.

guidance of the Church, and to collaborate willingly and loyally with those who are called to guide the movement. Only this obedience, continually rediscovered and nourished, can ensure an ever richer experience of Christian life among you and the renewal of your presence in the world, for the good of the whole Church.”⁸²

Fr. Giussani recounted that the movement had its beginning in the moment unity was triggered with those kids encountered on Via Lamarmora leaving the school, and whom he set out to follow; not them, but the unity with them, Him who manifested Himself in that unity. “The Movement had been and was the source of everything because it demanded my belonging. That is, in beginning the movement, the first person engaged was me. So when I faced the first three young men in the street after my first hour at school, after the first day teaching at the Berchet High School, I went home worried about myself, thinking with what responsibility, self-awareness, and engagement of myself I had to respond and correspond to what I was beginning to sense, speaking to them! I understood I could not see them again the next day without taking a position in front of this expansion of the question: I belonged to those three young men. I belonged not to them but to the unity with them. Something had happened.”⁸³

Following, through begging for Christ, is a journey. As we said yesterday, following is done by beggars, those who have nothing to demand, nothing to defend. This fills us with that *naive boldness* that makes witnesses of us. It makes us strong in bearing witness and at the same time without demands, capable of welcoming any accent of truth in each person we meet so that He, Jesus, may be known and loved, and may save us and the world. As Péguy said, we are called to: “nourish [...] / With our flesh and with our blood, / With our heart, / The carnal Words, / The eternal Words, pronounced carnally in time. [...] to keep alive in time / These words pronounced alive in time.”⁸⁴

⁸² Francis, “Letter to Davide Properi.”

⁸³ Luigi Giussani, “Appartenenza alla dimora come movimento verso l’unità della vita” [Belonging to the dwelling place as movement toward a unity of life], in *Tracce* no. 1 (1997), III. Our translation. This is a very interesting passage in which Fr. Giussani recounts the emergence of the movement in himself.

⁸⁴ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 59–60.

“You are the living fountain of hope”: Mary and the Church

I would like to conclude by stressing an analogy, which all of tradition underlines, between the Church (and our companionship) and Our Lady. First of all, I'll do this with what Péguy said about the Virgin Mary. In our friend Rafael Gerez's interview of Fabrice Hadjadj at the 2021 Encuentro Madrid, the latter said: “From the theological point of view, hope is certainly the virtue that is born when faith and charity, heaven and earth, the sinner and the saint, the flesh and purity move together. For this reason, behind every reflection on hope, Péguy weaves a stupendous meditation on the Virgin Mary, carnal and pure. In fact, the difficulty lies here. It is very easy to be only in heaven or only on earth, but it is difficult to be in both poles and turn to heaven without fleeing the earth; if we do this, we will find ourselves with a religion that becomes the opium of the people. But also not being only on the earth, such that, for example, in the name of achieving a simply human justice, one arrives at destroying everything, tearing out everything, the wheat and the weeds; it is necessary to leave place for the final judgment.”⁸⁵

Here is what Péguy wrote: “In all creatures there's something missing. [...] / What those that are carnal lack is precisely being pure. [...] / But what those that are pure lack is precisely being carnal. [...] // And she however doesn't lack anything. Except truly to be God himself. [...] / (But this is in the order of things.) // Because being carnal she is pure. / But, being pure, she is also carnal.”⁸⁶

Péguy saw in this paradoxical unity the task of Mary as the “sureness of our hope.” In addition to this analogy between the Church and Mary, there is also a paradoxical coexistence of purity and carnality in the Church and our companionship. It is like Luca della Robbia's glazed terracotta of *The Visitation of Mary and Elizabeth*, created in 1445, the first known glazed terracotta statue. The elderly woman falls to her knees in front of Mary, who is so young, almost a child, because she is full of grace, the grace that already fills her. The presence of Christ is seen in this childlike and mature youth, full of awareness of the mystery and entirely lovely. She is the child hope. Full of grace: this is an image of what the

⁸⁵ Fabrice Hadjadj, *Una vida en clave de esperanza: Diálogo con Rafael Gerez Kraemer*, ed. Carmen Giussani (Madrid: Bookman, 2021), 65. Our translation.

⁸⁶ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 46–47.

Church is, what we are, our movement. Giussani prayed this way, in a memorably brief message, one of his last, on the occasion of the pilgrimage to Loreto for the fifty years of the movement: “‘Our Lady, it is you who give certainty to our hope!’ This is the most important phrase in the whole history of the Church; the whole of Christianity is expressed in it. ‘You give certainty to our hope’ indicates the blossoming of things. Without Our Lady we would be unable to be sure of the future, because the certainty of the future comes to us from Christ: the Mystery of God who becomes man. [...] So, for us, prayer to Christ is more and more identified with prayer to Our Lady.”⁸⁷

I’ll close with the greeting Fr. Giussani gave to the participants in the Meeting of Rimini in 2002, in his last years, when on every occasion he spoke of Mary:⁸⁸ “You are the living fountain of hope. Hope is the one station where the great train of eternity makes a brief stop. You are the living fountain of hope for, without hope, there is no chance for life. [...] May this living fountain of hope be every morning the most gripping and tenacious meaning of life possible. This is why we are friends. Let us remain friends. How can we remain friends? [...] You are the living fountain of hope. I wish you all to be my companions on the road, feeling a deep friendship even though we don’t know one another directly. We know each other indirectly, but even better than if we knew each other directly. Living fountain, ‘Maiden yet a Mother... Thou the consummation planned by God’s decree.’ Fantastic! Saying it seventy years later is truly impressive. It is evident that nothing in the world is sure except in this. Ciao, and forgive my impertinence.”⁸⁹ And mine!

Regina coeli

⁸⁷ Luigi Giussani, “Fr. Giussani’s Message to the Participants in the Pilgrimage to Loreto, on the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Birth of Communion and Liberation,” October 16, 2004, available at <https://uk.clonline.org/archive/fr-giussani/father-giussani-s-message-to-the-participants-in-the-pilgrimage>.

⁸⁸ Remember that in the 2003 edition of *Perché la Chiesa*, Giussani added a concluding chapter on Mary, origin and model of the Church and our companionship, where we read: “Our Lady introduces us to the Mystery, that is, the meaning of our days, the meaning of time that passes; her gaze guides us on the journey, her example educates us, her figure constitutes the design of our initiatives. Generous mother, she generates the great Presence of Christ for us. We are consoled, forgiven, nourished, enriched, gladdened by that Presence that is reborn in the flesh of Our Lady. For this reason, we ask her every day to make us participants in her freedom, her openness, her life.” Giussani, *Perché la Chiesa*, 309. Our translation.

⁸⁹ Luigi Giussani, “Living Fountain,” *Traces* no. 9 (2000), available at <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/septem02/livingfoun.htm>.

Saturday, April 13, afternoon

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Concerto for piano in C minor n. 24, K 491 Piano, Clara Haskil

Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux–Igor Markevitch, Spirto Gentil n. 32 (Philips), Universal

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Giovanni Paccosi

The gladness of the poor

This afternoon as well we'll draw from "Bring Hope," the text by Fr. Giussani that we quoted many times this morning. The final section is entitled, "The sublime in the life of every day."

"There are two precise factors of experience felt by anyone who participates in the community of the Church [that is, who participates in the place where Christ makes Himself present, making possible our hope], living it in the liturgy: *certainty* and *constructive activity*. A deeply humble certainty, because its foundation is not me, but the One who makes everything do-able. 'In spem contra spem. Spes autem non confundit' [Hoping against every hope. Hope then does not disappoint]. A constructive activity that is not reduced to certain times and is not identified only with certain undertakings, but that fills every moment and redeems even the briefest measure of a gesture with the usefulness of a noble task. A constructive activity that achieves the sublime in the apparent banality of the most meager life." At this point there is a very beautiful line: "Can't the sublime be of daily life, like wine and water?"⁹⁰

What a heartening outlook! This brings us back to everything we meditated on this morning, the certainty projected on the future because of this familiarity with the *sublime*, with the mystery made presence, who fills ordinary things and makes them a sign of the sublime themselves, giving them a *sacred* value. Fr. Giussani conclud-

⁹⁰ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 161–62. Our translation.

ed the article by stressing the need for an education to hope: “On this earth you do not belong to Christ unless in hope. Therefore, it is through education to hope that one enters upon the experience of redemption.”⁹¹ But how is one educated to hope?

Before embarking on the answer, I’ll open a little parenthesis. Someone reminded me, when I mentioned this afternoon’s theme, that Fr. Giussani invited us to keep two things in mind in *L’attrattiva Gesù* [The attraction of Jesus].⁹² On the one hand, wonder, because of the attraction of reality and things that sets in motion our desire. On the other hand, the sacrifice necessary to educate our hope, sacrifice in the sense spoken of this morning, to make each thing *sacred*, acknowledged as a sign of what attracts more than the thing itself. As I said this morning, just think what a gaze is possessed by someone who sees all things, all relationships, all people as sacred, because they are recognized as the place where the mystery is manifested.

So then, how does one educate to hope? Let’s return to *Is It Possible To Live This Way?* to discover how the experience of redemption can become consciousness of the instant, familiar as bread and wine.

The sentiment that arises in those who live in hope is *trust* but, as Fr. Giussani said, there is a point of passage, an obstacle to overcome, in order to live in this present familiarity, full of trust in the future. “From hope to trust the obstacle that can be born is the attribution of the certainty in the future to particular things we already possess: for example, money, hair, gold eyeglasses, friendships, the protection of elders, knowing how to sing, muscles ... according to all versions and images. What could hinder trust [...]? Something we possess, in which we specifically place our trust; something we already possess. But then, it has to do with non-possession; at least in that way, it has to do with non-possession, and the virtue that has to do with non-possession is poverty.”⁹³

Is it possible that in addressing such a fundamental and controversial theme as *poverty*, Fr. Giussani cited as obstacles to lived trust such minimal, almost paltry things? Can *hope* and the vital sentiment

⁹¹ Giussani, 162. Our translation.

⁹² Cf. Luigi Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù* (Milan: BUR, 1999), 34–37. Our translation.

⁹³ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 86–87.

that arises from it, *trust*, be blocked by attachments to hair, gold eye-glasses, knowing how to sing, and muscles? And yet these are exactly the examples he gave. They are the apparently paltry goods that make up our daily life. It's almost scary to think of how many things we can become attached to, how we can place our trust in certain present goods in looking to the future, and not in the certainty of Him present. Placing our certainty in a "particular" present possession is an objection to hope. "*Particular* means fixed by us, foreseen by us, chosen among what is comfortable to us, chosen among what persuades us more, chosen among what gives us more richness and therefore economic security."⁹⁴ Hope as certainty for the future comes from possession of Christ, now. Faith makes me recognize Christ present now, and for this reason I am certain of the future. Instead, placing my certainty in a particular possession, in the possession of a particular thing, this is the obstacle. We have this or that, and so we are certain. Just the same, for the future we want this or that, and hope is reduced to all these things. Here we are in front of something in which there is not the *both-and* (as if to say, 'I can hope in Christ and also hope in economic well-being.' 'I can hope in Christ and also hope in success.') but the *either-or*. We remember well when Jesus spoke about the alternative between serving God and Mammon.⁹⁵ Fr. Giussani added that anything you entrust your certainty to, if it is not faith, does not last and time carries it away.

I'd like to add a caution about how we can reduce our belonging to the Church and the charism in this arbitrary way. In fact, we can entrust our certainty in the future to an image of our companionship defined by us, our interpretation of what we have encountered, and not the objective presence of Christ in the concrete history of the charism, exactly as it reaches us now, of the real road that the Church confirms for us to be the sure presence of Christ. In this way we can also judge this history on the basis of "hair, gold eyeglasses, knowing how to sing" or on the fact of hearing or not hearing certain things, feeling instinctive congeniality or not. Instead of possession of something that is continually given to us, that we receive, that is not prey to our whims, we trust our certainty

⁹⁴ Giussani, 88.

⁹⁵ Cf. Lk 16:13.

to something that we hold tight and dominate, a “*particular* thing,” the way we want it. The condition for avoiding the blackmail of these reductions of faith and hope is poverty.

Giussani passed from this *external* approach, from considering poverty as the condition for not being reduced to the measure of the things in which we trust, to a description of the fundamental value of poverty: “On what, then, does poverty found its value? On the certainty that it is God who fulfills; Christ fulfills the desire that He creates in you: ‘He who began this good work in you will bring it to fulfillment tomorrow in the day of Christ.’”⁹⁶

Therefore, the certainty that He will fulfill the promise frees us from things, and here we have right away the immediate fruit of poverty: *freedom*. “You are a slave of nothing, you are bound to nothing, you are enchained to nothing [...] you are free. [...] You are not a slave of what you use, because you are only a slave of Him who gives you the certainty of your happiness.”⁹⁷

Yesterday Davide cited the episode of the rich young man, didn’t he? We also find ourselves a bit in his dramatic situation of having to decide what his heart was truly attached to. And yet, it is exactly an acknowledgment that Christ alone is the source of this certainty that frees us. But how dear this poverty costs us! How we constantly try to exorcise it, relativize it, allowing attachment to things to enslave us! And so, as always happens when we allow even a minimal distance, even a millimeter, from what is proposed to us, we miss out on the best.

