

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

**MY HEART IS GLAD
BECAUSE YOU LIVE, OH CHRIST**



RIMINI 2017

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“On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation being held in Rimini, His Holiness Pope Francis, spiritually participating with you, sends his cordial and well-wishing thoughts. He wishes for the numerous participants and for those following by satellite link-up abundant fruit of interior rediscovery of the fecundity of the Christian faith in a world lacerated by the logic of profit that produces new poverty and generates the culture of waste, supported by the certainty of the presence of the Risen and Living Christ.

The Holy Father invokes the gifts of the divine Spirit so that the revolution of tenderness begun by Christ with His preferential love for little ones may be actuated, in the footsteps of the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani, who exhorted us to make poverty our love, and, as he asks you to persevere in prayer in support of his universal ministry, he invokes the celestial protection of the Virgin Mary and gladly imparts to you and all the participants the apostolic blessing you requested, willingly extending it to the entire Fraternity.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness,
April 28, 2017

Friday evening, April 28

During entrance and exit:

Franz Schubert, Symphony no. 8 in B minor, D 759 "Unfinished"

Carlos Kleiber --Wiener Philharmoniker

"Spirto Gentil" no. 2, Deutsche Grammophon

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

“Let not your prayer be a mechanical exercise,” Fr. Giussani told us. Therefore, “let us elevate our consciousness, let us reawaken our responsibility! [...] The whole world is as if under this leaden pall that is the forgetfulness of the reason you wake in the morning, take up things again, take up your life again. The impact that all things have on the human person is to say: ‘Wake up [...]’. [...] My God, *this* should be the redemption of every morning! But instead, an oppressive forgetfulness is what normally disqualifies our days from the beginning, even if they are then full of activity. [...] When we gather together, we do so to look again toward the light [...] [to shake off this forgetfulness, to] ensure that the person close to us does not cry, alone and without a horizon. [...] In this way, in this moment, our head can emerge from the normal fog that usually covers it: we re-gain awareness, resume our responsibility for ourselves and for things, for love of ourselves and for love of the sun, for love of ourselves and for love of people. [...] It is up to us to keep this companionship awake and existent in the world, this possibility of companionship that abolishes the isolation between me and you, between one person and another person, and enables things to be useful, enables time to be useful.”¹

Let us ask for this with all the awareness of which we are capable.

Come Holy Spirit

As we begin these days together, I’d like to read you the telegram the Holy Father sent us: “On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation being held in Rimini, His Holiness Pope Francis, spiritually participating with you, sends

¹ L. Giussani, *Un evento reale nella vita dell'uomo (1990-1991) [A Real Event in the Life of Man]*, Bur, Milan, 2013, pp. 219-220.

his cordial and well-wishing thoughts. He wishes for the numerous participants and for those following by satellite link-up abundant fruit of interior rediscovery of the fecundity of the Christian faith in a world lacerated by the logic of profit that produces new poverty and generates the culture of waste, supported by the certainty of the presence of the Risen and Living Christ. The Holy Father invokes the gifts of the divine Spirit so that the revolution of tenderness begun by Christ with His preferential love for little ones may be actuated, in the footsteps of the meritorious Monsignor Luigi Giussani, who exhorted us to make poverty our love, and, as he asks you to persevere in prayer in support of his universal ministry, he invokes the celestial protection of the Virgin Mary and gladly imparts to you and all the participants the apostolic blessing you requested, willingly extending it to the entire Fraternity. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

1. “What would salvation be if it were not free?”

The way we began this evening seems paradoxical. Fr. Giussani invited us to pray in such a way that our prayer is not mechanical, to elevate our consciousness, to reawaken our responsibility, that is, to wield our freedom, and yet, shortly before listening to his words, we sang about how we are incapable of living with truth and are contradictory in the use of freedom: “I’ve only learned to deceive myself [...]. / In my hands there is nothing left / but burned earth, names without a reason [...]. / *With my hands / I’ll never be able to bring about justice!*”²

Why is it so important to Fr. Giussani that we regain our awareness, that we elevate our consciousness, that we wield our freedom? Péguy reminds us of the reason. “But what would salvation be [God says] if it were not free? / How could it be described? / We want him to gain this salvation by himself. / By himself, by man. Procured by himself. / That it should come, in a sense, from himself. Such is the secret, / Such is the mystery of the liberty of man. / Such is the price we put on the liberty of man.”³

Who could imagine such a valorization of the human person and our freedom? God truly wants us to be the protagonists of our salvation. This is anything but an emptying of the value of time and history! Why?

² C. Chieffo, “La guerra” [War], *Canti [Songs]*, Società Cooperativa Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2014, p. 235.

³ C. Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, transl. Pansy Pakenham, Catholic Information Network, 2000, <http://www.cin.org/liter/holyinno1.html>, p. 23.

“Because I, myself, am free, God says, and because I have created man in my image and in my likeness. / Such is the mystery, such is the secret, such is the price / Of all liberty. / This liberty of the creature is the most beautiful reflection that exists in the world / Of the Liberty of the Creator. That is why we attach to it, / That we put on it a proper price.”⁴

But why is it so important to God to involve us in our salvation, knowing that we are wretches? What is the reason for His insistence on our collaboration?

“A salvation [continues Péguy] which was not free, [...] which did not come from a free man would mean nothing to us. [...] What interest could be found in such a salvation? / A beatitude of slaves, a salvation for slaves, a servile beatitude, how do you expect that to interest me? Does one love to be loved by slaves?”⁵

Well before our times, Péguy touched upon the most sensitive point of the present day: freedom. If these words were true in some past era of history, all the more so are they true in our times. In fact, ours is a moment in which no conventions hold any longer, in which no custom or usage can be sufficient to communicate Christianity and make it acceptable. Rather, everything seems to be against it. Christianity is no longer in vogue; it is no longer something that can be transmitted by habit or through social customs. For many people around us, faith is “old stuff,” to be discarded without even taking it into consideration. This can have the effect of making us downcast, or it can throw us into the adventure, exalting even more what has been true since the origins of Christianity: Christ proposes Himself to the freedom of the human person.

It is true, first of all, for us: nothing spares us from exercising our freedom. Nothing can take root in us unless it is embraced and earned in freedom. It is an urgent need that we are the first to sense, as one of you wrote me. “Dearest Julián, three days before the Spiritual Exercises, I felt the desire to communicate to you why I’ve decided once again to participate. It’s not enough for me to respond to an announcement with mechanical adherence. I need to rediscover the reasonableness that makes me be there with an open mind and heart. In a world that seems clearly so far from the gesture we are making, I nonetheless sense a good and a usefulness for me and the world. In each of our lives, we engage in this great relationship with the Infinite, who in a mysterious way touches the finite nature of our lives and calls them to Himself. Opening myself to this has changed the

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵ *Ivi.*

outlook with which I live. Just as for everyone else, life is not simple for me. I have discovered, battling, in the great grace of the road you call us to travel, that life is beautiful not because everything's going well or exactly as I imagined. Life is beautiful because every day there's an opportunity for a relationship with the Mystery, and everything can become a challenge to discover it and receive a "something more" for oneself. What frees me from anxiety and fear (the true diseases of our time, which people try to treat with drugs) is having experienced the fact that sudden, unexpected things enclose something that has been prepared for me, an opportunity to deepen this relationship with the Mystery. I need to hear again One who calls me by name, to know that what He has begun with me will never end. Therefore I am grateful to you, who are called to reawaken our gaze and our heart to the attraction of Jesus and to each of us, passionate about our own destiny."

After all, who would be interested in a salvation that was not free, a slavish state of bliss? What pleasure would God find in being loved by people who did so out of inertia or being forced? It would have cost God nothing to create other beings who fulfilled their task mechanically, like slaves, just as He could have created more stars that orbit mechanically. They, too, would have contributed to making His power shine forth, as Péguy said: "My power blazes forth clearly enough in the sands of the sea and in the stars of the sky. / It is not contested, it is known, it blazes forth clearly enough in the inanimate world. / It blazes forth clearly enough in the ordering, / Even in the occurrence of man."⁶

So then, what did God want? "But in my animate creation, God says, I have willed better, I have willed more. / Infinitely better. Infinitely more. For I have willed this liberty. / I have *created* this very liberty. [...] / Having once known what it is to be loved by free men, the prostrations of slaves no longer mean anything to you. / [...] Nothing can weigh as much, nothing can cost as much. It is certainly my greatest invention."⁷

God wanted something better. We know this as well. "Having once known what it is to be loved by free men, the prostrations of slaves no longer mean anything to you," "one no longer has any taste for subservience." God wanted something "Infinitely better. Infinitely more:" to be loved freely.

