



Called, that is, sent: the beginning of mission

**Notes from the words of Francesco Cassese and Davide Proseri
at the Beginning Day of the adults of Communion and Liberation of the Lombardy Region, Italy**

Unipol Forum, Assago (Milan) and by video conference, September 21, 2024

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Davide Prospero

Fr. Giussani said in the book *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Oneself]*: “Salvation has already been accomplished with the resurrection of Christ: this is the center of faith and everything hinges on it, because it is a fact. Salvation has already been accomplished, but it becomes resounding through our communion.”¹

Let us entrust this moment and the year ahead to the Holy Spirit, that His voice may never cease to grant us the Grace to be in communion with Christ in every moment and in every place.

Come, Holy Spirit

Francesco Cassese

Welcome, and thank you for being here. Greetings to the ten thousand people here in Assago and also the approximately four thousand five hundred following in six other cities of Lombardy. In the coming days there will be another twenty-six Beginning Days in the other Italian regions and one hundred forty-one abroad, in seventy-three countries.

I would like to begin by trying to review the steps we have taken together in the last year, one that has been very intense and for which I personally am very grateful to God.

But before going into these steps, I would like to share a personal episode that happened about ten years ago, that has helped me think about the journey completed and yet to complete. I was in Paris for work and was staying the weekend with a family of friends of the Movement. They hosted me in a little room that had a frosted glass door from which you could see outside. In the morning their little daughter began scratching on the glass, calling me by name. I woke to this darling little girl calling my name and my heart leapt, thinking, “My goodness, if I could wake up this way every day, my life would be transformed!”. That was my first thought. My next thought was of the bell at home that calls us early in the morning for Morning Prayer. I said to myself: “For me, the bell is like this child: it is One calling me by name, One who is summoning me!”. Was it my imagination? No, my whole life story leads me to say: “If there had not been this Presence, a real presence, I would not have entered the Movement or *Memores Domini*; I would not be here.” From that day on, everything changed for me. When I hear the bell in the morning, it is a sign for me. Before, this was not the case and it did not mean much to me, but now that sound reminds me every day that my life is a Man who is calling me and waiting for my yes. This continual relationship keeps my mind and heart alert.

¹ L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé. La vita come comunione (1968-1970) [A Revolution of Oneself. Life as Communion (1968-1970)]*, Rizzoli, Milan 2024, p. 70.

For this reason, the events we will review now, the steps we taken made this year, are not simply things that have happened. I lived them right away, with that immediacy born of an education, as the voice of the living presence of the Lord. Now I will present the three fundamental steps of the journey proposed and its fruits, a journey that at a certain point received new light from the opening of the final phase of Fr. Giussani's cause of beatification, on May 9.²

What have these steps been?

1. The gaze of faith

We all have in mind Pope Francis' words to us: "Dear friends, take to heart the precious gift of your charism and the Fraternity that preserves it, because it can still make many vines 'flourish' [...]. The potential of your charism is still largely to be discovered."³ But I also think of Cardinal Farrell's invitation: "Do you want to be this factor of renewal, to contribute to be this factor of renewal from within the entire ecclesial experience, bringing all that you are?"⁴ I truly felt it was an invitation to me. "Do you want to be this factor of renewal?". Following this invitation, in last year's Beginning Day we first of all wanted to focus on the theme of "experience" in general—to avoid the constant risk of subjectivist and sentimental reductions—and that of "Christian experience," underlining three essential factors: 1) the encounter with an objective fact (community and authority), 2) recognition of the meaning of the Fact (the grace of faith), and 3) the consciousness of the correspondence between the Fact in the encounter with the Christian and ecclesial reality, and one's own person (verification). We said that without one or another of these factors, we cannot speak of "Christian experience."

In particular, we wanted to stress that faith leads to a level of experience, comprehension, penetration and enjoyment of things that cannot be matched by our abilities alone or natural religious sentiment or drive.

