

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

### **Synthesis**

#### **Father Fabio**

Allow me, before the synthesis, to give a small reaction to what we just heard, what we just saw, what Father Francesco's testimony has introduced to us. My reaction is one of great emotion, great gratitude. I hope also to give voice to the gratitude and the emotion present in your hearts: gratitude, because there exists a place and there exist faces that summon us on the Thursday evening of the Easter Triduum to take seriously the questions that are present among us. There exists a place where Friday morning certain questions are posed, certain reflections, certain readings, so that they can become a point of work for life, in that moment of life that each of us is living: those in first year of high school receive them and face them in one way, those in fifth year in another way, each in the moment of the journey in which they find themselves. We are full of emotion and gratitude, because Friday we were helped to look at the One who was crucified, who let Himself be pierced and then Friday evening we were able to make what we lived re-emerge from our heart, from our intelligence, asking questions that were useful for the path the following day. And so, we are full of gratitude, because this morning we were able to see the fruits of this path in the life of Father Francesco; thus, because we have adults who accompany us, who offer us their testimony of life, telling us the story of what the good God has done in them for the good of everyone.

The synthesis is made up of a few points starting from the video of Father Giussani. Yesterday, we saw it at the end of the morning, at the “90<sup>th</sup> minute,” and we saw it in a “missionary” key, because we had arrived at the last step: “An encounter that expands,” looking at communion, friendship, and mission. Now, instead, we will look at it again, placing our gaze, the accent, on the first part of the video, so that it can also be useful for this moment of synthesis, starting from his words.

#### **Father Giussani**

“The faith is like a great working hypothesis that comes to us from tradition. But if the work of experience is lacking, it remains at a purely abstract level and becomes only rituals or moralistic preoccupations, while faith is life, it is a way of conceiving and feeling life. And this is our supreme task: not to be a father or mother, not to be a journalist or an engineer, not to be a soldier or a worker, not to win elections or to be a slave to our boss. It is not this: our task is to spread the great message of Christ in the world. The gift of faith has been given to me so that I can give it to others, communicate it. The gift of faith has been given to us so that we can communicate it, and our life will be judged on this. So that man may know Christ, so that humanity may know Christ—this is the task of the one who is called, the task of the people of God: mission.”<sup>1</sup> »

<sup>1</sup> [Video—Father Luigi Giussani, Il pensiero, i discorsi, la fede \[Thought, Discourse, Faith\] \(from 36:10 to 37:50\).](#)

» **Father Fabio**

Many of your questions and interventions from yesterday's assembly brought to light an impatience: "I want to see right away," "I want this to happen to me," "I want immediately to complete the steps that the Samaritan woman made," "She went from five husbands...to the public witness to her townspeople!"; and maybe a bit of "holy envy" came over us also this morning listening to Father Francesco: "I too want a friendship like he had during his high school years! I too want a friendship like he lived during the CLU years!" So it is necessary to give a small premise as background to our synthesis.

**1. The Temple in time**

Jesus responds to the Samaritan woman: "God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in Spirit and truth."<sup>2</sup> And therefore you are, you are the temple of God, His dwelling place; remember that Seve said, in his greeting on Thursday evening: "A house that we are, even if a bit dilapidated." And yet, God chooses you, chooses to come to dwell in you, you are the temple of God. But be careful not to get impatient: because for a temple to come up, for a house to come up, you need time.<sup>3</sup> We clearly do not mean a time lived lazily! And so, we can leave behind a doubt that may remain in the back of our mind: "Yeah, sure, they speak to us specifically about time, they tell us, for example, to 'take your time,' in order to postpone!" Instead, no, time represents the itinerary that the Mystery gives us. Time is given us, the Mystery gives it to us allowing our life to develop, our awareness, our heart, our reason to mature, to develop, because the plant does not grow all at once!