"Ask a father if his best moment / Is not when his sons begin to love him like men, / Him as a man, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / Ask a father whose

⁶ *Ivi.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

children are growing up. // Ask a father if there is not a chosen time above all / And if it is not precisely when submission ceases and when his sons become men / Love him (treat him) so to speak from knowledge, / As man to man, / Freely, / Gratuitously. / Esteem him thus. / Ask a father if he does not know that nothing is equal / To the glance of a man meeting the glance of a man. // Well, I am their father, God says, and I know man's condition. / It is I who made him. / I do not ask too much of them. / I only ask for their hearts. / When I have their hearts, I am satisfied. I am not hard to please. / All the slavish submissions in the world are not worth one frank look from a free man. / Or rather all the slavish submissions in the world repel me and I would give anything / For one frank look from a free man.⁸

One frank look, not perfection, but the frank look of a free man. Péguy concludes: "To that liberty, to that gratuitousness I have sacrificed everything, God says, / To that taste I have for being loved by free men, / Freely, / Gratuitously, / By real men, virile, adult, firm. / Noble, tender but with a firm tenderness. / To obtain that liberty, that gratuitousness, I have sacrificed everything, / To create that liberty, that gratuitousness, / To set going that liberty, that gratuitousness. // To teach him liberty."⁹

Saint Gregory of Nyssa reminds us of this with other words: "For He who made man for the participation of His own peculiar good, [...] would never have deprived him of that most excellent and precious of all goods; I mean the gift implied in being his own master, and having a free will."¹⁰ What interest is there in a salvation that is not free? For us, none, but none for God, either. Salvation becomes interesting for the human person and for God only if it is free. For God, because He wants to be loved by free people and not by slaves, and for us, because otherwise it would not be a salvation that is mine, or yours. Freedom is crucial in order not to understand salvation as something to do with slaves, something forced from which we ultimately defend ourselves, but instead, as pertinent to our needs as human beings. Throughout history we have seen where salvation that is not free leads, salvation imposed by force, habit, or fear. Being forced has inured many against this kind of salvation, and habit has caused interest in it to be lost over time.

So then, the big question that each of us must ask ourselves at the beginning of our gesture together is simple: is salvation still interesting for me? Not habit, not the mechanical repetition of certain gestures, but salvation! Does

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, chapter 5, <http://www.studylight.org/history/early-church-fathers/view.cgi?pn=2&sid =pos&aid=05-01%20,%2005-02&file=npnf2-05-39>.

it still interest me as it did in the beginning, with the same aching yearning as at the beginning? As we know, this cannot be taken for granted. Time and the vicissitudes of living do not give discounts to anyone. For this reason, each of us must look at our own existence and answer in the first person.

2. “Christ remains isolated from the heart”

As I prepared the preface for the new book that collects the Spiritual Exercises preached by Fr. Giussani, I came across a concern that loomed over him during the first Exercises, in 1982, the year of pontifical recognition of the Fraternity. On that occasion, he set before everyone’s eyes the fact that simply remaining passively in the Movement was not enough to maintain the freshness of the beginning, to keep interest in the encounter experienced. And habit could not suffice to preserve that beginning even for us, who were chosen, graced by the overwhelming gift of the encounter with Christ through Fr. Giussani. In fact, he said, “[y]ou have grown up, and while you have secured a human ability in your professions, there is the possibility of drifting away from Christ (in contrast with the emotion of all those years ago [not the coherence, but the emotions of many years ago] and, above all, certain circumstances of all those years ago). There is a kind of drifting away from Christ, except in particular moments [except on certain occasions]. [...] Except when, for example, you do something in His name, or in the name of the Church, or in the name of the Movement.” As we see, Fr. Giussani did not let himself be confused by any possible euphoria about the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity. Even though we could be engaged in many things, “it is as if Christ were far from our heart [...] or, rather, Christ remains isolated from the heart.”¹¹ Simply remaining was not enough to continue to experience the “emotion of all those years ago,” of the beginning.

The key point of Fr. Giussani’s judgement was his perception that, in becoming adults, we were living life with all its commitments, as right as they may have been, in a way in which “Christ remains isolated from the heart.” If Christ is isolated from the heart, sooner or later He ceases to be interesting. In fact, Christ is interesting precisely because of the way He causes our heart to vibrate, to correspond to it totally and to enable us to perceive this correspondence.

¹¹ L. Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ, Notes from a lesson by Fr. Luigi Giussani during the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, May 8, 1982,” in *Traces*, n. 2, February 2007, <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/2007E/02/familiarity.html>.

But this isolation of Christ from the heart concerns not only our relationship with Him, but also our relationship with everyone. Christ's remoteness from the heart, Fr. Giussani continues, generates another remoteness, one manifested in "an ultimate embarrassment amongst us—I am speaking of husbands and wives, too—[...] the distancing of Christ from the heart distances the ultimate aspect of my heart from the ultimate aspect of your heart, except in everyday actions (keeping house, looking after the children, etc.)."¹²

If the isolation of Christ from the heart concerns the relationship with everything, it is "because the heart," he says soon after, "is how you look at your children, how you look at your wife or your husband, how you look at someone passing you on the street, how you look at the people in the community or your colleagues at work, and, above all, how you get up in the morning."¹³ Now, if Christ has nothing to do with the way we look at our wife, husband, a person passing by, colleagues, etc., then He has nothing to do with life, with ninety-nine percent of life. Consequently, over time He becomes useless and we lose interest in Him.

We know well, by experience, that Christ became for us an interesting presence because He made our heart vibrate, made our "I" vibrate in a different way in front of everything ("Reality makes itself evident in experience,"¹⁴ Fr. Giussani told us). In the same way, we discovered that he or she was the person with whom we wanted to share our life because that person made the depths of our "I" vibrate. Was that vibration only sentimentalism or was it, rather, the opportunity to discover the importance of that presence for us? The same holds for the encounter with Christ, for the impact with His presence, in the experience at the beginning.

To understand how things are for us, just ask yourself: what prevails now as the sentiment of living? What do I discover as my ultimate foundation? What is the dominant thought? What is the background music that predominates? The human person is one, and in the end, there is one thought—whatever it may be—that dominates, one ultimate sentiment of living that predominates. All the analyses are useless, because each of us finds him- or herself in the open in front of the great question: has Christ remained as interesting as He was the first time?

Just look at the aching yearning that the beginning provoked in us to see whether Christ remains more glued to our heart now than He was then,

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo [From Temperament a Method]*, Bur, Milan, 2002, p. 143.

or whether today He is more detached, more isolated from the heart compared to the initial leap of the heart that made us “seized” people. Here is the alternative: seized or isolated. Ever more seized or ever more isolated. I do not say this so that we can measure ourselves moralistically—let’s not waste time on that!—but so that we realize whether He has remained as interesting as He was in the beginning, so that we become conscious of how enthusiastic we are now compared to then.

3. A journey to make

Christ’s distance from or closeness to the heart involves our freedom. This same freedom is at stake in the relationship with the one who made Christ so close to us, Fr. Giussani, his charism, and the inheritance we have received.

During the March 7, 2015 audience, the Pope reminded us, “Faithfulness to the charism does not mean ‘to petrify it’—the devil is the one who ‘petrifies,’ do not forget! Faithfulness to the charism does not mean to write it on a parchment and frame it. The reference to the legacy that Don Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of records, of decisions taken, of the rules of conduct. It certainly entails faithfulness to tradition, but faithfulness to tradition, Mahler said, ‘is not to worship the ashes but to pass on the flame.’ Don Giussani would never forgive you if you lost the liberty and transformed yourselves into museum guides or worshippers of ashes. Pass on the flame of the memory of that first encounter and be free!”¹⁵

Without freedom, the life of each of us could become a museum of memories of old times. If there is not something that predominates in the present as more interesting than all the memories, life is blocked, because all the memories, no matter how beautiful they may be, the decisions made, the codes of conduct are not enough to keep the flame alive now. It is a journey that can never be suspended: you cannot live off the past. Von Balthasar wrote this in the early 1950’s: “A truth that continues only to be transmitted, without being thought through deep down, has lost its vital force.”¹⁶ And in the same years, Guardini said, “In the monotony of pure carrying on, we will suffocate.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

¹⁶ H.U. von Balthasar, *La percezione dell’amore. Abattere i bastioni e Solo l’amore è credibile [The Perception of Love. Break Down the Bastions and Only Love Is Credible]*, Jaca Book, Milan, 2010, p. 13.