In the February book of the month suggested by the movement, Chesterton’s very original biography of Saint Francis,⁹⁸ he described Francis’s poverty with paradoxical expressions—as he always did—that were also very effective.

He introduced this description with the definition that Francis gave of himself as a “jester of God,” and wrote that the way Francis began to see the world at a certain point, with an overturning of outlook, can be compared to how an acrobat walking on his hands sees it. “Any scene such as a landscape can sometimes be more clearly and freshly

⁹⁶ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 90.

⁹⁷ Giussani, 90.

⁹⁸ G.K. Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (Wilder Publications, 2020, digital edition).

seen if it is seen upside down.”⁹⁹ And the mysterious overturning that happened in Francis’s life when he embraced poverty as his bride can truly be described with this image of the world seen upside down. Let’s see what he says, because maybe the image of an acrobat leaves us a bit perplexed. “If a man saw the world upside down, with all the trees and towers hanging head downwards as in a pool, one effect would be to emphasise the idea of *dependence*. There is a Latin and literal connection; for the very word dependence only means hanging. [...] But the point is this: that whereas to the normal eye the large masonry of its walls or the massive foundations of its watchtowers and its high citadel would make it seem safer and more permanent, the moment it was turned over the very same weight would make it seem more helpless and more in peril. [...] Instead of being merely proud of his strong city because it could not be moved, he would be thankful to God Almighty that it had not been dropped; he would be thankful to God for not dropping the whole cosmos like a vast crystal to be shattered into falling stars.” At this point he added a very moving thing: “Perhaps St. Peter saw the world so, when he was crucified head-downwards.”¹⁰⁰

Seeing everything as hanging from the love of Him who gives it to us, who is giving it to us now: poverty is this being in front of everything, receiving it with gratitude, without demands. We said this morning that nothing is of value, if not in its being a gift and sign of the only thing necessary, Christ. Chesterton’s image is stupendous: you realize that in this moment, all of reality, including all of us, is coming from God who is generating it: it is hung from Him. In the following pages, Chesterton developed these reflections, making us understand that the gaze of the “mystic” sees things as they emerge from God, as God draws them forth into being. For example, he said: “He who has seen the whole world hanging on a hair of the mercy of God has seen the truth; we might almost say the cold truth. He who has seen the vision of his city upside down has seen it the right way up.”¹⁰¹

In this way Chesterton sensed and showed us the root of Franciscan *gladness*, which is also the characteristic that Fr. Giussani stressed as the most beautiful fruit of lived poverty: “It may seem a paradox to

⁹⁹ Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*.

¹⁰⁰ Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*.

¹⁰¹ Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*.

say that a man may be transported with joy to discover that he is in debt [...]. There the infinite creditor [because God has given us everything] does share the joy of the infinite debtor; for indeed they are both debtors and both creditors. In other words debt and dependence do become pleasures in the presence of unspoilt love.”¹⁰²

Francis’s gladness and joy gushed from the knowledge that everything is grace, a gift that comes from the uncontaminated love of God in whom he trusted unreservedly. In this regard, Fr. Giussani observed, “From freedom from things, which poverty engenders, a feeling is born that is possessed only by the poor, that is, by those who don’t place the hopes of their lives in determined things that they have chosen. [...] From this freedom from things, which is born from the certainty that God Himself fulfills everything, another characteristic of a person who is poor arises, which is gladness, of which the figure of Saint Francis is the emblem in the history of Christianity.”¹⁰³

Having nothing to defend, receiving everything in the moment, in the certainty of Christ, makes us glad. “From faith, hope is born; gladness is in hope because gladness cannot be earned and lived if not in the certainty of a future.”¹⁰⁴ Gladness, because while I recognize that everything is gift (and without this awareness there would remain only the lack of substance of everything, because things would fall to pieces if I did not realize that in this moment God is sustaining it and me), I am sure that the future is good, that *the best is yet to come*, because it will be the way God will respond to the desire and expectant awaiting that constitute me. And He will do it. He will respond in unforeseeable, always new forms, and I am sure, without fear of the inevitable sacrifice that becomes the condition for an even clearer awareness that only God suffices. *Quid animo satis?*

“As I described in the first volume of the School of Community, I had read a book on Franciscan life where every chapter began with a design. In one of the designs at the beginning was a *Q*—‘Quando,’ [When], the chapter began like that. That *Q* had a little bird as a tail and inside was the outline of Saint Francis in front of the sun coming out: the symbol of the human sensitivity of our people, of our race,

¹⁰² Chesterton, *Saint Francis of Assisi*.

¹⁰³ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 91.

¹⁰⁴ Giussani, 92.

in front of nature's most beautiful subject: this is gladness. And the *Q* introduced a sentence at the feet of Saint Francis: 'Quid animo satis?' What can satisfy the soul? In fact, the expression of gladness is precisely in this question—'What can satisfy the soul?'—because the relationship between Saint Francis and the most beautiful phenomenon of nature was an external view, a perspective of the eternal, a sign of the eternal. So, in true love, gladness exists inasmuch as possession is missing. It's not for naught that when speaking of virginity, we will say that it is poverty, that it is poverty at its extreme level, and it is for this that in dedicating oneself to God in virginity one must also give one's money, because without poverty, purity of dedication does not exist. [Someone told me that the most striking thing about our *Memores Domini* in the United States is not so much that they live virginity, but that they hold their money in common. In America it seems impossible that this could happen, and at times in our families as well this may seem impossible.] In a love relationship, an affective relationship, the prospect of the eternal renders it happy and, while it renders it happy, it makes it free from conditions: the more this detachment exists within it, the more it becomes happy. This is not meant to exhaust the observation and the description of every moment. The initial period can be one of greater contentedness, but it has to do with contentedness, not with gladness; gladness is permanent."¹⁰⁵

The third characteristic of the person who lives poverty, in freedom, is that nothing is lacking: you lack nothing. "One who is poor is one who is certain of some great things" and therefore lacks nothing, or actually, what he has, he possesses only to give. And Fr. Giussani went so far as to say: "The affirmation of Another as the meaning of the self doesn't mean to give fifty cents to the common fund, but to give everything, all of yourself to the common fund."¹⁰⁶ The affirmation of Another, that is, of the great presence, "will permit the great construction of your relationship with your woman or your man; certainty of some great things that will permit the architecture of your contribution to society, that will permit your work to rise up before your eyes as something beautiful and useful."¹⁰⁷ If it is not for this, what is it worth living for?

¹⁰⁵ Giussani, 95.

¹⁰⁶ Giussani, 96–97.

¹⁰⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose (1979–1981)* (Milan: BUR, 2007), 386. Our translation.

Fr. Giussani's last observation on the theme of poverty as condition for trust, which is the sentiment of life that emerges from hope, explains how poverty is also the condition for the detachment necessary for knowledge.

I believe we all remember the example in *The Religious Sense*, chapter 12, about the distance necessary for looking at a painting: seen from too close it is just a bunch of blotches, but seen from the right distance, it comes alive with beauty and harmony.¹⁰⁸

Here again Giussani returned to Saint Francis and that stunning line of his: "After God and the firmament, Clare." He commented on this line this way: "It's difficult to conceive of a loving exaltation greater than this. But think of the detachment there was, from the metric point of view, decimal metric. In fact it isn't a question of measurement, but ultimately of contextual company—the object, Clare, in Francis's eyes, was placed in the great company of the universe [that is, God]—it isn't a question of measurement but of company and, ultimately, of love; that is, of the abandonment of self, of the gift of self. It is better to say abandonment of self because it clarifies the idea of a gift. In a gift one always reserves the right to be esteemed, because one has given something, the right to gratitude, and this makes one lose everything; while in abandonment of self, no, it is pure. The abandonment of self: the more one loves the more one abandons oneself, and affirms only the other."¹⁰⁹ In the detachment of poverty, one knows and loves.

Thus in poverty, you are no longer attached to things, people, for some security of your own, but only in sight of their destiny, and thus their good and truth. "The more you love, the easier, lighter, and freer the relationship becomes,"¹¹⁰ without demands. Poverty enables you to have and use the thing as if you did not have it, as if you did not use it. This description of poverty is contained in Saint Paul's letter to the Corinthians: "I tell you, brothers, the time is running out. From now on, let those having wives act as not having them, those weeping as not weeping, those rejoicing as not rejoicing, those buying as not owning, those using the world as not using it fully. For the world in its present form is passing away."¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 102.

¹¹⁰ Giussani, 110.

¹¹¹ 1 Cor 7:29–31.

Trust: being suspended over a fullness

At this point in *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Fr. Giussani used a striking image that reminds us immediately of Chesterton's expressions mentioned earlier. The renunciation involved in poverty seems to leave us suspended over a void, without being attached to anything, but instead: "Poverty is not destined to leave us suspended over a void, but poverty that is born from hope is destined to establish, to exalt, to enlarge, to fill the entire world, so that our eyes see avidly, with trust. The result of poverty that is born from hope is called trust, which is the opposite of being suspended over a void. Trust is the opposite of being suspended over a void: it is being *suspended over a fullness*."¹¹²

The presence we have discovered in faith sustains life, now and forever, and therefore we can look to the future entrusted (trust comes from *fidere se alicui*, entrust oneself) to another, to Him, without fear, until the fulfillment of destiny.

a. Abandonment

Trust, Giussani continued, is an *abandonment* like that of a child in her mother's arms. Péguy described abandonment as seen by God, an abandonment precisely of hope, which is the strength of the person: one abandons oneself and this moves God Himself. The *child hope* obtains everything she wants, like children. "Those mischievous kids, they pretend that they're doing nothing, / Those sly little children. / They understand what they're doing, / The innocent ones. [...] / With their innocent manner; / Seeming not to be aware of anything; / Not to know."¹¹³ As Paolo Prosperi observed in his text, *Mistero dei misteri: La speranza in Péguy* [Mystery of mysteries: Hope in Péguy]: "In their not knowing anything, children know what adults had once known but have forgotten. They know the paradoxical power of pure expectant awaiting, the asking that receives the energy of its own drive not from the sentiment of their own merit but from the simple entrusting themselves to the gratuitous nature of a love that precedes all merit."¹¹⁴

¹¹² Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 111.

¹¹³ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 23–24.

¹¹⁴ Paolo Prosperi, *Mistero dei misteri: La speranza secondo Péguy* [Mystery of mysteries: Hope according to Péguy], (Brescia: Scholè-Morcelliana, 2023), 137. Our translation.

God looks at us and loves us with “*brooding tenderness*” as we said this morning, as a father with his child, in our entrusting ourselves to Him, almost with a demand that is not a demand, because it does not come from our own images but only from trust in Him. It is like the cunning of children who know they have no merit to assert and can only abandon themselves. Let’s listen once again to Péguy: “Children are new creatures. / They too, they above all, they are the first to take heaven by force. / *Rapiunt*, they seize it. / And what welcome strength and what tenderness of strength. / As a father willingly bears / As he likes to bear the forceful assertions of this strength. / The embraces of this tenderness. / As for me, says God, I know nothing more beautiful in the world / As a rascal of a child who chats with the good God / Down in a garden. [...] / A little man who recounts his sufferings to the good God / In the most serious way in the world.”¹¹⁵ “Happy childhood. Their whole little body, their whole little person, all their little gestures are full, stream with, overflow with a certain hope. [...] / You children imitate Jesus. / You don’t imitate him. You *are* children Jesus. [...] / In our childhood we are joined with Jesus.”¹¹⁶

The abandonment of trust is that of Jesus to the Father, and here we understand that being like children is not childishness but abandoning oneself to Him, even in front of sacrifice, passion, and pain, with “naive boldness,” with the certainty expressed in Psalm 131, “like a weaned child”¹¹⁷ in its mother’s arms, without knowing in advance what will happen, but trusting that with Christ one can go to the ends of the earth without fear. This must have been the trust the apostles experienced in being with Jesus. Fr. Giussani observed: “The sign of abandonment is as if one had all one’s sources of pride dried up. He no longer grows proud, it becomes impossible to become proud because nothing is his, and yet everything becomes his if nothing is his.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Charles Péguy, *I misteri* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1977), 179. Our translation.

¹¹⁶ Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, 25–26.