We sang, in fact: "The greatest Story is Destiny / which reveals itself little by little."<sup>4</sup> "We need two factors for a seed to grow. The *first factor* [is that this seed that is within the earth, the earth is our companionship, is the companionship of GS, is the companionship of the Church] is the nourishment that the earth gives to the seed."<sup>5</sup> This means that we stay, we remain, we remain faithful to this companionship, as Father Francesco witnessed to us: the years of middle school living in a bit of an "unhinged" way, in first or second year of high school living with a certain anguished interior, having "a foot in both worlds" and then always more and more drawing near to that *decision for existence* which we spoke about Thursday evening, but staying, staying, in the earth of the companionship: stay, stay, remain and then you absorb and assimilate the nutrition that makes the brain and the heart function! "The *second factor* is time. Time is the condition needed for the seed to develop."<sup>6</sup> We don't have to understand everything on 30 March 2024!

Someone will leave today having reached a few convictions and with a few questions still open, others with a whole lot of certainty and some points that still need to be illuminated. But time, with the *humus*, with the earth of our companionship, allows the seed, the I, to put down roots, then to put out little leaves, then flowers, then sprouts, then fruits, a fruit that goes...all the way to Chile: what did Father Francesco know about going to Chile, then becoming rector of the seminary, then coming back to Milan to lead CLU? What did we know, Seve and I and the adults here, who twenty years ago were in your place, about what would happen, about how our lives would develop? Over time there comes a depth of certainty. It is beautiful to read the Gospel, because very often a phrase reoccurs after Jesus does a »

<sup>2</sup> John 4:24.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio* [Time and the Temple], BUR, Milano 1995.

<sup>4</sup> Claudio Chieffo, "La notte che ho visto le stelle" [The night I saw the stars], in Canti, Soc. Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2014, pp. 236-237, translation ours.

<sup>5</sup> Luigi Giussani, "Risposte ai giovani" [Response to young people], *CL Litterae Communionis*, n. 10/1989, p. 4, translation ours.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

» miracle: the disciples are there wide-eyed, their mind full of wonder, their heart full of joy, and then the evangelist comments: "And they believed in Him." Then another page, another moving fact: "And the disciples believed in Him." Then another conversation or encounter, another event: "And the disciples, that day, believed in Him." The whole Gospel is sprinkled with these events and these phrases.<sup>7</sup> And someone says: "How so? Didn't they already believe in Him on day one? Didn't they already believe when Jesus turned toward John and Andrew and said to them, 'What are you looking for?'" But, in time, that initial certainty gets deeper and deeper! In fact, Jesus says to them: "Come and you will see,"<sup>8</sup> that is: stay with Me and you will see, and you will begin to believe, and that dawn—as Father Francesco said—of friendship, little by little that dawn will become more luminous. So be careful not to stumble on the error of impatience, that makes us interrupt a path because we do not see the fruit right away, because we would like to pick the fruit too soon! "By your perseverance [in patience] you will secure [you will possess] your lives."<sup>9</sup>

## 2. "The faith is like a great working hypothesis that comes to us from tradition"

Father Giussani said in the video: "The faith is like a great working hypothesis that comes to us from tradition,"<sup>10</sup> from the Latin *traditio, traditionis*, deriving from the verb *tradere*, "to hand over," "to transmit." Father Francesco described just now the same dynamic that we have seen at work between the Samaritan woman and the other inhabitants of Sychar: the other townspeople, after having heard and seen, received what the Samaritan woman had transmitted to them—"Here is someone who told me everything I have done, here is someone who has read my heart like no one ever has, not even my five husbands!"—these also desire to go to meet Jesus and asked Him to be with Him and began to take seriously that hypothesis that had reached them, that had been transmitted to them. As one of you, for example, were able to say last Wednesday, coming back to school after vacation: "There is a place, GS, where I feel myself understood, read, welcomed, where my questions are taken seriously and where I can verify an answer within a friendship, discover the benefit of the Christian fact for my life. You come too!" Those townspeople, hearing the Samaritan woman, said to themselves: "Because of the words of the woman we began to believe and now want to know Him, the source!" In fact, in the Gospel this step is described right away: "They went to Him and asked Him to stay some days together with them." In this way, that *decision for existence* is realized: "I want to be with You!" Yesterday afternoon as well, we said during the *Via Crucis*, looking at Dismas crucified on the cross next to Jesus: "Take me with You to Paradise, let me be with You"; Paradise is opened for us now, in this life, being with Him already now. In the end, the Gospel of Saint John continues: "We no longer believe because of your word; for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the savior of the world." And so, it reaches us through tradition, through a small, uninterrupted chain of »