¹⁷ R. Guardini, *Natale e capodanno. Pensieri per far chiarezza [Christmas and New Year. Thoughts to Bring Clarity]*, Morcelliana, Brescia, 1993, p. 38.

In that moment, in 1982, while everyone was happy to be in Rimini to celebrate the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity that had just happened, Fr. Giussani did not release his hold, did not break his grip on a passion for the life of each of us. He was concerned that that moment, marked by the Holy See's act of recognition, should be the opportunity to become aware that as we were becoming adults, our life was drifting away from Christ. What was Fr. Giussani worried about? The maturity of the experience of the people of the Fraternity—above all after the recognition—a maturity that today, as well, depends exclusively on the journey that each of us must make.

He was well aware that there are no formulas or user's manuals that can substitute the movement of freedom: it is indispensable for the fulfillment of the journey toward maturity, toward the truth of ourselves. He said, "How striking it is to think that life, time, is change. Why does a mother give the world a little child and that fellow lives forty, fifty, sixty, eighty, ninety years? So that he may change! So that he may transform! What does it mean to transform? To become ever more true, that is, ever more yourself."¹⁸ As Kierkegaard observed, "I do not in truth know [...] the truth, except when it becomes life in me,"¹⁹ and this is the sense of the change, of the transformation. This is the ultimate reason for Fr. Giussani's call: that we become ever more true, ever more ourselves. This is anything but moralism! But it is a change that cannot happen without us, without our freedom, without the constant involvement of each of us.

Why did Fr. Giussani insist so much on the need for a journey of maturation? Because the possibility of the fullness of our life, of our becoming ourselves, depends on the maturation of our familiarity with Christ. Otherwise, alienation dominates. But this maturation is not at all to be taken for granted and does not happen automatically, simply with the passage of time or with becoming older, nor can it be taken for granted for those who grew up in the experience of the Movement. This is why, in 1982, Fr. Giussani said there is an "ambiguity of 'growing up' [...] I don't believe that it is a [...] statistically normal characteristic that growing up has made us more familiar with Christ [...] has given the answer to the question with which we heard the proposal 25 years ago. I don't think so."²⁰

It is not statistically normal that becoming older makes us more familiar with Christ! We can perceive these words as a rebuke that annoys us, or

¹⁸ Giussani, *Una strana compagnia*, op. cit., p. 125.

¹⁹ S. Kierkegaard, *Esercizio del cristianesimo [Practice in Christianity]*, in Id., *Le grandi opere filosofiche e teologiche [The Great Philosophical and Theological Works]*, Bompiani, Milan, 2013, pp. 2109, 2111.

²⁰ Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*, op. cit.

we can embrace them with boundless gratitude, as the gesture of one who cares so much for our life, our journey, that he uses every opportunity to call us to the truth of ourselves, so that we will not end up in nothingness.

So the question arises: why does interest lessen to the point that we feel that Christ is far from our heart? Why has growing older not increased our familiarity with Him? Because, as Fr. Giussani always told us, spontaneity is not enough, because becoming adults is not a spontaneous process: it requires a commitment of freedom, a journey, as it was for the apostles, “the itinerary of conviction.”²¹

Let us allow ourselves to be guided by Fr. Giussani in this renewed realization of the journey ahead of us for the maturation of our faith. A commitment of freedom, first of all, is needed to keep open our humanity: “the ultimate openness of the spirit [...] is something demanding a continual commitment from us, even if it takes its cue from each person’s natural gifts. What a great responsibility education has: that capacity to understand, even if it does respond to our nature, is not spontaneous. On the contrary, the original gift of sensibility in us would be suffocated if it were treated as pure spontaneity; to reduce religiosity to this pure spontaneity is the most definitive and subtle way of persecuting it, of exalting the fluctuating, provisional aspects bound to circumstantial sentimentality. If this gift of sensibility for our humanity is not constantly solicited and given order, no fact, not even the most startling, will find correspondence within us. Sooner or later, we all experience that feeling of obtuse alienation from reality. This happens on one of those days when we let ourselves be led adrift by circumstances, when we have remained uncommitted to making an effort of any kind. On such a day, suddenly, things, words, and deeds, once such clear motivations, cease to be so, and, abruptly, we no longer understand them.”²²

What finds the correspondence? Our heart, our humanity. If our heart is not awake, no fact, not even that of Christ, will be able to show and realize its correspondence to it. And without correspondence, the only thing that prevails is alienation. “How alone I am here! Great God, how alone I am here, and how foreign I feel! Everything around me is hostile to me, and there’s no place for me. Even the things around me would say they do not see me and that I do not exist. [...] Reality is absent. True life is absent.”²³ It is not enough that Christ continue to happen, if I lack that openness

²¹ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 49.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

²³ P. Claudel, *Il pane duro [The Hard Bread]*, in Id., *Il pane duro – Destino a mezzogiorno [The Hard Bread—Destiny at Noon]*, Massimo, Milan, 1971, p. 102.

that enables me to realize it, to not feel alienated from Him, if I am obtuse to His being present. Therefore, without freedom it is not possible for salvation to remain interesting. Emphasizing freedom is essential; it is not something added on, even if this does not at all mean that in life we can manage on our own. No! It means that without engaging all our humanity freely, Christ remains isolated, far from us.

4. “Our first danger is formalism”

What is the consequence of this isolation of the heart from Christ, of this obtuse alienation that we feel at times, even after such a long time? Formalism. “Therefore, our first danger is formalism, repeating words or repeating gestures, but the words or gestures do not shake you or make you think twice, that is, move something in you, illuminate your gaze upon yourself a bit more, nourish a conviction about a value (for example, that you should throw yourself into working for the elections because it is a need for your humanity, otherwise a measure for your humanity is lacking).”²⁴ Giussani said these things at the beginning of the 1980’s, speaking to leaders of university students in CL. But how current they are, how true they hold for us, too!

Formalism is a faith that runs parallel to life, that is satisfied with the repetition of words and gestures; it is an adherence that identifies with participation in certain moments or with the carrying out of certain activities. However, to the extent that does not move something in me, outside of those moments and after those activities, we find ourselves in front of life like everyone else, we, too, gripped in the alternative between “desperate presumption and darkest despair.”²⁵

Fr. Giussani also spoke about “a formalism in adhering to the community,” which he described in this way: “You are not all set because you do School of Community. You are not all set because you participate in Holy Mass with your priest. You are not all set because you hand out flyers or hang up posters. This can be the formality with which you pay your dues for belonging to this social reality. But when does all this become experience? When it says something to you and moves something in you (‘movement’).”²⁶

²⁴ L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983) [People Without a Homeland]*, Bur, Milan, 2008, pp. 194-195.

²⁵ L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 123.

²⁶ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria*, op. cit., p. 194, quoted in *A Presence within the Gaze*, 2015 Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, p. 39.

Again, speaking to university students in 1977, he said: “The true problem is formalism of faith. We are in an era in which faith is totally reduced to formalism. [...] You do not start from the awareness of Christ as your life and, therefore, as the life of the world, and therefore, of the world as your life.”²⁷

The great Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément was also aware of this: “The practice of the Church changes without one’s noticing it, not due to a conscious creation, but due to yieldings, scleroses, deviations, *a posteriori* reinterpretations, and veneration of habits that are, in and of themselves, contingent.”²⁸

This is a point Fr. Giussani never let us forget. In a 1984 text, he stated: “No expression of a movement like ours is of worth if it does not invoke the memory of the presence of Christ in the heart of the concrete vicissitudes we live. Rather, it worsens the situation of the human, because it promotes formalism and moralism. It would make the event among us—the event that we should keep with trembling in our eyes and hearts as the criterion for our behavior with each other—deteriorate into a sociological refuge, a social position.”²⁹

And in the new book of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, he added, “So then, there is this phenomenon by which, [...] in certain moments our soul grows and rises, [...] is ‘reawakened,’ and moves, but then the gaze of everyday life returns to being all glabrous, all homogeneous, all bounded, all suffocated. It is as if we never join these two moments of thought and of gaze upon ourselves, except from the outside, moralistically, in the sense that, since we have faith, certain things cannot be done, and certain other things must be done. And this is from the outside, not from within: what you do or do not do is not the expression of a new consciousness (conversion), of a truth of yourself, but is like a toll paid, rendered to something external, even if devotedly and profoundly acknowledged and esteemed. Instead, no: either God is life, or it is as if He is outside our door.”³⁰ This alternative is at stake in every moment, in every circumstance, at the beginning of every action, when we begin to work or when we establish a relationship: either God is life or He is relegated to outside the door.