¹¹⁷ “Lord, my heart is not proud; / nor are my eyes haughty. // I do not busy myself with great matters, / with things too sublime for me. // Rather, I have stilled my soul, / like a weaned child to its mother, / weaned is my soul. // Israel, hope in the Lord, / now and forever.” (Ps 131:1–3).

¹¹⁸ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 115.

b. “I have the strength for everything through Him who empowers me.”¹¹⁹

This abandonment in trust is not lessened even by our continual betrayals. “Simon, do you love Me?” His mercy is more powerful than our failings, if we look Christ in the face.

“Don’t daydream and aim for perfection, but look Christ in the face [...]. Not projects of perfection, but looking Christ in the face, looking someone in the face! Extremely simple, extremely easy ... but extremely uncomfortable; extremely uncomfortable because you can’t follow yourself anymore. Happiness is to follow Another. Sure, to look Christ in the face and not make all sorts of plans to be perfect means that you look Christ in the face truly desiring the good, truly desiring to be true, truly desiring love: ‘desiring you truly, O Lord.’”¹²⁰

“I can do everything,” but not in the sense of indifference, which leads us to think we can sin because we’ll always be taken back. After all, this would be a brief illusion because we would be sucked back by the lack of caring itself. No, we can do everything with the true desire for Him and His forgiveness.

Among us there is the misunderstanding that we can say we are on the right river and it will carry us in any case. Carras said: “How fortunate we are to have encountered Giussani!” In effect, it is a great fortune to have encountered Giussani, the greatest fortune, but if we allow ourselves to be carried along by the current without truly desiring to change, as if following from a distance, in the long run we will tire without that *naïve boldness*.

This risk was made manifest for me in 2008 in Lima, with the death of our great friend, the Servant of God Andrea Aziani. Many of you will have read the book published about him.¹²¹ Since God always shows us His mercy through concrete faces, the concrete faces of this companionship, all of us who were daily witnesses to his real holiness, full of mercy and energy for initiatives, with which Andrea gave all of himself and treated us, we felt almost as if we were car-

¹¹⁹ Cf. Phil 4:13.

¹²⁰ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 117.

¹²¹ Gianni Mereghetti and Gian Corrado Peluso, *Andrea Aziani: Febbre di vita* [Andrea Anziani: Fever of life] (Castel Bolognese: Itacalibri, 2023).

ried on his shoulders, even with all our sins. We could always look to him and in doing so could return to looking where he looked, that is, at the movement and Christ. But at times this was an excuse for not taking responsibility for making ourselves simple like him, entrusted to Christ like him. So when he died, and he died from one moment to the next, in some way we lost our excuse and found ourselves a bit lost. And now? Who will correct our errors? Who will we look to? It was quite a challenge because we had to acknowledge that we had to take a step not in terms of capacity but in the simplicity and sincerity of a true trust toward the concrete faces Andrea had always looked to, the charisma, the Church, and Jesus, with that purity and totality (like the trust of children) that, instead of envying, we also could begin to experience ourselves.

Péguy spoke of our looking at God not as fearful servants but with the gratuitous and free ease of children, in which He takes pleasure. They are very beautiful pages because they show the human stature that blossoms from hope in Christ, from the full trust of abandonment, from certainty in the fulfillment of His promise.

“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. [...] // As their liberty is the reflection of my liberty. / So I love to find in them a certain gratuitousness / A reflection of the gratuitousness of my Grace. [...] // To the gratuitousness of my Grace they respond with a certain gratuitousness of prayer, / I like that they fall on their knees not only freely but gratuitously. [...] / Finally, says God, I like that they love, not only freely, but gratuitously.”¹²²

It is the joy of entrusting oneself, the hope in Him, not that of obtaining our image of what we ask. It is the gladness of Saint Francis who sees everything as it gushes incessantly from the *fullness* that is God. Being wanted and loved is the incessant discovery that causes our abandonment into the hands of God, who brings us into life gratuitously and freely.

¹²² Cf. Charles Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, trans. Pansy Pakenham (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 101, 106, 107.

c. From trust, a feast, and from a feast, mission

Let's take another step. Being loved, wanted, and forgiven in this way is a *feast*; actually, looking at the face of Jesus begins the feast. "It is the feast that qualifies every reawakening, every morning, every time you say 'O God,' every time you look at Him and say 'O God, forgive me.' It is a feast, a feast occurs. Trust is a state of the soul such that from whatever position you're in, you have a feast [it is the feast of the prodigal son]. If you have trust, a capacity for victory together with the One who is your strength is born, even from all your weaknesses; a capacity for victory is born that is the boldness of those seven or eight disciples who were the first to have followed Him. There were seven or eight of them, and they already had and repeated the awareness of conquering the world, of being the new Jewish people: that which would conquer the world, because it was with Him."¹²³

I believe this was the source of Anas's intuition expressed in the song *La festa sta per cominciare* [The celebration is about to start]: the celebration is to be on the shore of the sea of God, no longer being lords of ourselves, but abandoned to Him, entrusted to Him and His design. "The celebration is about to begin, / run and don't stop, my friend. / It's the celebration of the end of evil / on the shore of the sea of God. [...] / And step after step toward the sea / everything is simpler and is about to begin. / I feel no pain that is mine, / I suffer of love and joy like God."¹²⁴ There is no longer my pain, my sacrifice: there is the sacrifice of Jesus and the pain of Jesus in me. Therefore, it is the celebration of having been freed. It is the celebration of the father for the return of the prodigal son.

So the feast is *mission*, because it is bringing a new, festive presence in the world, a fulfilled humanity that in living circumstances gives everything so that He may be recognized, so that the hope that animates us can reanimate the hope of women and men. Do you remember the point of the Beginning Day titled, "From Faith, Mission"?¹²⁵

¹²³ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, vol. 2, *Hope*, 119.

¹²⁴ "La festa sta per cominciare" [The celebration is about to begin], words and music by Antonio Anastasio.

¹²⁵ Davide Prospero and Francesco Cassese, "From Faith, Mission," section five of "Faith, the Fulfillment of Reason," Beginning Day of the Adults of Communion and Liberation of the Lombardy Region, available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2023/10/23/beginning-day-milan>.

I found a text from 1999, included with the December issue of *Traces*, entitled, “The Jubilee and Life,” which I think can be useful for understanding the mission that hope launches us into. Fr. Giussani said: “In Guatemala, during the pastoral visit in March 1983, John Paul II said that Christ is the new weapon of a new world. But this hope is not based on my resources or on the resources of that projected ‘I’ that are the society, the bosses, the things man creates; this new life, this hope is founded on this Presence. Faith is basically acknowledging a Presence, and acknowledging this Presence gives new heart a thousand times a day, in any position one is in, even in death, and therefore gives the capacity to open up to others with purity, and that is to say with gratuity. This is why Christ the Redeemer of man is not for the next life only, but for this life, today, this hour, an hour from now, within the company where I am, within the company where I will be, and so this hope has no bounds, it embraces the world. Of its nature this hope is social, by its nature there is no problem or need or human situation that we don’t feel struck by and in which we don’t feel positively interested. The great formula of Christian life spoken of by St. Paul is ‘In spe contra spem.’ This is why the Christian is eminently a man who commits himself in the impact with persons and things in any condition at all, even in politics, because this Presence has moved the waters of our great, terrible, horrible state, of our great swamp of impotence; this Presence has come in and moved everything, and its waves reach up to the furthest banks. In other words, they embrace the world, up to the ends of the earth. For this reason there is no longer anything that is extraneous to my concrete instant; so I live my concrete instant with an attempt at love that in Christian language is called ‘offering,’ for the whole world. This offering makes me cry with pain for my pettiness and opens me up in the joy of a hope precisely because it is not founded on me, but passes through me, uses me. So even though I am so petty as to be capable of giving very little, I give this little.”¹²⁶ Hope placed in Christ makes us desire that everything be filled by His presence, that it renew the hope of the world.

¹²⁶ Luigi Giussani, “The Jubilee and Life” *Traces* no. 12 (1999), available at <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/archive/dic99/ptnuk.html>.

In this regard, I'd like to quote again one last passage from the 1961 text. Fr. Giussani spoke of "a constructive activity that is not reduced to certain times and is not identified only with certain undertakings, but that fills every moment and redeems even the briefest measure of a gesture with the usefulness of a noble task. A constructive activity that achieves the sublime in the apparent banality of the most meager life."¹²⁷ He said this in 1961! It is not a matter of doing sensational things, but that everything be done in the abandonment of myself to Him that makes every gesture "sublime," an offering of myself to the entire world. Therefore, being there, in society, in daily circumstances, with the awareness that what has filled our lives is for everyone.

Mission is lived and fulfilled in belonging, in our unity that supports us in bringing the new gaze upon reality that is born of faith into the concreteness of daily circumstances, bringing the awareness of this unity that is not just an interior consciousness within the "banality of life" of every day. It is being a presence in the places of concrete life, bringing an original presence, not armed with a discourse or a project, but capable of judgment and free to propose a new and aware way of living that is played out in every detail, that engages us to the core of our being.

Do you remember the description of the first Christians contained in the *Letter to Diognetus*?¹²⁸ Another world in this world: Christians are in this world like everyone, dress like everyone, but they are the beginning of another world in the world. I'd like to read you a kind of modern letter to Diognetus. It is the testimony of a Brazilian friend who describes the companionship he shares with his friends of the movement. "I perceive in me and in the companionship of friends who live the faith with me some very evident characteristics. For my friends, all circumstances, each of them, have a meaning, and so they are grateful for what happens, even for suffering. They have a gaze for the other that is attentive and full of tenderness, because the other is a sign of the presence of Christ. They are patient; there is nothing they complain or get angry about, because the outcome does not lie

¹²⁷ Giussani, *Porta la speranza*, 161–62. Our translation.

¹²⁸ *Letter to Diognetus*, chapter V. The Greek text is found in PG II, coll. 1167–86. English translation available at <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0101.htm>.

in their own capacities but in Christ and everything contributes to the relationship with Him. They forgive because they are aware of their own sin and of the forgiveness received for every error. They have hope because they know He comes and everything comes together into this. They are not unnoticed at work because they bear witness to a more human form of living: their testimony to Christ is their form of living.”

In a *Quasi-Tischreden*, Fr. Giussani said: “Those who believe in Jesus are seized by the power of the mystery of Christ, are brought within His personality and so become one body, in the literal sense of the word; this body grows, is destined to grow, to be fruitful.”¹²⁹ I was struck as I read this because for everything he said, he always provided the reason. And as you heard, the reason is the consciousness of the presence of Christ and His forgiveness, because He is the meaning of all things. Those who live the faith and experience hope find that they are one, one thing. Fr. Giussani continued: “The relationship between Christ and the companionship He is in makes this companionship fruitful: this companionship is destined to take the world, to possess the world.”¹³⁰

Think of the Beginning Day when Davide referred to the words of Bishop Paolo Martinelli, the apostolic vicar for Saudi Arabia, when he said that being missionaries means “you are sent by Someone,”¹³¹ living a companionship within reality and with the *consciousness of being sent*.

Fr. Giussani spoke of it this way: “When there were just a few of us at the Berchet High School, we had a much clearer position than everyone today that we were made for taking the world. In fact, after two years the first ones who graduated asked to go on mission. And two years later we went on mission: the only case of a missionary reality invented and supported, economically and as people, by kids. The one case in history, even though nobody says so. [...] This companionship with Christ is destined to be fruitful, that is, to enter into the whole world. Bit by bit as it spreads, it becomes more evident that

¹²⁹ Luigi Giussani, *Una presenza che cambia* [A presence that changes] (Milan: BUR, 2004), 368. Our translation.

¹³⁰ Giussani, 368. Our translation.

¹³¹ Cf. Prosperi and Cassese, “From Faith, Mission.”

within human society it constitutes a people. It is a different people, that perceives, conceives, judges, loves, decides, and achieves in a different way.”¹³²

In another text, he stressed how trust in Him who we have encountered makes Him the criterion for understanding and judging, and the concrete ideal of every gesture. This documents a new conception of life and the world. “The main question therefore is the conception of the human person: What does the radical change brought by Christ mean for the perception, image, and sentiment of the human person? What change did He bring to the concept of mind, the concept of heart, the concept of people, the concept of leader of the life of a people, of the head and guide of a people? If they make these things emerge, then one begins to desire that society be this way, and so one fights in society. [...] The most important thing remains faith, but a faith thought about and mobilized in the comparison with things that happen, with time and with space, with everything that comes about there. So then one draws from there new images for tomorrow in relationships with one’s wife or husband, children, other townspeople, or in any political elections there may be. Hope is born from a developed awareness of the message involved in faith (our strength has been only this, only this!).”¹³³

A thought faith: we have to help each other to judge, not to produce a discourse with which to oppose other people, but to discover more the originality of our experience and be able in this way to propose it to everyone, full of reasons. I am struck, as I imagine all of you are too, by the range and breadth of vision expressed in the recent issues of *Traces*, on artificial intelligence, affections, and the end of life! Looking at the real complexity of the issues at stake, trying to make a judgment, keeping sight of the presence who makes hope possible, shows that every life is worthy and loved. I think of the testimony of the people who live their lives accompanying those who find themselves in the most extreme situations of life. It is striking and moving to see the different and more human outlook that is born of this hope. I think also of the testimonies of mission. Remember what Saint Peter

¹³² Giussani, *Una presenza che cambia*, 368. Our translation.