2. Taking care of unity, safeguarding the charism: communion, obedience and following.

As you remember, on January 30 the Holy Father sent Davide and the entire Movement a short but very dense letter, a gesture of great paternity and esteem. Central to his message was the theme of unity and obedience. He urged us "to take care of the unity among you: in fact, it alone, in following the pastors of the Church, will in time be able to safeguard the fruitfulness of the charism that the Holy Spirit gave to Fr. Giussani." He concluded with a heartfelt invitation to "follow the path taken, under the 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."⁵

Giussani always stressed the ontological and sacramental value of unity as the supreme sign of the presence of Christ in history: "Christ has remained present in the world, in history, and will be present until the end of the centuries through the unity of those He seizes and brings within His personality."⁶

I was struck by the coincidence that the same months saw the publication of a book on the life of our friend Andrea Aziani, one in which Andrea and Fr. Giussani gave us numerous encouragements about the importance unity. I'll read a passage about his move to Siena with some university friends: "In June 1976, Fr. Giussani asked Andrea to move to the Tuscan city [Siena]; the same was proposed in different conversations with three other university students, Gian Corrado Peluso (Dado) of Catholic University, and Lorenza Violini and Ornella Milan of the State University, who accepted enthusiastically. Before their departure, Giussani told them: 'The important thing is that there be unity among you, because from your unity what must grow will grow.'" Further, on the same page: 'Fr. Giussani told us: 'I

² Cf. M. Delpini, "Fr. Giussani. The Fascination of the Charism," May 10, 2024, *clonline.org*.

³ Francis, "Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts", p. 15, *clonline.org*.

⁴ K. Farrell quoted by D. Prosperi, "Introductory Greetings," in M.-G. Lepori, "Christ, the Life of Life," *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation* April 2022, p. 8, *clonline.org*.

⁵ Francis, "The Pope to CL: Preserve Unity," Letter to Davide Prosperi, January 30, 2024. Posted February 1, 2024, *clonline.org*.

⁶ L. Giussani, "Christianity as an Event Today," *Traces*, n. 2/2024, p. 16, *clonline.org*.

don't care how many people you succeed in drawing; what I'm interested in is the unity and friendship among you, a friendship that has at heart the destiny of each other, and all the rest will come as a surplus."⁷

"The objectivity of His presence is saved, is assured, precisely by this unity,"⁸ whose total reality is called "Church." "And just as back then, those who followed Him became Christians and changed, so today a Christian is a person who changes, changes as a person, and follows this unity to which Christ gave a sign of absolute objectivity, which is the bishop of Rome, the head of the community in Rome."⁹ And what is true for the reality of the Church is also true, by analogy, for our companionship. In other words, there is no unity without authority, without the objective sign of authority. As Fr. Giussani said in *Una rivoluzione di sé*, it is not one theme among others, but *the* theme, the theme that assures the continuity of our friendship and the possibility of its fruitfulness."¹⁰

During the February meeting of CL leaders on Pope Francis' letter, reflecting on the theme of "communion guide" we also underlined that in the final analysis, if we follow people, they are an expression not of themselves, not just what they feel or think, of their interpretation of things or the charisma, but a communion.¹¹

3. The presence: judgement and culture

Taking to heart what the Pope told us in 2022, speaking of an "impoverishment in the presence,"¹² the third step concerned the presence in its fundamental dimensions of culture, charity and mission, which also includes works. We began with culture. In particular, I am referring to the text of Davide's meeting with the Italian Association of Cultural Centers. As early as in Student Youth, Giussani proposed faith as the source of a new way of looking at, conceiving and facing all the problems of existence, society, history and politics, that is, as the source of a "judgement on the world," which means "the beginning of a different culture."¹³ This is what we have

tried to do, albeit initially and in a way that certainly can be improved, with some recent issues of *Tracce* dedicated to affectivity, the end of life, and artificial intelligence. In this way, and at the same time, culture becomes verification of faith and communication of Christ's newness and beauty to the world.

In the meeting with cultural centers it was said that yes, Christ's beauty corresponds to the heart, but this does not mean that it agrees with everything we normally think, with our measures, presumptions, calculations, or our and the world's will to power, because the world's mindset pervades us; it is not just something outside ourselves. When people outside look at, encounter and listen to the Movement, what usually strikes them? For example, what has an impact on those who participate in the Meeting? The ability to be and say something original, a difference from the climate in which we are immersed.

Today, starting from our faith, from the encounter that has marked our life, we are "brought into a discussion" regarding many questions that Giussani or the Church herself have not had to face in the same terms. In fact, the adventure of judgement and culture belong to Christian testimony; it is an irrevocable part of our experience and presence in the world. It can arouse opposition and provoke incomprehension, but it can also become an opportunity for encounter for many, and offer to broken or thirsty hearts like our own an outlook, a road of the "diversity," the beauty and the hope that is Christ.