²⁷ L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza (1975-1978) [From Utopia to Presence]*, Bur, Milan, 2006, pp. 109-110.

²⁸ O. Clément, *La rivolta dello spirito [The Revolt of the Spirit]*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1980, p. 82.

²⁹ L. Giussani, “Appendice [Appendix],” in Id., *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1984, p. 90.

³⁰ Giussani, *Una strana compagnia*, op. cit., pp. 194-195.

When we succumb to this separation (between God and life, between the presence of Christ and life, between faith and life), our tasks become a mere appendage to our existence, something extraneous to our heart. As the Pope wrote in *Evangelii gaudium*: “Today we are seeing in many [...] an inordinate concern for their personal freedom and relaxation, which leads them to see their work as a mere appendage to their life, as if it were not part of their very identity. At the same time, the spiritual life comes to be identified with a few religious exercises which can offer a certain comfort but which do not encourage encounter with others, engagement with the world or a passion for evangelization. As a result, one can observe in many agents of evangelization, even though they pray, a heightened individualism, a *crisis of identity* and a *cooling of fervour*.”³¹

Carrying out many activities without spirit is not desirable; everything gets worn down. Again, Pope Francis describes the result of the separation between faith and action: a tiring activism. “The problem is not always an excess of activity, but rather activity undertaken badly, without adequate motivation, without a spirituality which would permeate it and make it pleasurable. As a result, work becomes more tiring than necessary, even leading at times to illness. Far from a content and happy tiredness, this is a tense, burdensome, dissatisfying and, in the end, unbearable fatigue.”³²

What is the consequence of all this? “And so the biggest threat of all gradually takes shape: ‘the gray pragmatism of the daily life of the Church, in which all appears to proceed normally, while in reality faith is wearing down and degenerating into small-mindedness.’ A tomb psychology thus develops and slowly transforms Christians into mummies in a museum. Disillusioned with reality, with the Church and with themselves, they experience a constant temptation to cling to a faint melancholy, lacking in hope, which seizes the heart like ‘the most precious of the devil’s potions.’ Called to radiate light and communicate life, in the end they are caught up in things that generate only darkness and inner weariness, and slowly consume all zeal for the apostolate. For all this, I repeat: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of the joy of evangelization!”³³

5. The basis of the problem: “We have been detached from the human foundation”

When Christ is isolated from the heart and does not appear interesting for our life, Christianity crystallizes into doctrine. If I do not recognize Christ

³¹ Francis, *Apostolic exhortation Evangelii gaudium*, ¶ 78.

³² *Ibid.*, ¶ 82.

³³ *Ibid.*, ¶ 83.

as a need of mine, if I do not discover Him as essential for the fullness of my days, as the Presence I cannot live without—because I have a need that nothing else can satisfy—Christianity remains at best a noble pretext for my social or religious engagement, from which I expect fulfillment—or satisfaction—which, however, will never come. For this reason, it is necessary not to misunderstand the nature of the heart, the importance of our desire, of our need, and not to fool ourselves into thinking we can satisfy it with something other than His presence. In fact, Christ becomes isolated when our heart becomes isolated from our self.

Fr. Giussani clearly identified the heart of the question that the Pope described so well, which leads us to isolation from Christ and from ourselves. Speaking in Chieti in 1985 he said: “We Christians in the modern climate have not been detached directly from the Christian formulas [we may know them by heart], from the Christian rites [we may continue to repeat them], from the laws of the Christian Decalogue [we may continue to be faithful to them]. We have been detached from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity [...], that no longer responds as it should to the religious sentiment.” Therefore, we have a faith that is “unaware, a faith that no longer has intelligence of itself. An author I have loved reading for years, Reinhold Niebuhr, said, ‘[n]othing is as unbelievable as the answer to a question which has not been asked.’ Christ is the answer to the question, to the hunger and thirst of the human person for truth, happiness, beauty and love, justice, and ultimate meaning.”³⁴

Faith loses our interest, is emptied, in proportion to how much we separate or let ourselves be separated from the human foundation. This is why Christ begins to become distant, and along with Him other people and all of reality, and the things we do begin to become a toll to pay. As Tolstoy said, “I felt that what was indispensable for living eluded me.”³⁵

The obliteration of Christ today—in our Western society—does not pass primarily through the explicit and frontal contestation of Christ, but through the reduction of the human, of the desires and needs of the human person, through censorship of our thirst, that is, of our original poverty. In this way, Christ becomes a pure name (and we have repeated it many times), and Christianity is transformed into a cultural matrix and into the point of departure for an ethical stance.

³⁴ L. Giussani, *La coscienza religiosa nell'uomo moderno [Religious Awareness in Modern Man]*, November 21, 1985, in Quaderni del Centro Culturale “Jacques Maritain” [Notebooks of the “Jacques Maritain Cultural Center”], Chieti, January 1986, p. 15.

³⁵ L. Tolstoy, *La confessione [Confession]*, SE, Milan, 2000, p. 81.

We can trace in this the Enlightenment's influence on us. "Contingent truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason,"³⁶ said Lessing. And Kant added: "A historical faith, based merely on facts, can extend its influence no further than the tidings relevant to a judgment on its credibility can reach."³⁷ We also thought we could know, could change, and could develop an efficient concept and practice without the reality of Christ. That is, we believed we could do without the Fact, the historic and carnal presence of Christ, who in the Church makes it possible for us to experience Him.

But, as Fr. Giussani said—and we repeated at the Spiritual Exercises last year—a "particular story [is] the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality, in his relationship with God, with life, and with the world."³⁸ In other words, only within the particular history generated by Christ, only through the experience of Christ in the heart of each of us, can a true conception of the human person, the opportunity for morality, emerge and thrive in time. It is the event of Christ, the historical encounter with His presence, now as then, that makes possible the opening to the full truth about the human person and the journey toward it.

Let's listen to how Fr. Giussani describes the detailed, precise happening of this particular story in his life: "If I had never encountered Msgr. Gaetano Corti in high school, if I had never heard the few Italian lessons of Msgr. Giovanni Colombo, who later became Cardinal of Milan, if I had never met those kids who, in front of what I said, opened their eyes wide as if surprised by something as inconceivable as it was welcome, if I had never begun getting together with them, if I had never found more and more people who got involved with me, if I had not had this companionship, if you had not had this companionship, Christ, for me and for you, would have been a word that is the object of theological expressions, or, in the best case, a call to a 'pious' affectivity, generic and confused, that only became precise in the fear of sins, or, in other words, in moralism."³⁹

But—returning to the theme I left open—to escape from the crystallization of Christianity into doctrine (theological expressions) or its reduc-

³⁶ G.E. Lessing, *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Philosophical and Theological Writings*, transl. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 85.

³⁷ I. Kant, "Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason," in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings*, transl. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, p. 113.

³⁸ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 134-135.

³⁹ L. Giussani, *Qui e ora. 1984-1985 [Here and Now]*, Bur, Milan, 2009, pp. 209-210.

tion into ethics (moralism), a childbirth, a travail is needed. It is necessary that Christ not be added to our existence from the outside, but be at the root of our consciousness and our action, such that the evidence of His presence flows from within life faced in relationship with Him, in the light of the bond with His presence, as Mounier said in this passage read and commented upon by Fr. Giussani at the 1989 Spiritual Exercises: “It is from the earth, from the solidity [the earth or the solidity is the set of conditions in which life is incarnated: your clothes, the voice I have, the eyes that serve me to a certain point] that a childbirth full of joy necessarily derives [or full of cries, but cries of gladness for what is being born], the patient sentiment of the work that is growing [what is born becomes big, organizes itself, becomes a body, a journey, a story full of patience], of the steps that follow one after the other [the steps of history], you wait calmly, with certainty [certainty because He is here]. It is necessary to suffer so that truth does not crystallize into doctrine.” Everything is suffering: travail and birth, patience, one step after another that does not come right away, the supreme sacrifice of certainty, that is, of the certainty in an Other. It is suffering because the fact that Christ is among us does not remain an example or a set of moral values, but is born from the flesh. It is necessary to suffer: to adhere to the way in which this presence is among us. Christ rose, but He passed through death. In the prayer of the Angelus we ask God that we, who have known the incarnation of His Son Jesus Christ, through His death and resurrection, may be brought to the experience of His glory, to the change of life and the world. Adhering to Christ, letting Him penetrate into our flesh means looking, conceiving, feeling, judging, evaluating, trying to treat ourselves and things with the memory of His presence, with the eyes of His presence. [...] From this memory all morality is derived. Not one iota of the law is abolished, but His presence provides its foundation.”⁴⁰

As the Pope said on Holy Thursday, “the truth of the *good news* can never be merely abstract, incapable of taking concrete shape in people’s lives.”⁴¹

A teacher wrote me: “While participating in a GS gesture, I was having lunch with some young people. I asked the young man in front of me his name and age, and what school he attended. ‘Sixteen, third year of college prep high school.’ Then I asked him other questions, and he answered in a

⁴⁰ L. Giussani, *Occorre soffrire perché la verità non si cristallizzi in dottrina ma nasca dalla carne* [It is necessary to suffer so that the truth does not crystallize into doctrine but is born from the flesh], *Esercizi Spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione* [Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation], Rimini, 1989, p. 24.