¹³³ Luigi Giussani, *Vivendo nella carne* [Living in the flesh] (Milan: BUR, 1998), 273–74. Our translation.

wrote in his first letter: “Now who is going to harm you if you are enthusiastic for what is good? But even if you should suffer because of righteousness, blessed are you. *Do not be afraid or terrified with fear of them, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.* Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence, keeping your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who defame your good conduct in Christ may themselves be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.”¹³⁴

“With gentleness and reverence” born of certainty, not generic but verified all the way to a judgment on even the most apparently banal circumstances, in a radical following of Christ who is the meaning and horizon of everything.

A possible final horizon of testimony and mission is also *martyrdom*. In Peru, in the midst of the Andes, I had the opportunity to visit more than once the Franciscan monastery of Ocopa, at over eleven thousand feet above sea level. In that place in the middle of nowhere, in the midst of very high mountains, the sources of the rivers that then form the Amazon, there is a library with forty thousand books, because for three centuries this was the place where monks were trained for the mission below in the Amazon forest. There is a room where the monks honor the memory of almost ninety martyrs who set out from Ocopa and boated down the rivers of the forest, never to return. And yet thanks to them the Amazon of Peru is Christian. They went two by two, maybe finding a native community that welcomed them, or being killed by blowgun. So then others went. The Spanish never went down into the forest, but these monks went into the adventure without weapons, certain only of Christ to whom every person was called, because those women and men who lived and who live in the Amazon needed and need Christ too. I was moved when I saw that room, and also when I learned that in their travels north on the Mantaro, the Ucayali, the Huallaga and the Marañon, the great rivers that flow into the Amazon River, they met Jesuits who were coming down from the Cordilleras of Colombia. What fruit did their sacrifice

¹³⁴ 1 Pt 3:13–17.

bear? At the time, there seemed to be none, but they were planting seeds, or maybe only preparing the soil, as the great Jesuit Matteo Ricci wrote regarding his mission in China. I'll read you a fragment of one of his letters, which is something marvelous. He said: "Regarding what you asked me, that they want to see some news from China of some great conversion, know that I and all the others who are here dream of nothing else day and night [that there might be great conversions]; and for this we are leaving our homeland and dear friends, and we wear the clothes and shoes that the Chinese wear, and we do not speak or eat or drink or live in homes that are not of the Chinese culture. Not even God wants more than us to see the fruits of all our toils, [...] because the time that we are in China is not one of harvest, or even of sowing, but of clearing the fierce forests and fighting with the wild animals and poisonous snakes there. Others will come with the grace of the Lord, who will write about the conversions and the fervor of the Christians."¹³⁵ What certainty in responding to a task, in the sacrifice of everything, of everything except the gladness to give his life so that Christ might be known!

Do you see? There is another letter, quoted in the same book, in which he wrote that criminals had attacked their home, robbing everything and leaving Ricci and his brothers wounded. The police had caught them and wanted to condemn them to death. Ricci and the other Jesuits went to the court to defend them, saying: "It doesn't matter to us, don't kill them." And in the end, they were not condemned to death. The criminals went to kneel in front of them, saying: "We have never seen someone who, having been wronged as badly as you were, did good to those who wronged them. What is Christianity?"

Maybe we are not called to go like Ricci and his brothers (who knows? I never would have imagined I'd be called to go), but certainly we are called to be a missionary presence with our unity, in which another humanity lives, another world in this world.

Saint Paul wrote to the Romans: "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves

¹³⁵ Antonio Sergianni, *Cristo fra i cinesi: la figura di padre Matteo Ricci* [Christ among the Chinese: The figure of Matteo Ricci], (San Miniato [Pisa]: La Conchiglia di Santiago, 2023), 57. Our translation.

to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect. [...] For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.”¹³⁶

Living a mission, being a presence, is always possible within the organic unity of the Church, of our companionship. I’d like to tell you about my great friend, Fr. Paolo Bargigia, with whom I shared my whole life, from the time we were sixteen, in Student Youth, when we had no inkling we would enter the seminary. (We were the same age and we were always together, like the Three Musketeers, with Andrea Bellandi, now the archbishop of Salerno. And like in the Three Musketeers, there was also a fourth one, Fr. Paolo Milloschi, who discovered his priestly vocation a few years later and joined us.)

Fr. Paolo Bargigia reached me on mission in Peru in 2008 (I had been there since 2001). He arrived three days after the death of Andrea Aziani. After wonderful and truly intense years, he discovered in 2014 that he had ALS (Lou Gehrig’s disease). In the three years of the disease, I saw him lose autonomy day by day, without ever losing his gladness. At a certain point, in March 2016, he had to return to Italy, where I then returned in August and shared the last year of his life in a parish in Florence. By then he was immobilized in a wheelchair, but his gaze was always glad, and he was passionate about everything and everyone, certain, as he said, that his illness was “a vocation in my vocation,” that it was the way Jesus was asking him to be *more of a priest* and *more of a missionary*. In fact, our home became a hive of activity where miraculous encounters happened daily. At times the woman who cooked for us went to open the door and many people would come in, even some seen on television, and she would say: “I feel like I’m on *Porta a porta!*” [a famous Italian late-evening political talk show—*Translator’s note*]. It felt like the whole world was in those two rooms. “The best is yet to come,” he often repeated. There were hundreds of people, literally hundreds, who came to take turns keeping him company. But actually, they came not so much to help him as to be helped by the hope they saw in him. A couple of months

¹³⁶ Rom 12:1–2, 4–5.

after his return to Italy (I was still in Peru), he went with Andrea Bellandi to Pope Francis. At the end of an intense encounter, as they were saying goodbye, Paolo asked the pope to pray that he might accept God's will each day, and he responded: "No, I don't pray you can accept God's will every day. I pray you can be happy accepting God's will every day!" Paolo always cherished these words in his heart and lived them to his last day. A missionary from the hole of his room. I believe all of us have seen the same gladness in the eyes of many of us who in illness and death are witnesses of hope for everyone. In this way, with our visible hope, with our unity, which is the most beautiful and greatest form of this hope, we respond to Jesus's mandate and participate in His mission for the world.

Because, as Fr. Giussani said in *Dall'utopia alla presenza* [From utopia to presence], "*The newness is the presence of this event of new affection and new humanity; it is the presence of this beginning of the new world that we are.*"¹³⁷

To conclude, I'll read two more fragments from that memorable talk at the Equipe of university students in 1976.

"*The newness is the presence* as awareness of carrying 'within' something definitive, a definitive judgment on the world, the truth of the world, and of the human person, that is expressed in our unity. The newness is the presence as awareness that our unity is the instrument for the rebirth and liberation of the world." And again: "Christians have been imprisoned, martyred, and kept in the dark for three centuries! History and its times are not defined by us. Our role is to live the presence, a total credit to the infinite who entered into our life and who reveals Himself immediately as new humanity, as friendship, as communion. 'Do not fear, little flock, I have overcome the world.' 'This is the victory that overcomes the world: our faith.'"¹³⁸ From our faith blossoms our hope and the hope of the world.

Thank you.

¹³⁷ Luigi Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975–1978)* [From utopia, a presence] (Milan: BUR, 2006), 65. Our translation.

¹³⁸ Giussani, 65, 68. Our translation.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Saturday of the Second Week of Easter: Acts 6:1–7; Ps 32 (33); Jn 6:16–21

**HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL KEVIN JOSEPH FARRELL
PREFECT OF THE DICASTERY FOR THE LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE**

Dear brothers and sisters,

In the gladness of the Easter season and in the context of your Spiritual Exercises, we have the joy of living the encounter with the Lord Jesus present in the Eucharist. The Gospel passage we have just listened to speaks to us about this encounter.

After the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, which took place near Tiberius, Jesus withdrew alone to the mountain to avoid the crowd, which wanted to carry Him off to make Him king (cf. Jn 6:15). As evening fell, after having waited a long time for Him, the apostles decided to go alone to Capernaum, the hometown of some of them, and where Jesus had established His residence. They did not receive a command from Jesus, as narrated in Mark's Gospel (cf. Mk 6:45): they themselves took this initiative.

After having been with the Teacher and helped Him to feed the crowd, now a separation was created. Jesus “went up” to the mountain while the disciples “went down” to the lake (cf. Jn 6:16). Precisely at this moment, on their way home they found themselves alone in the dark, in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, which was rough and choppy because a strong wind was blowing.

We can see ourselves in their situation. The “successes of Tiberius” are exciting but they do not last forever! Then we have to return to “the normality of Capernaum,” where everyone has their own home, where their families are waiting for them, where they have security. In order to do this, they have to face the sea again. In the biblical tradition, the sea is often the symbol of the evil powers that only God can subdue to save His people.

We too, as individuals or as a movement, in our “return to normality” after spiritual consolations, missionary successes, or the most intense joys, we too may experience not only solitude and separa-

tion from the Teacher, but the reawakening of the forces of evil that seem to erase all the moments of grace experienced. Well, precisely in moments like these, the encounter happens.

In this Gospel, Jesus's arrival is a theophany, the manifestation of the very presence of God Himself. In fact, Jesus appeared walking on the water, an action that in the Old Testament was never attributed to a man, but only to God, as affirmed, for example, in the book of Job: "He alone (God) stretches out the heavens and treads upon the back of the sea" (Jb 9:8).

When Jesus manifested Himself in the fullness of His divinity, the disciples "wanted to take Him into the boat," the Gospel says, "but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading." If the sea represents danger, land now represents safety. In the very moment the disciples wanted to welcome Jesus, the boat touched shore: this means that when you recognize Jesus in His divinity, and above all, when you welcome His saving presence in your life, you "touch shore" right away, you pass from the domination of death to that of life.

The encounter with Jesus is always this way, one that brings salvation, that pulls life away from the dark power of desperation, evil, sin, and lack of meaning. It is an encounter that brings us back to "dry land," the certainty that life is grounded in a solid foundation because it originates in a generative act of God, is accompanied by His fatherly and providential help, and is directed to a good destiny. As happened for the apostles, our "return to Capernaum," to daily normality, runs the risk of turning into a crisis. But the encounter with Jesus transforms it from a return to the banality of an existence without God, lost in tasks of little value, to the beginning of a new phase of mission that opens to new graces and new revelations, as narrated in the following lines of the Gospel.

My dearest ones, this Gospel strengthens our hope. The encounter with Jesus that has illuminated and given meaning to our life does not remain an isolated event in the past. No! It happens over and over, now too! In these days of Exercises, too! Maybe some of you have come here with darkness and solitude in your hearts, but you will return home with the light and joy of refound communion in Christ. The Church, the community of believers, is the place of the "human

and divine” wanted by the Lord, where this event of grace can always happen. In the Church, the charisms raised up by the Holy Spirit are the particular place where the encounter with Christ becomes more easily accessible for all people. The charism of Communion and Liberation, too, was given by God to the Church so people could encounter in the nights of their existence the consoling presence of Christ. Your charism, like others of the past, must bring the resurrection of Christ our Savior out from the past and forgetfulness, and make it close so that every person can experience it.

All of you are called to this very high task, and for this reason have received a Christian formation. Your charism urges you to this. Therefore, it is of vital importance to preserve the unity of the spiritual companionship that the Holy Spirit has created among you. The Gospel describes how the disciples together, as one body, welcomed Jesus into the boat. The Holy Father, too, in his latest letter to you addressed to the person of the president, exhorted you to cherish unity. It is a gift to invoke in prayer and to achieve in life, practicing humility, putting aside the desire for the affirmation of one’s ideas and self, choosing not to identify the charism with your own convictions, or worse, with your own person, because the charism is always greater than a single idea, always greater than just one individual, always greater than just one generation or season of history, even that of the beginning. The charism is even greater than the founder who embraced it, to the benefit of the whole Church.

Therefore, we beg the Lord in these days that all may be consoled by a new encounter with the risen Christ and be the proclaimers and bearers of peace in the midst of so many conflicts and tensions that afflict the world. Let us pray that the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation may always remain a blessed place of discovery of the beauty of the faith for thousands of people, and be safeguarded in unity to carry out the mission the Lord has entrusted to it. For all this, we invoke the help of Mary, Mother of Hope, protectress of the unity of the Church.

Amen.