And so here we are today. I wonder, and I ask you: what is asked of us today? What new step do you believe is necessary for our journey?

Prosperi

I'll answer right away saying that last year, we said the first fundamental purpose for the existence of the Movement is education to Christian faith, therefore living life as vocation. We are chosen, called by an Other. Now the new step with which we want to begin this year sets us upon the second dimension of our historical task within the life of the Church and the world: communicating to everyone the content

⁷G. Mereghetti-G.C. Peluso, *Andrea Aziani febbre di vita [Andrea Aziani, Fever of Life]*, Itaca, Castel Bolognese (RA) 2023, p. 40.

⁸L. Giussani, "Christianity as an Event Today," op. cit., p. 4.

⁹Ivi.

¹⁰L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Oneself]*, op. cit., p. 201.

¹¹Cf. "The Pope's Letter: The Path to Follow, March 8, 2024, [cclonline.org](https://www.cclonline.org).

¹²Francis, "Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts", op. cit., p. 10.

¹³L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Oneself]*, op. cit., p. 135.

of this faith. It is necessary to become aware that we are called for a task.

Being called means being sent; one leads to the other without interruption. Thus the title of the Beginning Day: “Called, that is, sent: the beginning of mission.” It is the theme of *mission*, following what the Pope told us: “Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts.” And before telling us this, he had underlined: “They are times of missionary renewal and relaunching in the light of the current ecclesial moment, as well as of the needs, sufferings and hopes of contemporary humanity.”¹⁴

1. CHRIST IS THE ONE SENT BY THE FATHER AND HE INVOLVES US IN HIS MISSION

Giussani said: “The great call [...] that God has made in His plan for the world is the call of Christ,” that embraces and explains everything. In fact, the election of Christ coincides with “the mission of making the mysterious plan of the Father for all things visible [...]. If anyone living at the time of Christ were to have asked Him, ‘Who are you? what is your name?’ Jesus could have replied, ‘I am the one sent by the Father.’”¹⁵ Jesus’ every expression, gesture and gaze expressed His awareness of being sent by the Father. Therefore, Christ is the first subject of mission, and His mission consists in making visible the Father’s plan and love, in communicating to the women and men of His time and all time, loving them, the love of the Father that constantly generates Him.

Not only this: Christ involved “His own” and all who will believe through their word, up to us, in His mission. “Just as You, Father, have sent Me into the world, so I sent them.”¹⁶ We too, like the first ones, are called, that is, sent. “Matthew, follow Me.”¹⁷ Your name can go here. How have we been called?

Think of the episode of the Samaritan woman at the well. John’s Gospel¹⁸ gives us the sense that this encounter did not happen by chance. Jesus decided to take the more arduous road from Jerusalem to Galilee, which passed through the desert in the

middle of Samaritan territory, travelling a route the Jews eschewed because they considered the Samaritans impure, and to reach Jacob’s well when nobody would be going there (it was about midday, terribly hot, and people stayed home in the shade) except this woman who knew she was considered “morally questionable” and so wanted to avoid embarrassing encounters. You could think it was just a chance meeting and might not have happened, but no. It happened to her exactly because Jesus wanted it that way. He travelled all that road to arrive there at that hour, exactly because he wanted to meet her.

This is the point! This encounter began a new life, such that all the mess of confusion and sin in her past became part of a design of good that began to have a sense that was one with the face and words of the man she had in front of her. Imagine what she must have felt in realizing who she had in front of her, suddenly discovering she was wanted, desired, loved and, to use the word dear to Fr. Giussani, begged for, by the Messiah, Christ, destiny, He for whom our heart is made and always awaited, consciously or not.

The same holds for us today, through the encounter with the Movement, within the reality of the Church. If you are here, it is because you have been chosen, called by name. I think of the many testimonies we heard this summer (some you will read in *Tracce*).¹⁹ Their story is also our story, of all of us here, albeit with different forms and shadings.

We have been called—I am also thinking of those who are here for the first time—through an encounter that enabled us to experience a gaze on our life that is as impossible as it is desirable, a gaze that is finally human, a freely given and undeserved love for our destiny, our face. None of us has done anything to deserve it. If the person or persons we have come upon have become an “encounter” for us, it is because we found them engaged in a different way in everyday things. In their speaking, working, eating and drinking we have perceived a qualitative difference, something corresponding to our thirst for meaning and love.