<sup>7</sup> "The following chapter of the Gospel tells about the miracle at the wedding of Cana and ends with these words: 'Jesus performed the first miracle. And his disciples believed in him.' This shows that the event developed over time. If those disciples had not seen Him again they would have forgotten that strange encounter, even though they had acknowledged Him as the Messiah since the first meeting. Instead, to re-encounter Him was like deepening an original impression. They reinforced their belief in this continuous convergence of impressions and feelings. Not that previously they had been insincere or non-believing; rather, they followed the guiding principle of human awareness that implies this development. Thus, even at other times, after the wedding of Cana, the Gospel notes: 'and His disciples believed in Him.' A depth is achieved that brings one to that degree of confidence and conviction where one is finally persuaded: *one is certain*" (Luigi Giussani, "Traces of the Christian Experience," in *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*, translated by John Zucchi, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2006, 60).

<sup>8</sup> John 1:39.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 21:19.

<sup>10</sup> See here, p. 27.

» tradition, it reaches us maybe through our mom or dad who tell us: "Go to GS", "Let's go to the Triduum", "Come to Mass with me", "Go with grandpa to Mass", and one goes, like those who heard the story of the Samaritan woman. This is how your verification begins; as Father Francesco said: "At a certain point I wanted to risk my life." Here is why we sang "Hoy arriesgaré" after "Peter, Do You Love Me?"<sup>11</sup> It is addressed to you! He calls on you! Now it's time to move!

### 3. "But if the work of experience is lacking"

I think that the work of School of Community is helping us a lot to grasp the factors of our own verification. To undertake or to have an experience, says Father Giussani, does not mean to live through a lot of circumstances. Usually we find ourselves saying: "That is someone who has had so many experiences, because he has traveled a lot, he's gone around the world..."! But this is not yet experience. Father Giussani says that we have an experience only when we compare what we have lived with the needs and evidences of our own heart.<sup>12</sup> After a judgment has been made on what we have lived, then we can say that we have had an experience. The Samaritan woman, in fact, is able to say: "This man has treated me as no other man has treated me before! He told me everything I had done, he opened a new horizon like no one ever has!" She compared what had happened to her with her heart, and this recognized difference led her to give a judgment of correspondence, of faith: "Here there is divinity, the touch of God." That is, within this companionship there is something that we cannot find elsewhere, and so we begin to give a name and a Face to this correspondence: this is the work of experience, of judgment. And so, in Father Francesco's time in GS, without becoming merely automatic, there was a phrase that sounded like this: "Here at GS we are happy and we are happy because God is here"...and so, he began to discover it by judging!

### 4. "While faith is life"

The fourth point of the synthesis is taken from the phrase of Father Giussani: "While faith is life."<sup>13</sup> So many of your contributions and interventions gathered on Friday evening expressed again the need to unify life, not to proceed ultimately on two parallel lines that never meet: on the one hand life and on the other hand faith; on the one hand reason and on the other hand faith; on the one hand science and on the other hand faith. We want a united a life, because faith coincides with life, in every circumstance I am in relationship with God, not only on "a mountain" or "in the temple", in the church yes and at school or soccer practice no. Father Francesco also witnessed to this a little bit ago: a faith that led his friend to take the exam again with him, when his friend had already completed it; the discovery of a way of living friendship in an apartment, helping each other seriously; their Christian present in the university...life is understood from faith, faith stimulates life. Faith is life, and so many of you asked: "Can you give us some concrete indications on this?" So we want to get down into particulars, so that this hypothesis that is given to you can be verified, and then you can tell us what fruit it has borne in you and through you, when we see each other next year!