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Davide Proserpi. Your Eminence, allow me to express our affectionate gratitude. Your presence and words at last year's Exercises of the Fraternity were a great comfort and clear sign of the certainty of our journey in the Church, and also supported us in the awareness of the responsibility to which we are called for the construction of our common home. The fact that you accepted an invitation to return this year, knowing all your numerous commitments and the calls upon you that arrive in this particular moment in the life of the Church, for us is a further support of hope and confirmation in the road we are traveling, as you reminded us by quoting the Holy Father's letter in your homily. For our part, last year we said we were available, and this year, once again, even more so, we are available for all the needs that press upon the Church in this moment. We exist only for this. Thank you, your Eminence.

Cardinal Farrell. First of all, I would like to thank all of you for listening patiently. It is part of the Spiritual Exercises to make some small sacrifice. Today I can attest to the whole Church that you have made a great sacrifice in listening to my Italian!

I bring you the greetings of the Holy Father. For many issues related to my work responsibilities at the Holy See I regularly meet with him and must acknowledge that every time he asks me: "How is the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation doing?" After this day with you, I can return to Rome and tell him that this year more than twenty thousand people were at the Spiritual Exercises in Rimini. A truly big number! Even bigger than the number of people present at many of the Wednesday audiences at Saint Peter's... I don't know what his reaction will be when I tell him!

I want to thank you from the heart for all you do. You are one of the movements among those I know that is able today to make the voice of twenty thousand people heard in society. You are truly a numerous people! For this reason, it is very important that everyone follow, and continue to follow, the charism of Fr. Giussani and that they live according to this charism in the concrete situation of the current world.

I thank you for what you do every day.

Sunday, April 14, morning

Ludwig van Beethoven

*Triple concerto for violin, cello, piano, and orchestra in C major, op. 56 Beaux Arts Trio
Gewandhausorchester Leipzig–Kurt Masur, Spirto Gentil 31 (Philips), Universal*

Angelus

Morning Prayers

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Proserpi. Well, we have come to the end of this gesture, which has surely been a powerful moment for our journey this year. As we said at the beginning, with all the sacrifices (in some cases, the back and forth between the hotels and the Expo Center was truly tiring) we were able to experience a greater measure than our own. This was visible to everyone, and yesterday Cardinal Farrell said so too. At dinner he spoke again about his surprise and wonder at seeing twenty thousand people gathered here, plus all those following from home or other locations. He said he was very struck that twenty thousand of us gathered here for Spiritual Exercises in this way, with a level of silence, attention, and participation that made it clear that the gesture does not depend only on what is said, no matter how important, obviously, but on the contribution that each of us makes.

This is the first fact that fills our hearts with gladness and certainty as we return to our homes.

Let's begin this assembly, Fr. Giovanni.

Bishop Giovanni Paccosi. Many questions have arrived. Some of us have read all of them, identifying those that came up most often and were the most representative.

“Regarding desire, could you speak more about the difference between something being a ‘dream’ and a ‘sign’? Are the little desires of every day truly a help for recognizing the one deep desire that defines us? It seems to me that they are in contradiction.”

Paccosi. This reminds me of a very beautiful page from a dialogue between Fr. Giussani and some high school students. I was there with a big group of Student Youth from Florence in the 1990s. It was published under the title, “Oltre il muro dei sogni” [Beyond the wall of dreams], in *Realtà e giovinezza: La sfida* [Reality and youth: The challenge].¹³⁹ Giussani compared a dream with the true desire that leads to expectant awaiting. He used the word “ideal” to define desire as expectancy for a greater fulfillment. I won’t read Fr. Giussani’s words but I invite you to read them because I believe they are a very important help for us.

In the text of the first lesson I had prepared, at the point where I quoted the short passage from Dante that I read to you, I compared the understanding of desire in Dante and in Petrarch. It would have been a bit long to speak to you about it yesterday, but this morning I want to tell you about it because I think it can help us understand how Christian hope transformed into hope placed in human abilities alone.

In *Spe Salvi*, Benedict XVI spoke about hope in progress, which we all share because it is what makes us wait for a new cellphone model, or a cutting-edge terminal, as if possessing these things were the greatest thing desirable. For example, it makes me smile to see how ads for cars all boast about how they are connected to the internet. OK, but a car has to have a powerful engine, grip the road well, and have good fuel economy! Today instead, progress is measured by being in connection with the internet! Benedict XVI spoke about a progress that, if it is for the good, becomes a help for everyone. Then he said a very beautiful thing: “Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere,” technical and scientific, so that each person starts out from the point reached by those who came before. People in the Middle Ages said so, too: “We are like dwarfs on the shoulders of giants, so that we can see more than they, and things at a greater distance, not by virtue of any

¹³⁹ Giussani, *Realtà e giovinezza*, 57–70. Our translation.

sharpness of sight on our part, or any physical distinction, but because we are carried high and raised up by their giant size.”¹⁴⁰ But the progress of the person, of the freedom of the person, does not happen in this way: “Yet in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new and he must always make his decisions anew,”¹⁴¹ that is, each person must always start over again.

The illusion of placing hope in what our own hands produce, which actually are dreams, began all the way back in the Middle Ages. In *Why the Church?*, Fr. Giussani compared Dante and Petrarch to show how the understanding of our relationship with God pivoted exactly on the question of desire. When I was still in Peru and taught at the university, I tried to compare Dante and Petrarch in some texts. For example, in addition to the passage on “the simple little soul,” that I read you yesterday, Dante said in the *Convivio*: “The supreme desire of each thing, and the one that is first given to it by nature, is to return to its first cause”;¹⁴² that is, we are made of the desire to return to God because He made us. He made us for Himself. Dante gave a very beautiful example: just as a pilgrim travels a road never taken before, and every house he sees in the distance he hopes is a hotel, and when he arrives there he realizes that it isn’t, then he looks to another house and believes *it* to be the hotel. He goes on this way, from house to house, until he finally comes to the hotel. So is our soul: as soon as it enters upon the new and never-before traveled road of life, it raises its eyes and wants to reach its supreme good, that is, God. But each thing it sees, it believes to be the good that it is seeking. Since its knowledge in the beginning is imperfect because it lacks experience and has not been educated, the small goods seem to be big, and he begins to desire them. In just this way we see a child with an extraordinary desire for an apple. And then, going further, he desires a little bird, and then, going further, he desires a nice piece of clothing. And then a horse (today we would say a motorcycle or a car) and then a woman.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Bernard of Chartres (twelfth century) in John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon* (1159) bk. 3, ch. 4, quoted in R.K. Merton, *On the Shoulders of Giants* (New York: Free Press, 1965), ch. 9.

¹⁴¹ Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, n. 24.

¹⁴² Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, IV, XII 14, available at <https://dante.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/dante/DispMinorWork.pl?TITLE=Conv&REF=IV.xii.14-18>.

And then some wealth, and then lots of wealth, and then even more wealth. And all this happens because in none of these things does he find what he is looking for. He believes he will find it, going further beyond. Dante says we can see that each thing we desire comes before another. He uses the image of a pyramid, in which the intermediate goods go toward the base, which is God. The first, smallest good is like the tip of the pyramid, but since we have it in front of us, it does not allow us to see all the rest. Then we pass to a bigger one, and bigger, and bigger, and bigger, until we realize that the ultimate desirable thing is God, who is the base of everything. So when you go from the point to the base, the desirable things seem increasingly bigger. This is the reason that desires are increasingly bigger as we journey along in life, one after the other. How beautiful!

Like Dante, Fr. Giussani said that desires should not be reduced or hidden. One must realize that they are signs that point to the one great good for which we were made, God. Here is the greatness. I was thinking this as I listened to the song by Anas, because I had not thought of it before. The apostles were in the boat fishing and had not caught anything, but Jesus was on the shore. Jesus is what filled their heart. Their hope was there, on the shore; it was He. Similarly, we are in the middle of the sea but our hope is this presence in front of our eyes. He does not take away our journey, but it is a celebration because He is within our experience. The very way we sang the song was a celebration, the celebration of a recognition of the presence that is among us.

Dante still understood desire in a Christian way, as a sign. Instead, Petrarch lived at the beginning of the process of “disarticulation” that changed the course of Western history. He perceived desire as something that led him away from God. Petrarch experienced a “dis-association” in his love for Laura, which he felt as something that imprisoned him totally, as a radical alternative to the search for the truth, for God. Laura made him discover the distance between the truth, which he recognized theoretically, and the passion that drew him away from it.

There is a sonnet by Petrarch that I’ll repeat in my own words. If what I feel is not love, what is it? But if it is love, if this love is a good thing, why is the effect bad, lethal? If it is a bad thing, guilty, why is the torment of love so sweet? If I burn from this desire of mine, why does it then make me cry and lament? If it is something bad for me,

why then do I lament losing it? “O living death, o delightful evil / how can you be in me so, if I do not consent?” Delightful evil! How can evil be delightful? This is the fallacy, thinking that my project is greater than the objectivity of good and evil. He continued, saying: If I pursue evil, why then do I complain? If I find myself as if in a frail boat on the deep sea in the midst of conflicting winds without a helm; if knowing is full of error, I don’t know what I want any more. I tremble in the middle of the summer (think what an incredible thing: I tremble in the summer) and I burn up in the winter.¹⁴³

It is all a contradiction between what he thought would fulfill his heart’s desire, and what truly does so. At a certain point, Petrarch came to say something tremendous: I am very avid for the truth, but since it is difficult to find and I am not capable of seeking it well, often, trusting in myself, in order not to err I cleave to doubt, putting it in the place of truth. But I realize that in this way, slowly but surely, I have become academic (that is, intellectual) and after many others I, too, have joined the humble ranks of those who do not know anything because they have nothing certain, and doubt everything. I doubt everything, he said, except those things I know it would be sacrilege to doubt.¹⁴⁴

Petrarch would desire not to desire, in order not to feel imprisoned by error. For the first time in Western culture, we see in him a distance between a “spiritual” good, superior but far away, and “earthly” goods, which are false but more attractive.

Well, I think that often our relationship with faith is this way. You do not doubt God, because, a bit moralistically, one cannot doubt

¹⁴³ “What do I feel if this is not love? / But if it is love, God, what thing is this? / If good, why this effect: bitter, mortal? / If bad, then why is every suffering sweet? // If I desire to burn, why tears and grief? / If my state’s evil, what’s the use of grieving? / O living death, O delightful evil, / how can you be in me so, If I do not consent? // And if I consent, I am greatly wrong in sorrowing. / Among conflicting winds in a frail boat / I find myself on the deep sea without a helm, // so light in knowledge, so laden with error, / that I do not know what I wish myself, / and tremble in mid-summer, burn in winter.” Petrarch, *Sonnet CXXXII*, in *The Canzoniere*, trans. A.S. Kline, available at <https://petrarch.petersadlon.com/canzoniere.html?poem=132>.

¹⁴⁴ “[I am] very avid for the truth; and since finding it is difficult, and in seeking it I am not skillful, often lacking self-confidence, I flee from error, and I open myself to doubt keeping it in the place of truth. So slowly but surely I have become academic, and after many and many others, join as the last in the more humble ranks of those who know nothing, keeping nothing certain, and doubting everything, of those things beyond which I know it is a sacrilege to doubt. Petrarch, *Seniles* [Letters of old age], V, 6). Our translation.

God. Actually, you also doubt Him if you reduce Him to an abstract image detached from your life.

Mario Luzi said in a conference in Florence: “One of the aspects that makes Dante exceptional [...] is precisely this: the exemplary character called Dante in the *Divine Comedy* is a character made concrete by the human individual called Dante in life, in existence, in history. There is an effectively prodigious coincidence between the invention and the confession, we could say.” It is a “miraculous coincidence between the character and the author.”¹⁴⁵

Instead, Petrarch began to project into literature a dream world that did not exist in reality, and did so on the basis of a line of reasoning of this kind: since in reality I am sure of nothing, I at least believe in an ideal world where things go the way I would like them to go. Luzi commented: “It must be acknowledged that European literature [world literature, one could say], proceeds much more from Petrarch than from any other author.”¹⁴⁶ Dante did not have his followers until Eliot, Ungaretti, and Luzi himself; for them as well, as for Dante, literature is not a way to flee from reality into a dreamworld, but to find the meaning of reality, therefore to go deep down, to the end of the journey of desire.

There is a poem by Ungaretti that Dado Peluso made me memorize, which says: “Poetry [for me] is the world, humanity and our life flowered by the word, the limpid marvel of a delirious ferment. When in my silence I find an excavated word, it is in my life like an abyss,”¹⁴⁷ which for me means: I want to understand the meaning of reality and every word I say is not a sound on the wind, but, rather, expresses the desire to get to the bottom, to truth and goodness, toward which every desire calls me.