¹⁴ Francis, “Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts”, op. cit., p. 10.

¹⁵ L. Giussani–S. Alberto–J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World del mondo*, McGill Queens University Press, Montreal, 2010, p. 38.

¹⁶ Jn 17:18.

¹⁷ Cf. Mt 9:9.

¹⁸ Cf. Jn 4:5-42.

¹⁹ “Chiamati, cioè mandati [Called, that is, sent]”, *Tracce*, n. 9/2024, pp. 40-53.

This difference is a gift offered to the world. Let's be clear, we're fragile and limited; we have nothing to offer if not what we ourselves have received (as we wrote at the end of the flyer published some days after the terrible happening in Paderno Dugnano)²⁰, nothing of our own, nothing that comes from us. The source of our difference, of our different and constructive presence in the environment is, to use Pope Francis' expression, "creative faithfulness"²¹ to an encounter, a source, a gift of the Spirit. The source lives in a place and a history: our communion in Christ. Our friend Carras repeated it to his last breath: you can be the sharpest and most sensitive of all, the most intelligent or charismatic, but if you separate yourself from the source you become a broken record that repeats itself to infinity. It is a temptation we can all fall into, no exclusions.

2. A LIVED COMMUNION

We have been called through a human encounter that has placed us in the life of the Body of Christ, in a communion made up of those who, Giussani said, are "chosen to see, who accept to look, who listen as they can, who plod on as they can, all sinners, loved by the Mystery."²²

We, too, have been chosen to see and we have had to accept to look. In fact, nothing happens without our freedom. Even in the acknowledgement of love received, our freedom is at play. Certainly, it is a freedom moved by the power of a superabundance, an attraction, because otherwise it would be incapable of taking steps, but it must in any case engage. But pay attention here: it is not enough to say our *yes* once. Just as Christ lovingly asked Peter to say his *yes* three times, so we have to repeat our *yes* to His love a hundred, a thousand times, every day. "Do you love Me?"

How many times are we scandalized, saying: "I had the encounter, but I feel blocked." Our *yes* must happen over and over again and become ever more conscious. This means each of us must embrace responsibility, but often we want to avoid it for our convenience or out of laziness. Our *yes* is full of rea-

sons, even when we are in the fog. The fact that we "do not see" happening now what happened to us before does not mean it is not happening. It can also happen that "after three years of emotion," you find yourself experiencing "three months of aridity, thirty years of aridity," as Fr. Giussani said in a passage of *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly) Possible to Live This Way?]*, which has been of great comfort for me in certain moments of my life. "In those moments, the memory of the past, the memory of the history experienced, what happened to you, what you did because of what happened to you, the historical memory is what saves you. What saves you is the outcome of this historical memory, which is the companionship you are part of. You do not feel the emotion you once had for the content of a memory and the companionship you are part of, but they are there [...]. I assure you, after three years of emotion, three months of aridity, thirty years of aridity, three months of 'renewed emotion' or removal of the obstacle to feeling moved, at a certain point, whoosh, the wave spreads out in front of the immense hole of the sea and covers all of it,"²³ and you, too, return to seeing again.

Therefore, the encounter with Christ happens today through running up against the communion of people bound to Him; it starts from Him. Communion, the unity of the believers, the Church is His Body, the method God has chosen to remain present in history. If at times this seems far off and extraneous to us, without consequences in our life, it is because whether we knew it or not, we have previously reduced the meaning of communion itself. It is not recognized as the mystery of Christ, the fact of Christ present. Without theorizing it or maybe without even realizing it, we have kicked Christ out of history, yielding to some form of spiritualism or eschatologism, such that Christ is no longer a presence and has nothing to do with the here and now. So the relationship with Christ is understood as individualistic and the companionship is reduced to a sociological crutch, what the friends can give me when I am in need. Instead, for Giussani, the road of faith passes through a human encounter and immanence in the communion that is His body in history.

²⁰ "Evil and the love that saves," September 17, 2024, *clonline.org*.

²¹ Francis, *Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to Members of the International Theological Commission*, November 24, 2022.

²² L. Giussani, *Attraverso la compagnia dei credenti [Through the Companionship of the Believers]*, Bur, Milan 2021, p. 55.