The first concrete indication is prayer. Jesus turns to the Samaritan woman and says to her: "If you knew the gift of God and who is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' *you would have asked him.*"<sup>14</sup> So, it begins, it begins, and then continues, continues to beg for a faith that coincides with life, to beg for God who makes your humanity flourish. Pray for your con- »

<sup>11</sup> Oscar Clemotte, "Hoy arriesgaré", in *Songbook*, p. 276; "Peter, Do You Love Me?", *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, translated by John Zucchi, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2023, pp. 6-12.

<sup>13</sup> [Video-Father Luigi Giussani, Il pensiero, i discorsi, la fede \[Thought, Discourse, Faith\]](#).

<sup>14</sup> John 4:10

» version, beg for your holiness! "Lord, make my humanity flourish, see that my heart is still a bit small and egoistic, so transform it, make it flourish." To rediscover life as a relationship with Him: I ask Him starting in the morning, while I put my right foot on the carpet at the side of my bed, while I pray the *Angelus*, also if I am a bit sleepy, while I go from my room to the bathroom, or on the bus to get to school. And then, as Father Francesco said, we make an appointment to meet up outside of school with friends. How beautiful to arrive at school with other friends or to make an appointment with those who wait for you and with whom you can share and verify this friendship! If there is no time, you can make the sign of the Cross and say "O God, come to save me", or prayer Morning Prayer and then the *Angelus*, and then during break to find each other together: "What went well in class? What didn't go well? Later, in the afternoon, let's get together to study!" To conclude the evening with the *Memorare*, entrusting ourselves to Our Lady, or to finish the afternoon studying at home or at the GS office with Evening Prayer prayed together, always recovering the memory of the One who brought us together! Come on, let's take these indications seriously. You asked for this concreteness so that you could verify it, that is, make it true in your life.

And then if faith coincides with life, what does Jesus Christ have to do with my whole life, with everything, that is, with culture, with the world? And so, while I am in class and hear Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, and I hear it said that science has nothing to do with faith...how beautiful, instead, to discover that faith has made science flourish, that faith seeks and demands intellect and vice versa, to organize meetings on this! There are beautiful books on this subject that are so essential, there are exhibits from the Rimini Meeting, adults you can ask, lean on them. Or, on the TV news or the internet one hears about a planned law on the end of life,<sup>15</sup> on abortion,<sup>16</sup> on surrogacy,<sup>17</sup> and asks herself: "What is this world I'm living in? What is this world we are creating? A world that instead of favoring and nourishing life does everything to stop it from being born and to take it away as soon as possible?!" Let us help each other to stay awake and interested in everything and to understand how that particular connects to Christ, with what we have met. Father Giussani said: "What does God have to do with math?"<sup>18</sup>

In these days we have seen and spoken about friendship as "friendship toward destiny" and for many this may still seem like mere words. Father Francesco just told us: "They told me that God is at the origin of our friendship. Those seemed like extraneous words." Then, to make it concrete, yesterday this message arrived from a person that I have only ever seen »

<sup>15</sup> "We must accompany people towards death, but not provoke death or facilitate any form of suicide. Remember that the right to care and treatment for all must always be prioritized, so that the weakest, particularly the elderly and the sick, are never rejected. Life is a right, not death, which must be welcomed, not administered. And this ethical principle concerns everyone, not just Christians or believers" (Francis, *General Audience*, 9 February 2022).