Well, we have the grace to be in this position because we have our anchor grounded on the shore of the eternal, because the eternal has come into our midst. Therefore it is no longer necessary to dream: we just need to stay within reality awaiting fulfillment, which an Other can give us.

¹⁴⁵ Mario Luzi, *Cantami qualcosa pari alla vita* [Sing me something equal to life] (Forlì: Nuova Compagnia Editrice, 1996), 52–53. Our translation.

¹⁴⁶ Luzi, 54–55. Our translation.

¹⁴⁷ Giuseppe Ungaretti, *Commiato* [Farewell], Locvizza, October 2, 1916. Our translation.

Prosperi. I really want to stress what Fr. Giovanni just said, because culturally we are the children of a centuries-long history that profoundly changed our mindset and relationship with reality, and so we understand well why we have such need for an education. In School of Community, Fr. Giussani asked: What is the sign? “The sign is a reality whose meaning is another reality, something I am able to experience, which acquires its meaning by leading to another reality.”¹⁴⁸ This is why our relationship with the sign is important, and also the attachment to the sign as sign, in order to possess the totality, all of reality, including what we do not see. The fascinating aspect of this is that it is precisely in relationship with reality as a sign that the human emerges totally. The place the human truly engages is not merely in attachment to things because of the emotion they evoke in us; the human fully engages in the interpretation of the sign, that is, in the journey undertaken to follow the direction the sign indicates. This is why the sign becomes so important, such a traveling companion, so crucial for one’s life, not spent in itself, but becoming the road given to me, so that which would otherwise remain an unplumbable mystery can make itself known to me.

The sign becomes dream when it is emptied of the relationship with that which causes it to exist, which establishes its value. Why can we say it is reduced to a dream? Because it is not fulfilled, because it inevitably disappoints, because reality is more than what we see.

“How can one have hope in situations where evil and pain seem to have the upper hand because of the inescapability of circumstances? How can one stay strong in hope when the effects of evil remain over time? And then, ‘hope does not disappoint’: How is this true in front of pain, death, these tragic circumstances of life, wars, and this onslaught of missiles that make the world situation ever more dramatic?”

“Everything in life points elsewhere, and at the same time nothing totally satisfies the desire for fulfillment. The more I experience this, the greater my sadness or longing for the home port prevails over gladness. It’s a kind of dejected hope. What does it mean to be truly glad?”

¹⁴⁸ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 116.

Prosperi. First of all, it is true that at times evil and pain seem to have the upper hand, above all when you are inside and can't see a way out, when all the hopes in which you had placed your human expectation disappear, when all that you normally lean on seems to collapse. Why evil and pain? Actually they are two linked but different dimensions, because there is the evil we suffer, injustice, which has to do with the experience of pain and the lack of meaning, but there is also the evil we commit, the sinfulness we find within. As we said on the first evening, if there is a tragic aspect of our time, it is the incapacity to stay in front of and accept one's own sinfulness. The greatest evil of our time is not so much the pain from physical diseases, and in fact, despite how grave they are or how they drag us into unspeakable difficulties, there are so many testimonies, heroic ones too, of people who stay in front of the pain of physical suffering! The true suffering today is above all that of living, because in physical suffering, even in the pain of the worst trial, one immediately feels the need to be saved, the need for another to come save me, the need for someone to accept my sacrifice.

But when you lose this hope, when you begin to be dominated by the feeling that things can no longer change, that the promised happiness is lost forever and will not come back, when you are curled up into yourself because you feel mistaken, because you think nobody can truly come to save you, how is gladness possible? As we have learned, as Fr. Giussani always told us, gladness is the sentiment that arises when you are grounded in what remains when everything else passes. When everything passes. We see things pass; we see ourselves pass, too, because we are aging, getting aches and pains, having difficulties, unforeseen things that are not always positive that at times get us into trouble, so a life that was full of promise suddenly seems to go toward a horizon of failure, defeat, and ruin.

When all this happens, our first temptation is to shift our gaze from what exists, which, albeit fragile, is the sign of the companionship of Him who loves you and tells you: "I'm with you. I'm still and always will be with you. You can still begin again; you have a destiny that is good." But we fix our gaze on a skeptical question: "How can it end well?" It all seems like a tragedy to us because we no longer have anything in our hands, and all the hopes we had built to try to carry on anyway have collapsed. But when all our hopes collapse, this is the

moment when authentic hope can spring forth, if and when faith, that spring of hope, is alive in us. When there is faith as the wellspring of hope, then hope rises, is resurrected, not like an image hanging in the air, like “It’ll be okay!,” the sign that appeared on people’s windows during lockdown, as you all remember. Why should everything be okay? Is this hope just optimism, just a matter of encouraging each other? No, hope is something different. From a certain point of view, it is the opposite of optimism. Optimism is when you put your trust in a future that still depends on us—“It’ll be hard but we’ll make it”—or a fatalism disengaged from the trial we are given. There is not the expectant waiting for a You capable of saving my life, giving me the good that I felt was lost. Instead, hope is placing all of yourself on what is given to you now, because you can wager on the fact that He who gives it to you will fulfill the promise mysteriously, according to a measure that is not yours, giving you much more than what you had. This is the promise, which is fulfilled according to another measure: the hundredfold of what you think you’ve lost!

I remember when my father died. I was little, just six years old. There were two of us children and my mother came from outside Milan. She had been born and raised in the area of Pavia beyond the Po River. My father was from Tuscany and we hardly knew anyone in Milan. However, I can say now, looking back, that I never felt life was negative. I have dragged around a lot of wounds all my life long, but I never perceived my existence as negative, because in front of me I had my mother, for whom reality was positive, and what made reality positive was faith. After my father’s death, she had to go to work. She found a job in a school, the first one run by adults in the movement in Milan, called *la Zolla*. Thanks to this, we discovered the movement. Certainly, I would not be here today without this sequence of events. Can I say that my father’s death was a good? No. I still carry the wounds. As we sang at the beginning, even God suffered. But I can say that it was for a joy, a hundredfold, for something I could not even have imagined.

We are asked to accept this wager. It is not a blind wager: it is a wager on what we have been given. Stay with what you have been given.

Paccosi. I'd like to add something. I think there is a kind of trick in the second question. "The more I experience this [that everything points to something other], the greater my sadness or longing for the home port prevails over gladness. It's a kind of dejected hope." I would flip the sentence and say that it is a kind of dejection full of hope and gladness. How can you not see that there is limitation, that things are fragile? But as we said at the beginning of our itinerary, within this there is a promise, imprinted in the core of our being, and this fills us with gladness, gladness because there is the promise.

Think of Abraham, the father of our faith. Certainly, he was not happy as he went up the mountain with Isaac, but he was full of hope. "We have the wood, the knife, and the fire for the Holocaust, but where is the victim?" his son asked him. Abraham responded: "God will provide," because he no longer had anything of his own. Think how full of joy he was then to understand that God did not want that sacrifice, which, unfortunately in the culture of that era, was practiced by many.

So, there is dejection in our life, but it is glad because there is a presence, as Davide said. I'll tell you about an episode that has always stayed with me. In the parish I went to as a young priest (I was thirty years old) there was a couple who seemed to be in the first stages of young love, but they were in their forties. They always walked and cycled together. At a certain point, when the husband was out on his bike, a car hit him and he was killed. It was a tremendous tragedy, truly. After a few months his wife came to me and told me: "Look, Fr. Giovanni, there's something I want to tell you that I can't tell anyone else, but maybe you'll understand." And she told me that "actually, I thank God for taking my husband from me. You understand what I mean; you know that for me, love for him was everything. But as long as he was there, I left all the responsibilities of my life to him; he took care of everything. I didn't take responsibility for anything; I was living in a dreamworld. But since his death I've had to take responsibility for myself, my family, things, and I understand that this has made me mature as a person." And she added: "So at the same time, I'm suffering because my husband is no longer here, but I understand too that this is part of a greater plan; it is for a good. He is already in eternity and I am more myself." She concluded: "I'm only telling *you*, eh!" It is really so. Certainly, you cannot generalize, but to understand

that it is possible to live this way, you just have to look at the faces of those who live faith in painful situations. Living in faith, they become a sign of hope for everyone.

So if we find ourselves in this dejection, maybe we should ask ourselves: What am I truly attached to?

“What does it mean to educate to hope?”

Paccosi. The effort of all these three days has been to give an indication of how one educates to hope, following Fr. Giussani. The first evening we saw that the point of departure is to take seriously the desire that constitutes us, the “irrepressible impetus for self-realization,” ourselves, Fr. Giussani said in the text that has become famous in these days, even if it has been there for a long time, *Porta la Speranza* [Bring hope]. But then we are so easily diverted from this desire that constitutes us, and as Fr. Giussani said, we identify it with “overblown instinctiveness,” drifting into the “banality of comfortable effusions,” or living with stoicism.

Yesterday morning’s lesson showed us that, stronger than this, we have encountered Him who is the grace that makes hope possible, no longer in the human way, so fragile, but grounded on the rock, assured by the anchor of His presence. Therefore, educating to hope means looking at Christ. There is no other road for growing in hope.

In the afternoon lesson, we asked how hope becomes the stuff of life, the trust with which you live everything, through the passage of poverty. However, not poverty as renunciation, but as the discovery that things are signs, that everything is a sign and therefore is sacred. At a certain point yesterday, when I was explaining how in the course of human history the idea of the *sacred* was born from the desire to see every material thing, even the smallest, as a relationship with the mystery, I said and I repeat: think what it means to look at everything, every person, recognizing it as *sacred*, as the means of a relationship with Christ. It changes everything! So yes, you can live in that trust which is abandonment, in that perception of everything as gift, hanging, suspended from the infinite grace of God who is giving it to us in this instant, and no longer be a slave, but be free.

Therefore, in answer to the question of what it means to educate to hope, we must live our belonging to Christ within this history that has reached us. The promise is to be able to live with the trust that lightens every circumstance and, as we said in closing yesterday, also launches us into the desire to communicate it to everyone: a feast, a celebration that becomes mission.

“We have been told not to neglect any aspect of reality (work, affections, friends) and at the same time to be poor. What is the right relationship to have with things? What place do work, affections, friends etc., take?”

Prosperi. I’ll link this with what Fr. Giovanni has just said. At least for me, the true challenge of poverty is to battle against the irresistible temptation to possess myself, because the possession of things, attachment to things for their own sake, wanting to accumulate goods, are basically reflections of the will to dominate myself, to have control of myself. The problem is not so much the material things, because they are just an aspect of the problem, and for me they are not the aspect that most imprisons us. The aspect that binds us the most is our projects, our idea of what is right or mistaken; that is, the way we exclude God from our life, from our real, concrete life, at best relegating Him to some moments of religious inspiration.

So you understand the connection between trust and sacrifice, which in his lesson Fr. Giovanni linked to the theme of education to hope. This was another question that came up very often among those sent to us. In order to live poverty in terms of possession of oneself, you have to trust yourself to something other than you, place your trust in an other. Certainly, in an Other with a capital O, but through the way He makes Himself present and a companion in my life, a real presence, not a thought, because on our own we do not overcome this temptation to autonomy.

Certainly, this demands sacrifice, but we know well that it is a sacrifice not so much in that we are asked to renounce something, but inasmuch as we glimpse the gain implicated in it, as was said yesterday, so that everything may be recognized as sacred, as being in

relationship with Christ. We see this gain coming or already realized in friends among us who live for the ideal, for whom you understand that the ideal is something concrete. How do you understand that it is something concrete? What is this gain? What is the hundredfold promised to us, that Jesus promised us? Freedom, freedom! You can love truly, without neglecting any aspect of reality, as was said yesterday—your husband, wife, children, work, your preferences, the things we feel are most ours— with freedom. Unfortunately, we often feel that when conditions change, even our affections and the most important friendships become a cage, and carry you away, close you in, don't allow you to see the breadth and range that was given to you through the history in which Another has set you. Instead, the true value of preference is that it opens you to everything, teaches you to love everything. A particular introduces you to loving everything as you would not be capable of doing. Otherwise, the preference would be an injustice to others but above all to yourself, because bit by bit it would imprison you.

“I'd like to ask you to explain more belonging to the unity with those in whom you recognize the presence of Christ. Existentially, what does it mean to belong 'to the unity with them' and not to them? At the end of the lesson you said that 'our unity is the greatest and most beautiful form of this hope.' Why is it the greatest and most beautiful? You said this line after telling us about Fr. Paolo Bargigia, Fr. Bellandi, and Fr. Paolo Milloschi. In your experience, how was it revealed that the unity among you was the greatest and most beautiful form of Christian hope?”