²³ L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly) Possible to Live This Way?]*, Bur, Milan 2016, pp. 470-471.

Christ is not an abstract idea or an ideal as we imagine Him, but a presence who makes Himself visible and tangible in our unity, which we can follow and to which we can belong, which becomes the place of the criteria and the sensibility with which we judge everything. This is why we spoke about communal judgement.

What makes us mature in the faith is the experience of communion among us and in the Church. The current mentality, which is often our own, understands growth in terms of becoming more autonomous and independent, but for Christianity it is the opposite: the more we journey, the more we discover that all our substance lies our belonging to His presence, that the truth of ourselves, of our life, of our instant, is in the acknowledged and lived dependence on Christ, on the mystery of Christ, on the mystery of the communion that is His continuity in history. “So here is the *paradox*: freedom is dependence upon God”²⁴ says the line in *The Religious Sense* that we chose as the title for the summer vacations of our communities.

In this regard I would like to quote the Bible passage about Jacob wrestling with the angel. The story is well known, but I invite you to read it again. Jacob tricked his father Isaac into giving him primogeniture, and even though he knew the Lord always maintains His promise, in his heart he did not feel at peace and he went far away. After many years he decided to return to the land given to him, and on the way he had to cross the Iabbok River. Having brought across his wives, slaves, children and belongings, he himself went to cross, but he found a strange figure in front of him, who began to wrestle with him.

Here is the great question that I believe to be the dramatic point of the times in which we live: recognition of belonging to God, awareness of being “His.” Jacob wrestled with the angel and God told him: “You have won!” which seems paradoxical because to our eyes Jacob lost: the angel dislocated his hip and he would limp for the rest of his life. So in what way did he win? The reason becomes clear when Jacob, before letting him go, asked him to bless him, and the angel asked his name. In fact, Jacob told him his name and the angel gave him a new one: “You shall no longer be named Jacob, but Israel, because

you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed!” Israel means ‘He who has contended with God.’ The story continues, “Jacob then asked him, ‘Please tell me your name.’ He answered, ‘Why do you ask for my name?’ With that, he blessed him.”²⁵ In the Jewish tradition, giving your name to someone in some way means giving yourself to him, establishing an alliance, giving the other the right and power to call upon you for help. So revealing his name is like saying: “I am yours. From now on I belong to you. I am on your side.” And changing a person’s name, as God did with Jacob, is even more significant. If knowing your name means possessing you, then giving you a name is that “squared,” like saying “You belong to me.” So you begin to understand. God did not tell Jacob His name, but instead, He gave Jacob a new name, as if telling Him: “Yes, you have won, but your victory does not mean you ‘possess Me’. Instead, it means you become Mine; you become aware of belonging to Me, or better, in finally choosing to abandon yourself to Me, to depend totally on Me.” Jacob had been experiencing an interior drama because he had obtained God’s promise by trickery, but after a long struggle, he finally passed from autonomy to belonging, and was totally God’s. Thus he was marked, wounded in his pride and intelligence by the God who, precisely this way, definitively made him His.

I think of how often for us, a dramatic or painful fact that would make us say “Lord, why don’t you take this weight away from me?”, would be humanly incomprehensible in terms of a God who loves us, if it were not the mysterious way we can be led to a deeper and loving familiarity with Him, to feeling even more our need for Him. So like Jacob, you win if you allow yourself to be defeated by the great Presence who came to you, by the God made man. What do you win? You win His love. Or better, you win, you obtain that new and true freedom that consists in yielding to the freely given love of an Other, which is not a matter of what you do or know, but of the gratuitous love of an Other, gratuitous all the way to forgiveness. Christ loves you, certainly, but if you do not learn to abandon yourself to this love, to yield to this love, it is as if you cannot perceive it truly, recognize it and experience it.

²⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2023, p. 98.

²⁵ Gen 32:29-30.