⁴¹ Francis, *Homily for the Holy Chrism Mass*, April 13, 2017.

tone devoid of any vibration: ‘Yes, I’m happy. I agree with everything I’ve heard, but these things aren’t new. I already know them. I heard them from the priest of the community I’ve been meeting with for three years now. For me it was a deeper look at these things.’ It was boldfaced taking for granted, in the flesh, right there in front of my eyes! I felt trapped in that dialogue. I had a terrible desire to withdraw from it. And yet, deep down, truly deep down, was an impossible thought: I was grateful because it made me aware of myself, of my desire. This wound knocked me to my knees: without You, without You Christ here, now, present, I am nothing. I lose my humanity, my ‘I.’ In the humdrum exchange of a ‘dull’ lunch I was able to discover the fundamental need, the essential need of my existence: to realize that You exist. Up to a short time before, a fact of the kind would not even have registered or would have only provoked a brief impatience, almost annoyance. What immense gratitude I feel to Fr. Giussani, who introduced me to a journey in which nothing, truly nothing, can be forgotten or excluded!”

These lines document how much we need the poverty—so much so as to kneel and pray for it—to which the Pope called us in the letter he sent us (to thank us for the offering we gave after the Jubilee pilgrimages), and which I will talk about tomorrow. Everything becomes flat, taken for granted, without the awareness of our poverty, our need, without the engagement of our freedom. How right was Péguy! If we do not become the protagonists of it, as he said, salvation will not interest us.

6. “One can stand on the side of the sepulcher or on the side of Jesus”

In his Easter homily, the Pope said: “Let us think for a while, each of us, think about the daily problems, the illnesses we have been through or of one that a relative has; let us think about wars, human tragedies and with simplicity, with a humble voice, without flowers, alone, before God, before us, let us say, ‘I do not know how this is, but I am certain that Christ is Risen and I have put a wager on it.’ Brothers and sisters, this is what I wanted to say to you. Go home today repeating in your hearts: ‘Christ is Risen.’”⁴²

With Christ we can face any situation in which we find ourselves. Herein lies our verification. We are not condemned to crystallization and aridity. However, once again, in order to carry out this verification, our freedom is needed. We have to decide where we stand.

The Pope said this so clearly and movingly in Carpi on April 2. He was speaking about the earthquake victims of Emilia, but his appeal holds true

⁴² Francis, *Homily of the Holy Mass of the Sunday of Easter*, April 16, 2017.

for us today. “Let us pause [...] on the last of the miraculous signs which Jesus performs before his Easter, at the sepulcher of his friend, Lazarus. [...] A great ‘*encounter-clash*’ thus occurred at that sepulcher. *On the one hand, there is the great disappointment*, the precariousness of our mortal life which, pierced by anguish over death, often experiences defeat, an interior darkness which seems insurmountable. Our soul, created for life, suffers upon hearing that its thirst for eternal good is oppressed by an ancient and dark evil. On the one hand, there is this defeat of the sepulcher. *But on the other, there is the hope* that conquers death and evil, and which has a name: the name of hope is Jesus. [...] Dear brothers and sisters, we too are called to decide on which side to stand. One can stand *on the side of the sepulcher* or *on the side of Jesus*. There are those who allow themselves to be closed within their pain and those who open up to hope. There are those who remain trapped among the ruins of life, and those who, like you, with God’s help, pick up the ruins of life and rebuild with patient hope. In facing life’s great ‘whys?’, we have two paths: either stay and wistfully contemplate past and present sepulchers, or allow Jesus to approach our sepulchers. Yes, because each one of us already has a small sepulcher, some area that has somewhat died within our hearts; a wound, a wrongdoing endured or inflicted, an unrelenting resentment, a regret that keeps coming back, a sin we cannot overcome. [...] Thus, we hear directed to each one of us Jesus’ words to Lazarus: “Come out!”. Come out from the gridlock of hopeless sadness; unwrap the bandages of fear that impede the journey, the laces of the weaknesses and anxieties that constrain you [...]. By following Jesus, we learn not to knot our lives around problems which become tangled. There will always be problems, always, and when we solve one, another one duly arrives. We can however, find *a new stability*, and this stability is Jesus himself. This stability is called Jesus [...]. And even though burdens will not disappear, there will always be his uplifting hand, his encouraging Word saying to all of us, to each of us: ‘Come out! Come to me!’ He tells all of us: ‘Do not be afraid.’”⁴³

And on the vigil of Easter, the Pope said: “In the resurrection, Christ rolled back the stone of the tomb, but He wants also to break down all the walls that keep us locked in our sterile pessimism, in our carefully constructed ivory towers that isolate us from life, in our compulsive need for security and in boundless ambition that can make us compromise the dignity of others. [...] God suddenly breaks in, upsets all the rules and offers new possibilities. [...] Rejoice! Hidden within your life is a seed of resurrec-

⁴³ Francis, *Homily at Carpi, Carpi*, April 2, 2017.

tion, an offer of life ready to be awakened. That is what this night calls us to proclaim: the heartbeat of the Risen Lord. Christ is alive! [...] Let us go, then. Let us allow ourselves to be surprised by this new dawn and by the newness that Christ alone can give. May we allow his tenderness and his love to guide our steps. May we allow the beating of his heart to quicken our faintness of heart.”⁴⁴

This is why we are together in these days: to support each other, to call each other, with our testimony, by wielding our freedom, to allow ourselves to be surprised and embraced by His presence, so that we will not give up in our sepulcher, as the Pope said. “We are called to decide on which side to stand. One can stand *on the side of the sepulcher* or *on the side of Jesus*.”

I encourage everyone to adhere to silence, precisely in order to help each other to stand on the side of Jesus. Let’s not take it for granted. If we do not help each other so that the silence is full and not something mechanical, full of striving to recognize His presence, if we do not exert ourselves to observe silence, these will not be spiritual “*exercises*” for us. Silence, too, must be born of the flesh for it to become mine.

This year we are dedicating part of the silence that we request during the entrance into the halls to singing some of the songs from our history. The proposal is born of the desire to not take for granted the gift of singing together. We want each of us—and hence our community—to rediscover the gusto, beauty, and educative power of singing together.

⁴⁴ Francis, *Homily for the Easter Vigil in the Holy Night*, April 15, 2017.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: Acts 5:34-42; Psalm 26; Jn. 6:1-15

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

“He withdrew again to the mountain alone” (Jn. 6:15). What is this withdrawal? An escape from reality? Hiding in humility? Jesus had just performed the most spectacular of His miracles, feeding thousands of people. Only the resurrection of Lazarus will exceed this sign in its awesomeness, as unequivocal evidence of the divine power in that Man. But in this hour, alone on the mountain, Christ primarily has at heart His apostles, already put to the test that day in front of that immense crowd. He knows that the next day there will be an even greater test, when in the synagogue He will say, “Not bread that perishes will I give you, but My body, My blood” (Cf. Jn. 6:51 ff). And all those who are now seeking Him enthusiastically to make Him king, to acclaim Him with social, even political, consensus, will leave, scandalized. “Do you want to go as well?” He will ask His apostles. Peter will respond, “No. Where will we go? You alone have the words that give meaning to life.” Jesus will say, “Your humanity did not reveal this to you, Peter, but the Father.”