Paccosi. I'll begin from this last thing, which involves me most directly. I had a particular grace, in that I found myself from the start living my personal vocation together with my dearest friends. Truly, the vocation was totally personal. In fact, I had said nothing to my friends about it. When I went for the first time to meet Fr. Pierfrancesco, because I had mentioned that I wanted to verify my vocation, I found Bargigia (who wasn't Fr. Paolo yet) and asked him, “What are you doing here?” and he said, “And what are *you* doing

here?” When Paolo, Andrea, and I met Fr. Giussani when we were nineteen years old and had finished high school, shortly before entering the seminary, he told us very explicitly: “In seminary, don’t do CL things. Follow the proposal that is made to you,” in part because he was confident that it was a truly beautiful and intense environment. The rector of the seminary was Fr. Gualtiero Bassetti and the bishop of Florence was Cardinal Giovanni Benelli, two extraordinary people. Fr. Giussani told us: “Follow the proposal that is made to you. Live unity among yourselves and keep these people as your points of reference,” and he named Cristiana Maraviglia, who at the time was following Student Youth in Florence; Lele Tiscar, who was the leader for the university students; and Fr. Silvano Seghi, who was the leader of the movement. We did as he told us. We lived a very intense experience of the movement, even though we didn’t participate in any of its gestures. And the irony was that the headquarters for the movement were right there in the seminary. I remember one day looking out the window and seeing some university students in the street, all my friends from Student Youth, who were leaving the headquarters to do a hundred thousand things. And we were inside the seminary. I was a bit moved, thinking how beautiful it would be to be with them, not with regret, but thinking that being in the seminary was a way we were building the same thing. In this way, the awareness grew in us that the goal of our unity was to call each other, in reciprocal obedience, to obey Christ within this history.

Once, when we had been priests for a long time, we had a vacation with priests from Florence. Fr. Ciccio Ventorino, who at the time was following the communities of Florence and Tuscany, was there too. At the end of the vacation he told us: “You don’t realize it, but you have a particular virtue, the virtue of obedience. You are always willing to obey each other.” I was struck by this but then I thought: it’s really true, we obey each other. Why? It isn’t that we obey one of us because he is the leader. We obey what he testifies to, and therefore we obey Jesus. However, to obey Jesus we need this concrete companionship, which is a bit like a Fraternity group. In no way does it claim to be an alternative to the objective authority of the movement and the Church, but it is for reciprocal help in following the person who in this moment the Lord puts in a position of responsibility to guide this history.

Therefore, even with all the moments of difficulty, I would not trade the unity in our history for anything in the world. When Fr. Giussani spoke about authoritativeness and authority, he explained that authoritativeness is this daily companionship in which the person alongside us calls us to the ideal. There is someone who calls us in a particular way, and so I follow him. I follow him because I want to follow the unity, the objectivity of the authority. It makes no sense to contrast authoritativeness and authority because Christ is present within this unity.

The friendship among us priests has always been a help for me in following Christ, and it still is, even though now we don't share our daily life as we did in many moments in the past, but the value remains the same because we can see each other once a year, maybe going on vacation together, and those days have the same intensity as when we were always together, because the horizon is the same. What we live in our unity, we live in the unity with the people who are given to us.

I know that in these hours several friends are receiving messages from half of Italy: "Oh, introduce us to Fr. Giovanni, we want to invite him on our vacation." I won't come! I won't come because objectively it's not possible. I have a diocese to lead and I can't neglect it. But what I want to say is that the charism lives and is communicated ever new and whole in our unity, so in following; according to the concrete organic unity of our companionship, there is already everything necessary for experiencing it fully and always surprisingly. Anyway, I can't go to all the vacations of the movement, even if, having preached the Exercises, I'm "in fashion" and people are curious! They took a big risk in inviting me!

Prosperi. It turned out well!

Paccosi. The thing that builds is the unity among us, so let's help each other to watch, to follow what the pope told us in his last letter concerning the journey we are making in this period. In this sense, to my mind, the meeting after the pope's letter contains fundamental words for our historical circumstances. Following does not mean going after the fashion of the moment. What gives us hope is unity, belonging to this unity, to the fact of this great history, in front of

which yesterday Cardinal Farrell was wide-eyed and full of emotion, as we are, too. It is the great history in which the Lord has placed us.

“The connection between unity and hope eludes me. Can you help?”

Prosperi. This is what I had at heart: looking at the unity of the entire itinerary we have traveled this year, from last year’s Exercises to the Beginning Day, passing through the pope’s letter and on to the content of these Exercises. You do not understand the relationship between unity and hope if you do not start from faith. In particular, I want to develop an aspect of the relationship between unity and the faith-hope trajectory or dynamic, without which none of the things we are saying is justified. I’m referring to a very frequent question that has emerged in these months and that you, Fr. Giovanni, evoked in a lesson when you said that unity is a gift. This is true and we all see and know that it is impossible through our own strength alone. But why did the pope call us to cherish unity? What does this consist in and what does it have to do with faith and hope?

I’d like to start by reading a short passage from Saint Paul’s letter to the Ephesians: “And He gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ, so that we may no longer be infants, tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming. Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into Him who is the head, Christ (pay attention to how Saint Paul continued), from whom the whole body, joined and held together [this is a description of unity], with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.”¹⁴⁹

This summarizes the whole journey we have made this year, because only a mature faith can truly care for and cherish the unity among us, so that the whole body grows, joined and held together

¹⁴⁹ Eph 4:11–16.

through the help provided by all the joints. But Saint Paul added that it is not enough to say “faith” for it to be mature. In fact, he contrasted mature faith to immature faith, that of infants tossed by every wave of teaching arising from human trickery. In fact, we see well how we are exposed daily to what Giussani called “the power,” which acts in every age and perhaps today in some ways more than ever, because it does so subtly, silently, making itself attractive. The devil does not slap you around; he makes himself attractive, generously offering you goods, but in exchange for your faithfulness to his power and dogmas, until his vision of things becomes ours.

I believe that today this is the most inflamed point at all levels, for the Church as well and thus also for us. I’d like to read you a letter shown to me, written by Fr. Giussani to the groups of Communion and Liberation in 1979, right after the audience with John Paul II, and before the Fraternity had received official recognition: “Dear friends: As you have probably heard, I had the great gift of speaking with the pope at length of our life and of what we want to be in this our beloved Church and in this our beloved land. While I was there before him, I was asking myself, ‘What reason does my life offer to the pope’s eyes to grant me all this?’ The reason is your life, the life of all of you, my friends and fellow travelers, all your faith, your hardworking commitment, your generosity, and your capacity for sacrifice. This is the true reason why I was received. And I was filled with astonishment, with shame at myself, and with gratitude to the pope and to you.

I would like to sum up the message expressed in the pope’s concerns and in his attitude: 1. Jesus Christ is the truth of the whole of man, and the faith is the form of the whole of life and its hard work. 2. So, there is not faith on one hand, and on the other hand our interests, our life commitments, our work. No. The faith is the source of the criterion for tackling all life’s problems, and it is in the faith that we have to root our behavior in the environment, which is like the land in which all problems are worked out. 3. In particular, it is necessary that the faith express itself as culture, for it is culture that determines the identity of a people, expressing its history. Our faith must not have ‘inferiority complexes’ as regards the dominant culture.”

Therefore, it is necessary to reflect on the way we deal with the dominant culture, which Giussani often called “the power.” Some

examples of expressing faith as culture are the efforts we are making with *Traces*, as Fr. Giovanni reminded us of yesterday, and the activities of cultural centers and the Meeting, which should be supported. Fr. Giussani continued: “We have always said that, in order to verify our faith and bring it to maturity [here we are!], we have to get involved with an event in which it lives in such a way that we, too, get the willingness, the light, and the courage to follow.” And he concluded: “My friends, in a world where the faith is so lost, and the injustice is so great, let’s shake off our inertia, break out of our selfishness, and leave behind our bourgeois attitudes.”¹⁵⁰

What is mature faith? We just heard it in Fr. Giussani’s words: it is a faith involved “with an event in which it lives.” So, to sum up, thinking of the whole journey we have made, we could say that a mature faith is one deeply rooted in the friendship of Christ. This friendship is what opens us to everything, to the truth, to the knowledge of the truth and also to the knowledge of falsehood, of what is trickery and deceit, allowing us not to be tossed around by every wave of doctrine. I wrote this also in the message to our Student Youth members: friendship with Jesus, which generates friendship among us, is marked by two fundamental factors. First, sharing His knowledge. “I have told you everything.” We never would have known anything of this unfathomable Mystery if it had not been revealed to us, if it was not revealed to us today. By whom? By His presence. With this knowledge He also gives us His full trust. “I have told you everything,” as a friend keeps no secrets from his friend. We know that in the language of the Bible, knowledge is relationship. Christ gives us His knowledge of the Father, introduces us into the communion between the Father and the Son. While certainly desired, it is inaccessible through our own efforts, and only is made possible by His initiative. This is true friendship. Second, *idem velle, idem nolle*, desiring the same things that are worth desiring, and not desiring those that are not worth desiring. This is friendship: sharing His will. This is where our freedom comes into play, and this is where all our fragility often emerges. But here, too, in front of the fragility of our freedom in adhering to God’s plan for our life, Christ takes initiative with us and continues to take it today as He did in that day,

¹⁵⁰ Luigi Giussani, “Let Us Serve Christ in This Great Man,” in *Traces* no. 2 (1979), 2–3, available at <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/apr05/letuserve.html>.

resolving the question in the Garden of Gethsemane: “Not My will [He, totally one with our humanity], but Your will be done,”¹⁵¹ testifying to the oneness of His will with the Father’s.

So, the new life offered to us following Christ is the immanence of friendship with Him, which reaches us concretely through our communion, within this history. This is the reason we have insisted so much during all this time on the centrality of communion, not just as a collateral support for the subjective experience of faith, but precisely as the cardinal content of faith itself, so that it may be mature.

“I was very struck by the image of the jester who, standing on his head, can perceive reality as depending on God, who is making him now. I wonder how one can ‘train’ oneself to have this perspective all of the time.”

Prosperi. I think this is a beautiful conclusion to this whole itinerary. We will have the time and the means to look again at all the details of the content proposed to us. The thing that most fascinated me was seeing what hope is in the man who has guided us in these meditations. Hope is the virtue of the journey. It is not a final point, imagining how the promise will be fulfilled, but seeing a person who is journeying, certain, who goes forward with his head high, notwithstanding all the difficulties of life. When you are on a journey, there are two options. Either you go forward by chance, or you follow.

Therefore, how can we train ourselves to maintain this perspective in which reality is recognized as being dependent on God? This awareness matures through the experience of obedience and following, which is not a disciplinary reprimand. The Gospel reading from John for Holy Thursday reminds us: “As the Father loves Me, so I also love you. Remain in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and remain in His love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete.”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Cf. Mt 26:42; Mk 14:36; Lk 22:42.

¹⁵² Jn 15:9–11.

The last passage in the pope's letter on obedience—which, based on what I saw in visiting the communities was not always understood well, and maybe was reduced to a moralistic question—introduces us to the condition needed for the full joy promised in John's gospel to be realized. The Gospel continues: "This is My commandment [commandment!]: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are My friends [friendship with Christ] if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from My Father."¹⁵³

In this way, we understand what is truly at stake in the question of following and obedience: Jesus shares with us what He has heard from the Father, in order to enable us to know the unfathomable mystery of Being. This is the difference between the obedience of a servant and the obedience of a friend. "I have called you friends." Who calls us friends? The Son of God!

Here lies the deep difference between the obedience of a servant and that of a friend—the servant does not know the purpose of the master, but obeys because he must obey, in order not to be punished, not to be sent away, because there is an advantage for him in doing so, but that which is the master's is not his. Instead, the son is also the heir, and therefore in a certain way what the father communicates is already his; even though he is not yet in full possession of it, it belongs to him but is not yet fully his. So the obedience of the son is justified in order to take possession of the value, the meaning, that the father communicates to him.

For this reason, we say that obeying means entering into the life of the father, becoming one with our whole selves, with the deep reasons that move the father. But the son is free with the father only when he recognizes that he is loved. This is what generates freedom in us, the ultimately generative relationship with my person, as from a son to a father. And so, in obedience to the authority in the Church, just as to the authority in our friendship, this deep, true freedom is realized, because it is exercised fully in the relationship with authority; otherwise, you try simply to please the authority but affectively you are not there because you do not believe in it. Or you renounce yourself and passively follow without truly

¹⁵³ Jn 15:12–15.

engaging your person, with the result that you do not grow, your faith does not become mature and you remain childish, an adolescent forever, full of your own concerns but without ever truly taking responsibility as an adult for generating; we do not generate ourselves. This freedom is possible through living the obedience of sons within a journey in which what has been promised is already ours, is our inheritance.