The love of an Other frees us: it frees us from the pressure to be recognized by the world, because we are already recognized by the one love of life. This recognized and accepted love is what makes us protagonists in history, as happened for Bernadette (I hope many of you have read the *The Song of Bernadette* by Franz Werfel, proposed as the “book of the month” last April.) She has always fascinated me, and is an important saint for our times who has much to say to us, too. On February 11, 1858 (and parenthetically, February 11th was the date of the recognition of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation), when the Blessed Virgin appeared to her in a grotto in Lourdes, Bernadette was a fourteen-year-old girl with serious learning difficulties at school, such that she thought herself stupid. This was post-revolutionary France, a rationalistic climate in which religious “fables” were considered obsolete, yet in that cultural context, contrary to what would be expected, Our Lady chose as her “ambassador” a girl who was totally extraneous to that model of persuasive or dialectic capacity. And this unlettered girl turned France upside down.

From the moment the apparitions began, Bernadette began saying things greater than herself. Many did not believe them in the beginning but she continued saying them, and did so for a reason: for love, because she had encountered the great love of her life. When a person encounters the great love of her life she immediately becomes free: free from the judgements of others and herself, from the need to be recognized (a need that normally traps us), from the pressure to feel esteemed by others. When those who did not believe in the apparitions asked her to persuade them (for example, the novice mistress, who almost begged her: “You would free me from atrocious suffering if you could convince me”²⁶). Bernadette answered candidly: “I was not asked to make you believe it; I was asked to tell you about it!”²⁷

This applies to us today. A free judgment upon the world and reality can only come from the recognition that He who has loved me infinitely and whom

I love more than any other thing judges me with esteem as someone good and of value. This freedom is a form of the hundred-fold: “There is no one who has given up house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for My sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not receive a hundred times more now in this present age: houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and eternal life in the age to come.”²⁸ We do our gestures, set up cultural centers or build the Meeting of Rimini and many other works, out of recognition of this love for us. Otherwise, it would be an inhuman effort and sooner or later we will tire.

3. MISSION AS DIMENSION OF LIFE

What further step is needed? In the just published book, *Una rivoluzione di sé. La vita come comunione (1968-1970) [A Revolution of Self. Life as Communion]*, Giussani, said that the new step is gaining awareness that the Fact that has bowled into me and entered me is the deepest truth of myself. “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me,”²⁹ said Saint Paul. It is a change in the way you conceive of yourself, a new self-awareness. Giussani said “it means that the self-awareness I have involves with me Christ and all the people He has chosen, the mystery of the Church, this *real unity in history*.”³⁰

And in another text Fr. Giussani affirmed: “The power of subjects lies in the intensity of their self-awareness, that is, the perception they have of the value that defines their personality. Now, these values flow into the “I” from the lived story to which the “I” belongs. The radical genius of a subject lies in the power of awareness of belonging.”³¹

Those who live with this self-awareness tend to transform everything they do; they cannot help but change the way they live and the relationships they have. A little or a lot, but inevitably, they transform the actions they do and tend to create, even in an

²⁶ F. Werfel, *Il canto di Bernadette [The Song of Bernadette]*, Gallucci, Roma 2011, p. 640.

²⁷ This is a quote from Saint Bernadette, in François Trochu, *Bernadette Soubirous, Marietti 1820*, Genova-Milano 2013, p. 255; in the novel by Werfel is it reported differently partially: “But I never wanted you to believe me.” (F. Werfel, *Il canto di Bernadette [The Song of Bernadette]*, op. cit., p. 461). Our translation.

²⁸ Mk 10:29-30.

²⁹ Gal 2:20.

³⁰ L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Self]*, op. cit., p. 179.

³¹ L. Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l'uomo moderno [The Sense of God and Modern Man]*, Bur, Milano 2015, p. 132.

infinitesimal way, a millimeter at a time, something new in the world. The criteria of judgement and action change. In this regard, Cardinal Pizzaballa's words at the Meeting were beautiful. "Now I have to bring this experience of incarnation, of the humanity of Christ, of the encounter with Christ, within the reality I experience today [...]. For me personally, it means first of all continually asking myself what Jesus is telling me in this moment. It must become the key for reading the situations, the pain, division, weariness in every sense, ensuring that what I live passes through that experience that must continue to be foundational in my life. [...] Every evaluation, decision, choice, word to say, must be compatible with that experience, that relation, that friendship."³²

This diversity, this change, this transformation is what we call *mission*. Otherwise, what we do may start out from Christ, the encounter and our lived communion, but it will remain an affirmation of ourselves and our work, and in the end we will live exactly like everyone else, feeling justified and content because we engage in some extra religious discourse. Without this new self-awareness, our actions will not be mission, will not make present an Other, His continuity in history. And this Other, Christ, bound His continuity in history to His work in the world, to the Church, on that mysterious day, speaking with Simon Peter: "And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it."³³