So here we begin to see the profound meaning of “He withdrew again to the mountain alone.” At the Last Supper, in His last discourse to His disciples, He will say, “I am not alone” (Jn. 16:32). “Alone” for Him always means being with the Father; it means recognizing that the root and substance of His humanity is the continual relationship with the Father. This is how the freedom of Christ, the obedience of the man Jesus to the Father, gives root to the freedom of His apostles, the freedom of Peter who will sincerely tell Him, “You alone are the fulfilled meaning of my life” (Cf. Jn. 6:68). The freedom of Christ, His aching yearning for each of us, which Carrón told us about this evening in the introduction with a question: what is the dominant sentiment now in my life? What is the dearest love now, in this moment? The apostles let themselves be won over, seized, brought inside this love of Christ for the Father and in Him for the destiny of the human person.

Let us ask His mother Mary that we may let ourselves be seized anew, deeply and totally, one by one, each of us, by Him.

Saturday morning, April 29

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony no. 7 in A Major, op. 92

Herbert von Karajan—Berliner Philharmoniker

“Spirto Gentil” no. 3, Deutsche Grammophon

Don Pino. If I am here, if I am aware, I know that I am here to become myself, and that this day can make me more myself. But I am an empty vessel, an empty vessel at the well. You respond to my cry.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”

I would like to start with Pope Francis’ letter thanking us for the offerings collected during the pilgrimages for the Jubilee of Mercy and given to him. As everyone has read, the Pope took the opportunity to give us some suggestions for our journey in the present of the Church and the world. We certainly cannot let a letter addressed to us by the Holy Father pass by without trying to grasp the fullness of its meaning. Thus we will take advantage of the most important gesture of our Movement, the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, to continue to delve into its contents.

The Pope wanted us to know how much it did his heart good that “so many people wanted to undertake the journey of mercy in the spirit of sharing with the needy,”⁴⁵ that is, that during the Holy Year we did not forget the needy.

Gratitude for our experience of sharing offered him the opportunity to underscore that, “the poor remind us of the essential core of Christian life.”⁴⁶ The radical nature of this can be seen in his quote from Saint Augustine “There are certain persons who are more ready to distribute

⁴⁵ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016, available at http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=867&id_n=21522

⁴⁶ *Ivi.*

all their goods to the poor, than themselves to become the poor of God.” Saint Augustine goes on to explain the meaning of this sentence, speaking of those who “of their own think they have, and glory as if they have not received: being rich to themselves, not poor to God; abounding to themselves, not needing God,”⁴⁷ and quoting Saint Paul, “If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.”⁴⁸

In line with these thoughts, Pope Francis shows us what he wants to call us to: “This poverty is necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him.”⁴⁹

Therefore, our poverty is so deep that it is need for Him, need for God. As Fr. Giussani reminded us, the poor person is all expectant awaiting: “Isn’t this truly the description of the poor, poor, poor person, of the poor person on the street? He waits to be given something that enables him to live the next moment, to prolong the road. His whole person is in that expectant awaiting, but with no demands, no basis for any demands, and, therefore, he is wholly in the moment, wholly.”⁵⁰

So then, the first step of our work in these days, following Pope Francis, is to rediscover our constitutive poverty, our true need. Focusing on poverty, as the Pope says in his letter, “is not a liberal program, but a radical program because it means a return to our roots.”⁵¹

Let’s try to understand this poverty.

1. The nature of the need of the heart

Poverty is acknowledgement of the need that makes up our heart. “Those who are poor in spirit have nothing except one thing for which and of which they are made, that is, endless aspiration [...]: boundless expectant awaiting. It is not boundless because they expect an endless pile of things. No, they do not expect anything, but live a boundless openness—and do not expect anything! As expressed in a poem by Clemente Rebora [...]: ‘I’m not waiting

⁴⁷ Saint Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, 71:3, in Saint Augustine of Hippo Collection, Aeterna Press, London, 2016.

⁴⁸ *I Cor* 13:3.

⁴⁹ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016, available at http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=867&id_n=21522

⁵⁰ House meeting, Gudo Gambaredo, March 23, 1970, transcript of the recording, historic Archive of the Memores Domini Ecclesial Association (ASAEMD), Audiovisual recordings OR.AUDIO/1458.

⁵¹ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016, available at http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=867&id_n=21522

for anyone...,' and yet they are there, entirely outstretched, intent. [...] This is the originality of the human person:"⁵² being expectancy. The human person is entirely outstretched and intent on something else, beyond all boundaries, which they do not know how to define.

This may seem like the discovery of hot water, something we already know perfectly well. But as we will see, thinking that we already know it can very quickly lead us into formalism. The true challenge is to discover ever anew who we are, the nature of our need, from the heart of the concrete situations we live, in order to avoid falling prey to formalism or moralism. Fr. Giussani showed us the road, and following him depends on our openness. In fact, he said, "a definition must reflect the experience of an acquisition. Otherwise, it would prove to be a schematic imposition"⁵³ or a formal repetition that becomes doctrine. This is important for everyone, but especially for us, now, in these times.

The heart is not a theoretical premise, but an existential one. In other words, it is at work, but its nature must be brought to light and recognized. This facilitates the encounter with everyone starting from experience, at a time in which a shared definition of the human person has been lost, as we observe in the arguments we hear every day.

The nature of the heart is not an already-known definition we can simply repeat—in this way crystallizing it into an abstract doctrine—a definition that does not move even an iota of our "I." So many of us know the correct words about the heart, but we all see that it is not enough to "know it" for our desire to be constantly kindled. Even though we know the definition, we can spend entire days in emptiness, full of forgetfulness, without feeling "the need for Him." Existentially, there is always the danger of living according to a reduced image of the heart. Therefore, we have a journey ahead of us, in order to discover from within our experience the humanity that is in us.

What kind of journey? To what are we called? "First, we must open ourselves to ourselves," Fr. Giussani encouraged us. "In other words, we must be acutely aware of our experiences and look on the humanity within us with sympathy; we must take into consideration who we really are. To take into consideration means to take seriously what we experience, *everything* we experience, to discover every aspect, to seek the complete meaning."⁵⁴ This sym-

⁵² Giussani, *Uomini senza patria*, op. cit. p. 298.

⁵³ Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, op. cit. p. 61.

⁵⁴ L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 54.

pathy for the human, for each thing that vibrates within us, is so crucial, so “radical,” that, without it, none of the rest can be understood.

Fr. Giussani told us about the moment when, as a young seminarian, he realized the constitutive lack that characterized his humanity, that is, the nature of his heart. He became aware of it within the depths of the concrete vicissitudes he was living. Let’s enter into his experience as he described it: “In that first year of high school, in that timbre of voice, I had perceived the thrill of something that was missing, not from the beautiful song of Donizetti’s romance, but from my life: there was something missing and it would not find support, fulfillment, an answer, or satisfaction anywhere. And yet the heart demands an answer; it lives only for this.” This is a key point, and it enables us to judge everything that comes our way. For this reason, Fr. Giussani underlined, “[m]an’s heart—the human ‘I’—is the need for happiness; the first word that Christianity says is this. If we do not start with this, we cannot understand any of the rest.”⁵⁵ When we become lost and do not understand, it is because we do not start out from this need, and so then everything becomes an abstraction, and all that remains are some repeated lines.

Fr. Giussani was well aware that starting from experience, from what we really live, is not something that we necessarily think of doing. For this reason, he invited us to be very careful: “All too easily we do not start from our true experience; that is, from our experience in its entirety and authenticity. We often identify our experiences with partial impressions [...]. Even more often we confuse our experience with prejudices or schemes that we absorb from our environment, perhaps unawares.” As we often observe, the mentality that surrounds and penetrates us, too, “does not consider or even know our real needs.”⁵⁶

How can we avoid stopping at partial impressions? Fr. Giussani summarized the journey: “Observe our experience clearly, and accept what it means to be human, with all the needs that this implies.” Otherwise, we will “move blindly between this desperate presumption” that we can resolve our needs, and “the darkest despair,”⁵⁷ when we realize that we cannot manage on our own.

Therefore, the issue is to discover the true needs that constitute us, but to do so, we must engage seriously with our experience, which demands the

⁵⁵ L. Giussani, “Quello che cerchi c’è” [What you are looking for exists], in *Spirito Gentil. Un invito all’ascolto della grande musica guidati da Luigi Giussani*, ed. Sandro Chierici and Silvia Giampaolo, Bur, Milan, 2011, p. 12.