This certainty is what makes us follow with joy and assuredness even when we may not immediately see the whole trajectory or certain things are difficult for us. I must insist: the only reason for this obedience is to become an adult, to become fathers and mothers in turn, as we said at the Beginning Day, recalling the words of Fr. Giussani. Here we see that objections often emerge: “Yes, but I’m not able. I’m small-minded. I don’t know how to do anything. I’m full of perplexities; I don’t agree. You have hurt me. I’m all messed up.” Courage my friend, courage! You’re not the one who makes reality. I’m not the one who makes reality. I’m not the one who makes all things. I don’t even make myself, just as I am made. I am as I am. Reality has already been made by an Other!

So there are no alibis. Are you on the ground? Get up! Is it hard for you? It’s hard for us, too! You can’t you raise your eyes from your feet? Look in front of you. He who loved you with an eternal love is passing by, and holy is His name! Come with us, let’s go die with Him!¹⁵⁴ Because the old man must die, our pride must die, our self-sufficiency must die, our impatience must die, if we want the new life that only Christ can give us.

* * *

I have an important announcement to give you. The Milan diocese shared it with the media just a short time ago.

Archbishop Mario Delpini of Milan will hold the first public session of the testimonial phase for the cause of beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Luigi Giussani on Thursday, May 9 at 5 p.m. in the Basilica of Saint Ambrose. With great joy we welcome this news, that was so wished for. It is a fundamental passage in the process of beatification of our dear Fr. Giussani.

The first phase of the process, the documentary phase, began in 2012. It entails a theological inquiry, which was concluded positively,

¹⁵⁴ Jn 11:16. “Let us also go to die with Him.”

and a broad and complex historical inquiry, which has now reached a very advanced point.

After the conclusion of the testimonial phase, which will begin on May 9, the documentation gathered will be sent to the Vatican's Dicastery of the Causes of Saints, where the work done in the Diocese of Milan will be verified. Other phases dictated by the regulations will follow, up to the possible decision by the Holy Father to declare Venerable the Servant of God Fr. Giussani.

In particular, this morning Monsignor Ennio Apeciti, the responsible for the Diocesan Service for the Causes of Saints, said at the end of the testimonial phase, "The attentive examination of a miracle granted by God through the intercession of the Servant of God will allow the pope to declare Monsignor Giussani Blessed, and another miracle, following the beatification, to proclaim him a Saint for the Church."

As explained by the diocese, the archbishop chose the ninth of May and the Basilica of Saint Ambrose for the first public session of the testimonial phase for reasons related to the figure of Fr. Giussani himself. Monsignor Apeciti explained: "The solemnity of the Ascension, on May 9, was particularly dear to the priest and the Ambrosian basilica seems the most appropriate place to express the bond of an Ambrosian priest with his 'maximum patron.' Finally, the closeness of the basilica to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart serves as a reminder of the place where for many years the Servant of God formed generations of young people, communicating to them his passionate love for the Church."

We are deeply grateful to Archbishop Delpini, Monsignor Apeciti, the postulator, Professor Chiara Minelli, and all those involved in the cause, for having made possible the opening of this new phase. Naturally, we are also very grateful to Pope Francis for the attention and esteem he has expressed numerous times, on occasion publicly, for the figure of Fr. Giussani and for the journey that the movement is making in this period.

We place in the hands of the Church our heart's irrepressible desire to see Fr. Giussani soon numbered among the blessed and the saints of the Lord. Our task now is to intensify our prayers for the good of the cause, for those who are and will be involved in this phase of the process, and in asking even more vigorously in our intentions for the intercession of the Servant of God Luigi Giussani.

HOLY MASS

Readings: Acts 3:13–15,17–19, Psalm 4; 1 Jn. 2:1–5; Lk. 24:35–48

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP FILIPPO SANTORO
EMERITUS ARCHBISHOP OF TARANTO
AND SPECIAL DELEGATE FOR THE *MEMORES DOMINI***

I had prepared a homily for the third Sunday of Easter, but after the news we have just heard, a whole new horizon has opened up. The joy that the apostles felt in seeing the risen Lord Jesus is also ours in the news of the opening of the testimonial phase, which is an important step toward the beatification and canonization of the Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani. Such great joy comes from the fact that the Church recognizes that this son of hers lived his daily life in the presence of the Lord, touched by His love, touched by the experience of the Word made flesh, the center of the cosmos and of history, the risen and alive Lord in our midst. The Church also recognizes how Fr. Giussani communicated all of this to his first students at the Berchet High School, and then to each of us.

When a process for beatification and canonization is opened, the Church has in mind a particular person, but the grace given to this person extends to all the work he prompted, and for this reason we are illuminated by this extraordinary joy. In addition to the clear signs that the Church gave us with the approval of the Fraternity in 1982 and the *Memores Domini* in 1988, now we are offered a further sign that motivates us to give our whole life to the Lord, following the journey and the form of teaching to which we have been entrusted.

Today's Gospel helps us understand the reasons for our joy. We see the apostles initially shocked and fearful because they believe they are seeing a ghost. They are shocked and fearful in front of the life and the very apparition of the Lord. Jesus does three things. First of all He shows them His hands and feet, saying "Look at My hands and feet." This is the first verb He uses: "Look." All of us have been called to look at what has happened to us, the signs of His presence. "Look at My hands and feet. It's really Me!" And then there is another verb: "Touch Me." Through the encounter with the charism, with

Fr. Giussani, with the charism born in him through the work of the Holy Spirit, we have been touched by the mystery, and our life is no longer the same. We have been looked upon, but looked upon in the way a mother looks upon her child, the way a father looks upon his child, with so much affection, looked upon in the way Jesus looks upon us. We have been touched by a concrete experience, by a voice, an encounter, a relationship, and then by the sign of the unity that the encounter has communicated to us. In my experience I have encountered many people in Brazil, but also in Italy, who told me: “We did not meet Fr. Giussani but through the testimony you give us, it is as if he were here in our midst.” It is a presence. It is the fruitfulness of the charism. “While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed [even though they were bursting with joy], He asked them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave Him a piece of baked fish; He took it and ate it in front of them.” Here is another verb: “He ate.” We have participated in this communion, in this dinner, in this life. Look, touch, eat. We have been nourished by a presence that has its culmination in the Eucharist.

Our Easter was the encounter we have had. Our life is no longer the same. Look, touch, eat. There is a continuity between the encounter of the risen Jesus with the apostles and the encounter of Fr. Giussani with us. And now, having heard the news, I say that now we do not need to pray that the cause be opened, but we must pray to the Father, through the intercession of Fr. Giussani, that our experience may be ever more true, that we too may live what he lived, and live it to the utmost in the concrete circumstances of life, in eating and drinking, in our families, in the total donation of our life to the Lord. We must ask Fr. Giussani to intercede for us, for our experience, for the task the pope has given us to serve and cherish unity, that it may urge us to the ends of the earth. As was repeated this morning, the greatest grace that can happen in life is to be invited to go on mission, which also happened to me. Therefore, we need to pray to the Lord for the Servant of God Fr. Luigi Giussani, that he may be near us in our journey in the present time.

Through Fr. Giussani this mysterious body has been formed in the Church, in the communion of the Church. And through the testimony of Bishop Giovanni Paccosi, we, too, have been touched and

have experienced it anew, here, in this gesture, because Easter is now, Easter is our today on our journey. Cardinal Farrell was shocked at the sight of twenty thousand people and repeated this last night at dinner, struck by the style, the silence, the focus, the unity. This body, made up of many people, of many “I’s,” not an anonymous mass but made up of each of us, is one thing, one heart and one soul.

I was very moved while Bishop Giovanni was talking about his life, vocation, history, mission, episcopate, and his task in Latin America, when he spoke of Andrea Aziani and Fr. Paolo Bargigia as signs of what happens at many points of our history. Then he spoke of the great history of the Franciscan missionaries who went down in boats from Ocopa, from the Peruvian Andes to the rivers of the Amazon to announce Him, because they recognized that Jesus is risen. As he was telling us about it, we felt that this happens now, happens for each of us. This is the greatest fruit of Easter. For Fr. Giussani, Easter culminated in Peter’s yes on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, where they had first met. Jesus looked at Peter and asked him: “Simon, do you love Me?” This is the culmination of Easter, the question that He asks each of us. “You have seen all these great and beautiful things. But do you love Me?” And we have learned with Fr. Giussani, moved by the Spirit, to answer like him: “Yes, Lord, You know that I love You.” This awakens hope, and so we bring hope into the world.

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness Pope Francis

Your Holiness,

About twenty-one thousand people gathered in person in Italy and by video link in the communities in twenty-one countries, as well as about three thousand people following at home because they were unable to travel, have participated in these days in the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

The title of the Exercises was “*What surprises me, says God, is hope*” (C. Péguy), and they were preached by His Eminence Bishop Giovanni Paccosi, bishop of San Miniato. Your Holiness, it has been an occasion to rediscover our need to recognize Christ in our lives, to recognize that we can hope only because He is present.

Bishop Paccosi introduced us into this journey of recognition and made it vividly clear that only in the embrace of the Church, through the form of companionship generated by the charism of Fr. Giussani in which we are immersed, can we remain attached to the objective presence of the risen Christ. The presence of His Eminence Cardinal Farrell was a clear sign of comfort for our journey of faith within membership in the one Church, for which we live and without which we would not exist. Christ uses our hope to show everyone His face, and we can only be “servants of this hope.” In this journey we desire to be accompanied by Mary, certain that, as Fr. Giussani reminded us, “without Our Lady we could not be certain about the future, because certainty about the future comes to us from Christ.”

Grateful for the blessing you have sent us, and desirous to be seized by Christ every day, we all continue to pray for you.

Davide Proserpi

*His Eminence Cardinal Matteo Zuppi
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Most Reverend Eminence,

About twenty-one thousand people gathered in person in Italy and by video link in the communities in twenty-one countries, as well as about three thousand people following at home because they were unable to travel, have participated in these days in the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

The title of the Exercises was “*What surprises me, says God, is hope*” (C. Péguy), and they were preached by His Eminence Bishop Giovanni Paccosi, bishop of San Miniato.

Bishop Paccosi introduced us into this journey of recognition and made it vividly clear that only in the embrace of the Church, through the form of companionship generated by the charism of Fr. Giussani in which we are immersed, can we experience true hope. We want to serve the Church accompanied by the Mother of God, certain that, as Fr. Giussani reminded us, “without Our Lady we could not be certain about the future, because certainty about the future comes to us from Christ.”

Thanking you for your closeness, and asking for your blessing, we greet you with heartfelt cordiality.

Davide Proserpi

*His Eminence Bishop Nicolò Anselmi,
Bishop of Rimini*

Your Excellency,

Thanking you again for the paternity you always express to us, and for your personal greeting, I am writing to inform you that at the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, entitled “*What surprises me, says God, is hope*” (C. Péguy), about twenty-one thousand people participated in person in Italy and by video link in the communities in twenty-one countries, while about three thousand people who were unable to travel followed from their homes.

The preaching by Bishop Paccosi, bishop of San Miniato, helped us to recognize our desire for hope, certain that only Christ responds and makes certain this desire. In this journey of recognition, we want to be accompanied by the Mother of God, certain that, as Fr. Giussani reminded us, “without Our Lady we could not be certain about the future, because certainty about the future comes to us from Christ.” Asking for your blessing for the journey of our Fraternity, we greet you with heartfelt cordiality.

Davide Prospero

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici

THE STORIES OF SAINT FRANCIS IN THE UPPER BASILICA OF ASSISI

The *Stories of Francis* frescoed by Giotto and his workshop in the Upper Basilica of Assisi show us the saint as a changed man, made joyful and fulfilled by an encounter with Christ; totally inserted into history, he acts in the concreteness of time and space, moved by self-awareness and by the consciousness of his own destiny. Holiness is proposed as an experience possible for anyone in every circumstance.

1. Homage of a Simple Man
2. Saint Francis Giving his Mantle to a Poor Man
3. Dream of the Palace
4. The Crucifix of Saint Damian Speaks to Saint Francis
5. Renunciation of Worldly Goods
6. Dream of Innocent III
7. Confirmation of the Rule
8. Saint Francis on the Flaming Chariot
9. Vision of the Heavenly Thrones
10. Saint Francis Expelling the Demons from Arezzo
11. Trial by Fire before the Sultan
12. Ecstasy of Saint Francis
13. Institution of the Crib at Greccio
14. Miracle of the Spring
15. Sermon to the Birds
16. Death of the Knight of Celano
17. Saint Francis Preaching before Honorius III
18. Apparition at Arles
19. Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata
20. Death of Saint Francis
21. Verification of the Stigmata
22. Saint Francis Mourned by Saint Clare
23. Saint Francis Appearing to Gregory IX
24. The Curing of a Man from Ilerda
25. The Confession of a Woman Raised from the Dead
26. Liberation of the Repentant Heretic

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