So when we speak about mission, the problem is not to carry out this or that activity, as Fr. Giussani said in *Una rivoluzione di sé*, but it "is the missionary commitment of your life. It is the missionary engagement of yourself. It is *your life is mission*. [...] To the extent that you do not have this sense of mission, produced inevitably, this climate of the new self-awareness with your wife or children, to the extent that you do not have it with the friend or your group of friends or collaborators, you cannot have it for society or politics, culture or work. You cannot have it! Inversely, you can have it if it is present in the elementary relationships of your life, where it is the hardest to actuate, at least apparently."³⁴ Our

friend Sandrine who lives in Burundi, commenting on her experience, said: "Mission has become a normal part of my life, of my 'I.' I began living it in my home." How beautiful is this expression! The new person, the "new creature" coincides with its mission: the content of life is mission.

What does this "missionary self-awareness" mean? It means desiring to live like Christ—we started from here—, immersing yourself in Christ, living everything, wherever you are, with the "awareness of being there, *sent by the Father*. To do what?" Fr. Giussani responded: "to bring the fact of Christ and thus the fact of Christian communion."³⁵ Christ came to us, filled us, involved us so that our life would have this function, would be defined by this purpose, this task.

So if everything we are saying is true, we understand well that mission is not a duty, something added, but instead is the fruitfulness of a belonging that is expressed where we are, and is the fulfillment of our very selves: we are made for this.

However, your life as mission always needs a risk, an initiative. In order to jump in, it is not necessary to have a certain kind of temperament, to be vivacious and constantly in motion. The necessary condition is simply the memory or awareness that what you are, what generates you and makes you bold, even with all your limits, is this lived communion. It frees you from the weight of certain difficulties of ours or from being crushed by a mentality that wants to convince us at all costs that living for Christ is useless. Communion *is* liberation.

But pay attention here—this is very important. We must avoid the slippery slope of spiritualizing communion according to a gnostic outlook, a risk that is always possible for us. Communion is not an idea from which we draw inspiration. The relationship with Christ is the relationship with His presence, and being Christians means following this presence.

So the question is: who do you follow, whom do you answer to about what you live, with whom are you in dialogue? How does the life of communion enter concretely into what is most yours, your work, relationships, interests and not just in the gestures of the Movement in which you partici-

³² P. Pizzaballa, "Niente è più reale dell'incontro con Cristo [Nothing is More Real than the Encounter with Jesus]" August 27, 2024.

³³ Mt 16:18.

³⁴ L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Self]*, op. cit., pp. 184-185.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 186, 207.

pate? You either respond to a concrete you, a place, a living reality in which the You of Christ is made present, or, even with the best of intentions, you respond only to yourself. So even if you were living or working alone in a certain place, even if you were the only one there who lives the Christian experience as it has been communicated to you, you would search for a point of reference for yourself, even if it were a monthly phone call from the other side of the world (as some friends recounted at the International Assembly of Leaders)³⁶ that keeps you bound to this communion. There is no “*Christ without the Church*,”³⁷ without His body, His flesh, as Giussani said, denouncing the reductions of modern rationalism, which would take away Christ’s humanity, concreteness and factuality in history. It is a matter of living communion.

In order to better understand all this, I asked a dear friend, Hussam, who is with us on video call from Haifa, to tell us about his experience.

Read the text and watch the video

4. BUILDING THE CHURCH

There is one last point I would like to propose to you. For those like us who have been touched by the announcement of Christ, reached by His event, there is no other task beyond this: collaborating in building the Church. This is the one way we can make our life in the world useful and collaborate for the happiness of women and men, for justice in society. Otherwise what we do will be the *n*th lie added to all the others.

At the Assembly of leaders, when our Ukrainian friend and our Russian friend spoke one after the other, without it being planned, we touched a small, great sign that showed how the task of building the Church, embraced, can collaborate toward justice and peace in the world. It was an unforeseen fact that the Lord set before our eyes to give evidence

that He can do what we with our projects cannot even begin to imagine. It is proof that the angel’s words to that girl in Nazareth on the most extraordinary day in history, announced a promise that is true: it is true! “Nothing is impossible for God.”³⁸ In the simple and free heart, free of preconceptions, of that 15-year-old-girl named Maria, this affirmation that “Nothing is impossible for God” unleashed boundless trust, without calculation, that made her say: “*Fiat*,” “*Yes*.”