<sup>16</sup> "A contradictory approach even permits the termination of human life in the maternal womb, in the name of safeguarding other rights. But how can an action that ends an innocent and defenseless life in its blossoming stage be therapeutic, civilized or simply human? I ask you: is it right to 'do away with' a human life in order to solve a problem? Is it right to hire a hit man in order to solve a problem? One cannot. It is not right to 'do away with' a human being, however small, in order to solve a problem. It is like hiring a hit man to solve a problem" (Francis, *General Audience*, 10 October 2018).

<sup>17</sup> "The path to peace calls for respect for life, for every human life, starting with the life of the unborn child in the mother's womb, which cannot be suppressed or turned into an object of trafficking. In this regard, I deem deplorable the practice of so-called surrogate motherhood, which represents a grave violation of the dignity of the woman and the child, based on the exploitation of situations of the mother's material needs. A child is always a gift and never the basis of a commercial contract. Consequently, I express my hope for an effort by the international community to prohibit this practice universally" (Francis, *To the Members of the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 8 January 2024).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Una presenza che cambia* [A presence that changes], BUR, Milan 2004, pp. 94, 316, translation ours.

» three times, and a friendship toward destiny was born. Knowing that I was here with you all, yesterday he sent me this message: "I am in the hospital, and they just operated on me for a tumor in my lungs. I hope to get out on Easter Sunday. These are very painful days. It is truly a Holy Week full of the Passion. But I wanted to tell you that I am praying, or better, I am trying to pray also for you, for your work with the GS Triduum, I am offering this also for you all. I pray the Holy Spirit will flood you will His surprising, inexhaustible fruitfulness. My 'yes' in front of God in these days is also for you and for all those kids who, without knowing, I love with all my heart." This is the promise of a truer, deeper friendship, just like the one described by Father Francesco with his friend Marta, or seen yesterday in the testimony of the mom whose daughter was born to Heaven.

We have spoken about affectivity in these days. Even on this there have been so many questions: "What does it mean to love a person?", "What does it mean to become attached forever to another person?" We have to go deeper into this essential dimension of life as well, because all of life is interesting to us. Therefore, if we are interested in understanding this, we will invite married couples to an evening of GS or on vacation, we will invite a priest or some *Memores Domini*, asking them: "What does it mean to love this person? When did you fall in love? What does it mean to love another in virginity, to possess him without suffocating him?" The girl Father Francesco was dating, once she discovered her boyfriend's vocation to virginity, said to him: "I will step aside so that you can go toward your destiny, so that you can fulfill your vocation"; if your call to Paradise passes through the priesthood, "I will put up my hands and take a step back." And then the reciprocation, when it was Father Francesco's turn to talk with his girlfriend: "Your call to Paradise passes through marriage and motherhood, through being a wife," then, what pure joy, what deep joy, to be able to walk together, the one next to the other, toward their own destiny, each according to their own vocation! Even here there are concrete indications: invite people, ask people. Be thirsty for these testimonies, follow that thirst, ask the adults around you, have them tell their story, they are there for you!

And then, as I said yesterday, when faith becomes life, it overflows, the water gushes out of you, through you and spills out: mission. Father Giussani from this point of view was categorical in indicating the task of every Christian; you have seen before the excitement with which he put us in front of our responsibility: "We will be judged on this!" Mission is a sign of charity, it is not the desire to put some kind of strategy in action, to fulfill some duty, but simply the overabundant joy and charity of wanting to share with another what I have met by Grace, the One who met me at the well of my existence!<sup>19</sup> With my classmates, with my soccer teammates, my university classmates one day, those in my dance studio, with whom I play basketball. To share. Then, as happened with Father Francesco and my friend, we do not know what will happen, we will remain friends as the good God desires. It is not proselytism, but simply the charity of sharing what make us live, what sustains us. It is moving to hear what Father Giussani said to some adults in Viterbo in 1977: the movement spread because there were young people who, because of what they were living in their own city, went on vacation and there, where they were staying, they met people. And where they met people they planted a little seed. And where they planted this little seed, little by little »