⁵⁶ Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, op. cit. p. 54.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

exercise of freedom of which Péguy spoke. In fact, our true needs emerge in experience (“from the inner depths of the concrete vicissitudes we live,”⁵⁸ as Fr. Giussani said). Only in experience does our heart’s true desire come to the surface. In other words, the human is provoked to showing itself, with all its needs, only in the relationship with reality, in front of something that happens. Without the provocation with reality, everyone can interpret what the heart wants as they please, identifying it with this or that image, which will promptly be shown to be a lie when it is subjected to verification. Experience is what shows us our authentic needs, and experience, as we have always said, does not mean just going through something. The needs that constitute me emerge to my consciousness when I engage seriously with what I go through and feel. As Fr. Giussani observed, they come to the surface in me in front of what I go through, to the extent that I seriously engage with what I go through. As these needs emerge, they judge what I am going through and feeling. Only at this point does going through and feeling something become experience.⁵⁹

“Thirty years ago,” noted Fr. Giussani, “when I began saying these things, I didn’t believe that thirty years later I would still need to repeat them over and over to make them understood by those who have already been on this journey for ten years! People read [pay attention!], think they have understood, and move on, and are not serious with the words they use, that is, not serious with the reality that the words indicate.”⁶⁰ As you see, formalism is always an imminent risk.

But reality is stubborn and always returns to knock on our door with its provocations. Therefore, not even those who have a reduced definition of themselves can keep the authentic material of their hearts from emerging in experience. Ideologies are too weak in front of the power of reality, which becomes manifest in experience.

What are the signs through which the human heart reveals its nature? One of these is the boredom described by Moravia, and so often misunderstood. He perceives it as the symptom of the insufficiency of reality: “My boredom could be defined as a sickness of objects, consisting in an almost sudden wilting or loss of vitality, like watching a flower pass through successive and very rapid transformations from budding to withered to dust in a few seconds. [...] For me, boredom is precisely a kind of insufficiency, or

⁵⁸ See here, p. 15.

⁵⁹ “L’uomo è educato dall’esperienza, non da ciò che prova” [People are educated by experience, not by what go through and feel], in L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly) Possible to Live This Way?]*, Bur, Milan, 2011, p. 82.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

inadequacy, or scarcity of reality. [...] The feeling of boredom is born in me from the feeling of the absurdity of a reality [...] that is insufficient or incapable of persuading me of its own effective existence.”⁶¹ What Moravia does not say is that we can experience the insufficiency of reality and, therefore, boredom only through the infinite nature of our desire. Dogs do not get bored. Leopardi grasped the issue well: everything is “small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind,” that is, compared to the infinite nature of our desire. For this reason, “to suffer want, emptiness,” and, therefore, “boredom” is “the chief sign of the grandeur and nobility of human nature.”⁶²

Another sign is nostalgia, the aching yearning for something missing that we cannot define. “I have always been criticized,” wrote Ernesto Sabato, “for my need for the absolute, which also appears in my characters. This need runs through my life like a river-bed, or better, like a longing for something I could never reach [...]. I’ve never been able to assuage this nostalgia of mine, to tame it by telling myself that that harmony existed once in my childhood. I wished it were so, but that’s not how it was [...]. Nostalgia for me is a yearning that is never satisfied, the place I have never succeeded in reaching. But it is what we would have wanted to be, our desire. Our inability to live it is so true that we could almost believe it resides outside nature if it weren’t the case that every human being carries inside this hope of being, this feeling of something that is missing [...]. Nostalgia for this absolute is like an invisible, unknowable background against which we, nevertheless, compare all of life.”⁶³

This “yearning that is never satisfied” reveals what the heart is made of, enables us to understand the nature of our poverty, and makes us realize the depth of our need. We carry this insatiable nostalgia with us like an

⁶¹ A. Moravia, *La noia [Boredom]*, Bompiani, Milan, 1992, pp. 7-8.

⁶² G. Leopardi, *Pensieri LXVIII*, transl. W.S. Di Piero, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1981, p. 113.

⁶³ «Siempre me han echado en cara mi necesidad de absolutos, que por otro lado aparece en mis personajes. Esta necesidad atraviesa como un cauce mi vida, como una nostalgia más bien, a la que nunca hubiera llegado. [...] Yo nunca pude calmar mi nostalgia, domesticarla, diciéndome que aquella armonía fue un tiempo en la infancia; ojalá hubiera sido, pero no. [...] La nostalgia es para mí una añoranza jamás cumplida, el lugar al que nunca he podido llegar. Pero es lo que hubiéramos querido ser, nuestro deseo. Tanto no se lo llega a vivir que hasta podría creerse que está fuera de la naturaleza, si no fuese que cualquier ser humano lleva en sí esa esperanza de ser, ese sentimiento de que algo nos falta. La nostalgia de ese absoluto es como un telón de fondo, invisible, incognoscible, pero con el cual medimos toda la vida.» E. Sabato, *Espana en los diarios de mi vejez*, Seix Barral, Barcelona, 2004, pp. 178-179. Translation ours.

invisible, unknowable, but real background against which we compare all of life. As Andrei Tarkovsky said, “[e]verything we are, we bring with us on the journey. We bring the house of our soul with us, like a turtle with his shell.”⁶⁴ There is a longing in us for something else, a longing we cannot tame, interwoven with an implacable dissatisfaction, one that nobody manages to hide in the end. Pavese wrote about it: “All men have a cancer that gnaws at them [...]: their own dissatisfaction; the point of conflict between their real, skeletal being clashes and the infinite complexity of life. And all men realize it, sooner or later.”⁶⁵

These are a few clues—we could offer many others—that reveal the original makeup of the heart. All the things we live, the circumstances, the challenges, are not given to us to complicate life, but are opportunities to understand the nature of our need, to discover our true needs. In fact, as we said before, through the impact with reality, the fundamental dimensions of the human emerge.

In this journey, everything is useful and contributes to bringing to the surface who we are, even disappointment. As Fr. Giussani reminded us, the experience of disappointment, which is inevitable precisely because nothing totally corresponds to the heart, does not stop the human person but spurs us, intensifies our thirst. “This is the nature of reason. This is the nature of the human heart. This is the nature of what constitutes the human person as human. In other words, the fact that, in facing anything, you perceive the limit and are always wounded by it in some way, no matter what (clearly, to the degree to which you are aware of what is happening, to the degree to which you are not distracted), the fact that in facing everything you become aware of the limit and disappointment, the lack of correspondence, and this does not stop you, but spurs you on, demonstrates that you do not belong to the limit and pain, and for this reason you are pushed, driven, drawn to try to grasp more, know more, penetrate more.”⁶⁶ In our living, we continually seek to grasp that which provokes our longing. We thirst to know that elusive something beyond that we sense is missing, and that always slips away from us.

This experience is the starting point for discovering the nature of poverty.

⁶⁴ The words of Andrei Tarkovsky (1932-1986) come from an interview originally published in Swedish: cf. A. Tarkovsky, “Att resa i sitt inre. Samtal med Tarkovskij,” interview by Gideon Bachmann, *Chaplin*, n. 193, September 1984, pp. 158-163.

⁶⁵ C. Pavese, *This Business of Living*, Transaction Publishers, London, 1961, p. 57.

⁶⁶ L. Giussani, *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro (1988-1989) [What We Hold Most Dear]*, Bur, Milan, 2011, pp. 491-492.

Fr. Giussani said that what the Gospel calls poverty is described very well by Romano Guardini in his comment on the first chapters of Saint Augustine's *Confessions*: "'Since You created us for Yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds repose in You.' In these words, the Augustinian concept of man touches its deepest core. Man is placed by the Creator inside the realms of true being. He is authorized to keep to his own heart and to press on at his own pace. But his reality is different from that of other creatures. They are rooted in their own natures. Their foundation is self and to self they will always return. The symbol of their existence is the circle which closes in on itself, while man's symbol, in contrast, is the arc curving beyond all he encounters. [...] This is the law of his existence and the proof is a profound uneasiness which never calms. It might be misunderstood, but it cannot be banished and when man realizes this it becomes a torment. When he accepts it, it leads him on to the essence of calm, to the fulfillment of his being."⁶⁷ Thus poverty is "this willingness to stretch the string of one's bow to reach out, not to self but to another,"⁶⁸ beyond himself, who cannot be reduced to his own measure.