Building the Church, building the community or, to use another expression of Giussani’s, “‘making’ communion,”³⁹ is not a task alongside the others: it is *the* task realized in all our actions and relationships, the horizon within which everything we do acquires its authentic value. Fr. Giussani said that everything about us is summarized and exalted in this formula: building the Church, which corresponds to the other: life as mission. It is the same thing.

We know that bearing witness to Christ in the world evokes wonder, admiration and gratitude in many, but also opposition, even persecution in others, as happened for Jesus before us. “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will also keep yours,”⁴⁰ He said. The fact of Christ judges history and challenges the power of any of the powers that be, even the power in us, otherwise what reason would there be for persecution? In fact, this is the first power that Christ contests. We are called to bear witness to Christ in a world that raises up against Him.

We must be aware that there is something heroic in this testimony. In what sense? I would like to quote a striking passage in the new podcast of Fr. Giussani: “If I follow You, I must abandon me! If I must follow You, I must abandon my position. Therefore it demands that one follows to the point of [...] denying oneself. But the question is not complete with this; there is something more. It demands that one follows to the point of denying oneself *in front of everyone*, because a sentiment or decision is never truly accomplished if it is not ready to stand in front of everyone.”⁴¹

³⁶ Cf. “Chiamati, cioè mandati” [Called, That is, Sent], *Tracce*, n. 9/2024, pp. 40-44.

³⁷ L. Giussani, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2022, p. 62.

³⁸ Lk 1:37.

³⁹ L. Giussani, *Una rivoluzione di sé [A Revolution of Self]*, op. cit., p. 68.

⁴⁰ Jn 15:20.

⁴¹ *La dichiarazione esplicita [The explicit declaration]*, episode 5 of the podcast of Luigi Giussani “E voi chi dite che io sia”? [And who do you say that I am?] Choramedia, min. 14:45 ss., clonline.org.

Giussani clearly was not referring to a single gesture or word, but to the *sentiment of self* or the *personal decision* about what one acknowledges and affirms as true. We had a moving documentation of this in the Meeting exhibit dedicated to Franz and Franziska Jägerstätter (Franz e Franziska Jägerstätter *Non c'è amore più grande [No Greater Love]*). Franz was beatified in 2007. The exhibit used the film *A Hidden Life* by Terence Malick, which tells with cinematic genius the heart wrenching story of Franz and his wife.⁴² One of the things Malick emphasized most in Franz' story is the apparent uselessness of his martyrdom, which made his gesture more stupid than heroic in the eyes of most people. Franz refused to join Nazism and fight for Hitler in the name of his faith, which was one with his love for truth and justice (you cannot separate Christ from truth, goodness, and justice!), even knowing this would mean his death. At a certain point in the film there is an extraordinary conversation between Franz and an army official, who, unable to understand Franz' decision, asks him: "What is the purpose of such stubbornness? You can't think that your gesture will change the outcome of this war?"

Franz's answer is a clear, conscious and prophetic testimony of faith, but pay attention—it is not solitary. It is personal but not solitary. Franz is not alone, because he is supported by the trusting love of his wife Franziska. Here is communion! What does he testify to? To the certainty that the relationship with Christ is what fulfills his life and makes it truly useful, contributing to the work of God, who shapes history according to times and ways that are not ours. But this is also the meaning of our attempts, of all we do, that Christ emerge, be known, be made visible in the world as the meaning and hope of life.

Martyrdom, that is, testimony, does not only mean arriving at the point of shedding your blood, as was the case for Franz and many others. Martyrdom means affirming this You as the substance of yourself in everything you do. It is life as mission, wherever we are. How is this possible? Here we return to the point of departure, the root, which is communion, Christian life as communion. In fact, we can be seized with fear or shame, but, I repeat, we are not alone. Testimony is not muscular heroism. Testimony is the unleashing of the love for Christ,

without any calculation or claims, sustained by lived belonging in His Body.

I would like to conclude with Bishop Paolo Martirelli's beautiful expression, which Hussam quoted: "Being in mission means being sent by someone, to someone, with someone."

⁴² *A Hidden Life*, USA-Germany 2019, directed by T. Malick.