<sup>19</sup> "It can happen, however, that the apostolic ardor, the desire to reach others with the good news of the Gospel, may diminish, become tepid. Sometimes it seems to be eclipsed; there are 'closed-off' Christians, they don't think of others. But when Christian life loses sight of the horizon of evangelization, the horizon of proclamation, it grows sick: it closes in on itself, it becomes self-referential, it becomes atrophied. Without apostolic zeal, faith withers. Mission, on the other hand, is the oxygen of Christian life: it invigorates and purifies it" (Francis, *General Audience*, 11 January 2023).

» it grew.<sup>20</sup> Some adults in Varese told me how the first Gioventù Studentesca and then CL were born in the Abruzzo region of Italy: in 1968, while in Italy people were crazy with the conflicts in the universities and in the cities, this small group of young people invited by the local bishop went to spend their free time during the summer of '68, '69, '70, and '71 freely with high school kids in Abruzzo. The bishop had called Giussani, Giussani had called Father Baroncini, and Baroncini had called these university students telling them: "Listen up, this summer, instead of going to the Seychelles or the Canary Islands, why don't you go to spend some time with these kids and share with them what has been given to you?" And so the first community was born there in Abruzzo. But so many things, so many seeds have been planted in this way in the whole world! Find someone to tell you the story of how GS was born in your region, in your town!

I will conclude. Father Francesco told us at the close of his testimony: "I hope it can happen also for you one day to be able to say what I am saying to you now." But for each of us it is already like this, there is already this experience. So, two brief letters that come from you all, from your contributions, as a final wish.

The first. "A month ago, my dear professor of philosophy, who left for Uganda and now works alongside Rose in the 'Luigi Giussani High School' in Kampala, came back to Italy and I was able to meet him again. That evening I did nothing but look at how he smiled, what he said, the gestures he made, with eyes wide open. And all of a sudden it seemed to me just like the twelve apostles at the last supper who listened to the Teacher, watched Him, and the more they looked at Him, the more their heart was full, was moved, was embraced totally. It did not matter anymore what was in their heart, whether dirty, sinful, happy, sad. It didn't matter how my heart was that evening at dinner; what mattered was that He was there. At the end of dinner, I got into my car and turned it on. As I left I began to cry and laugh. A strange, huge emotion: 'Lord, how much you love me! My professor has discovered that his passion for Christ, his vocation, has taken a shape in a companionship. And what a grace that, through him, it has reached me!' [We return to the point from before: through the Samaritan woman the others came to the good Jesus...do you understand?]. How can I be like my professor? I could not do it if I did not understand that he is over there to give his life for the work of Another and I remain here with the certainty that our friendship conquers the logic of time and space only by recognizing that we are children of the same Father."

A second contribution and I am finished. This relation with God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit, which makes us children in the Son, must be cultivated within all that we said before, that is, in belonging to the companionship of the Church, in prayer, in friendship, in all our affections, in culture, in charity, in mission. This is the dialogue *cor ad cor*, heart to heart, that continues our whole life. A girl writes: "This is what He asks me during the day: only a simple 'yes,' a yes that carries an immense significance. [We remember the fragile 'yes' of Mary, Our Lady, from which the whole of human history was changed. There is a 'before' the Incarnation and an 'after' the Incarnation. Time itself has a 'before' Christ and an 'after' Christ, thanks to that woman]. I can falter, fall, stay there reflecting, tormenting myself about my failures, immersing myself in negative thoughts, but the undeniable fact is that I am and will remain forever in the hands of Jesus, because He is my greatest treasure."

Now to Seve for the detailed announcements!

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, *Il rischio educativo. Come creazione di personalità e di storia* [The Risk of Education. As creation of personality and history], SEI, Turin 1995, p. 89.