So then, who are the poor? Those who have nothing to defend if not their own thirst, their own expectant awaiting, their own original nature, the fact that they have not created themselves, and who, therefore, strive to recognize and welcome those who can respond to it. This is why Jesus calls the poor "blessed." For Jesus, this poverty is not a misfortune, but a beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven... Blessed are they who hunger and thirst..."⁶⁹ Actually, said Fr. Giussani, "all the beatitudes are synonyms, different ways" of speaking about this poverty, of "poverty of spirit."⁷⁰

But why does Jesus insist so much on poverty? Why did Giussani insist on it? And why, now, does Pope Francis insist on it?

Because precisely this poverty, this expectant awaiting, this aching yearning and desire to know the one who can satisfy our thirst "enables us to recognize the accent of His voice when it echoes in our life. The thing that enables us to recognize Christ, His accent, the accent of His presence

⁶⁷ R. Guardini, *Der Anfang. Eine Interpretation der fünf ersten Kapitel von Augustinus' Bekenntnissen*, Alsatia Verlag, Kolmar i. Elsaß, n.d., pp. 14-15; quoted in L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2001, pp. 208-209.

⁶⁸ Giussani, *Why the Church?*, op. cit., p. 209.

⁶⁹ Mt 5:3-12.

⁷⁰ L. Giussani, "Dal senso religioso a Cristo" [From the Religious Sense to Christ], in *Dove la domanda si accende [Where the Question is Kindled]*, ed. Camillo Fornasieri and Tommaso Lanosa, Itaca, Castel Bolognese, 2012, pp. 55-56.

is honesty, sincerity, the intensity of this desire to know what God is for my life, for our life. “People do not learn when they believe they already know,” said the English novelist, Barbara Ward. The Pharisees thought they already knew, and did not learn to recognize the Presence that was the answer to their religious sense, to their whole history.”⁷¹ For this reason, in the list of beatitudes, the first is: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” In fact, only those who are aware of their poverty, who admit their need, who feel their hunger and thirst, will be able to recognize the bearer of the kingdom, the bearer of the answer.

But be careful—this may seem surprising to us—this thirst, as Fr. Giussani tirelessly pointed out, is the most important thing not only for those who need to encounter Christ, but also for we who are already Christians. The religious sense is not a premise that can be abandoned at a certain point, but is always a necessary *condition* to, in the first place, “recognize the accent of His voice when it echoes,” and, in the second place, have a real experience of the present answer that is Christ. As soon as we censure or minimize the thirst, as soon as we detach from the human foundation, Christ becomes irrelevant, as unbelievable as the answer to a question that you have not asked or no longer ask (therefore, the encounter with Christ responds to the thirst by deepening it, not by abolishing it). “Christ is the answer to the thirst we have for living the relationship with that which is our destiny, the meaning of what we do, of eating, drinking, waking, sleeping, loving, and working. To the degree to which this expectancy and desire are not alive in me, I cannot recognize the answer [...]. For this reason, the most important thing for us Christians is the truth of our religious sense, because then the reality of Christ is also communicated to our life.”⁷²

A person like the Samaritan woman, who felt the thirst of her heart, immediately perceived the One who was able to quench it. Her thirst emerged in its entirety. She was able to look at it deep down, as never before, only in front of the One who incarnated the promise to respond to it, because the “religious sense”—that is, the heart’s thirsting—is fully clarified and awakened only in the encounter with Christ. “The historical encounter with this man constitutes an encounter with the resolving and clarifying point of view of human experience.”⁷³ For this reason, Christ must always be contemporary, so that the religious sense can be reawakened and kept alive.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷³ Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, op. cit., p. 59.

Earlier I quoted the passage in which Giussani marveled at how many times he had said these things, as all the while people continued reading them, but passed over them. Let's see what happens instead when someone takes them seriously: "Dearest Fr. Julián, for years I've wanted to tell you this, but I just couldn't do it, couldn't come out with it. I consider myself—or rather, I am, "family-less," that is, without a family. Unfortunately, the suffering was so bad that it caused the end of my marriage. I was extremely angry about it for many years, and when you kept giving examples about the love of a mother or father, I would have willingly told you to go take a flying leap, thinking that you were lucky not to have had parents with problems that marked your body and soul. I had an exceptional encounter, but I've always considered myself different from the others, with this fundamental objection..." This means that the encounter may not actually change our perception of ourselves. Even though we recognize that we have had an exceptional encounter, there can remain a fundamental objection related to contradictions and problems, which we carry inside like "a woodworm: I experienced a sense of abandonment that persecuted me like a shadow over everything, sitting in judgment on the companionship, whether I was accepted or not, whether I was sought out, or appreciated, or dumped. Then something happened in me after the most recent School of Community by satellite linkup in March. I was doing very badly, but when you spoke about rolling up your sleeves and engaging actively in reality—the reality where I experience an immense difficulty—in work, with family members, with friends, and many aspects of my life, I understood that I wasn't free, that I expected happiness from the 'sunny moments,' and that I reduced the presence of Christ exclusively to the companionship. The crucial passage that rekindled my heart was the quote from Fr. Giussani, from *Vivendo nella carne* [Living in the Flesh]: 'The reason people no longer believe or believe without believing [and the exceptional encounter does not have an impact that awakens a different experience of living, a different perception of yourself] [...] is that people do not live their own humanity, are not seriously engaged with their own humanity, with their own sensibility, with their own conscience, and thus with their own humanity.'⁷⁴ There, that evening, I felt like my lungs were freed up, and I could take a huge breath."

This is the point: when we allow the encounter to enter into our life, engaging our need, we recognize the correspondence right away, and the sign is that we are freed up to breathe deeply. The letter continues: "I've decid-

⁷⁴ L. Giussani, *Vivendo nella carne* [Living in the Flesh], Bur, Milan, 1998, p. 66.

ed something because you helped me to understand myself. You made me understand the knot of my life. I began to take seriously everything inside me, the anger, the sadness, the difficulties, the injustices, the pain, and the solitude. Every morning I get up and decide [here we see the engagement of our freedom] to take myself seriously, all of me, to not censure anything, and what is happening is amazing. It's not an introspective analysis: it's the experience that, as I roll up my sleeves and engage in reality, I am never alone, and the wonder and gusto increase to the point that I have mercy on my siblings and my poor parents."

When the distance between our heart and Christ is overcome—through the recognition that He was the first to overcome it—the distance from others is overcome too, as this friend wrote. "It seems I'm beginning to understand that this is the right attitude, because I'm happy. I've discovered that Jesus is present in everything we go through, if we go through it with the right mindset, the certainty of our total dependence! This gives me such a sense of gusto that in the eyes of others it seems I'm a person with no problems!" This is not because the problems no longer exist, but because they no longer determine her. "Recently people have remarked that I've gotten prettier, and they ask me what's going on. I'm not young: I'm over fifty! Thank you dear Fr. Julián. I, too, want to thank you for teaching me Fr. Giussani's method. I want it to become mine. I want to be happy and to enjoy all of life. Even the Sundays spent home alone studying for school or cleaning no longer scare me. I've found that I'm not alone. I pray for you, that Our Lady will sustain you. With gratitude."

This experience is within everyone's reach, as we see, not because there are no longer any problems, but because we open ourselves to another possibility: taking seriously what Fr. Giussani proposed to us.

2. From the depths of our error, a thirst for salvation, a need for forgiveness

The need for meaning of which we spoke, for destiny, cannot be separated from another equally radical need that constitutes us and that we all know well: the need for forgiveness, mercy, redemption after each of our errors, after every repeated failure, defeat, or omission. Therefore, a realistic gaze upon ourselves cannot exclude this need for forgiveness from our consideration, just as Jesus does not exclude it from His gaze.

We are a need for perfection, for meaning, for love, for justice, but with all of these needs, bit by bit as we live, we are also in front of the results of our powerlessness to achieve them, of the contradictoriness of our actions. We all have experienced destroying what we love, as docu-

mented in the letter I just read, (how frequent this is in our loving relationships or with our children!), of failing where we would most want to succeed, of being incapable of building, precisely in the situations we care most about, of falling into a vortex of mistakes, weaknesses, and pettiness without knowing how to get out. We find ourselves powerless and crushed by our own limits, merciless judges of ourselves, almost to the point of considering ourselves unforgivable. Who will think us trustworthy, after all we have done? Who will still love us, if we are so fragile, inadequate, and inconsistent? This is the most uncomfortable and humiliating face of our poverty, of our powerlessness to be, which the Gospel constantly tells us about: we are exactly like the “poor,” the tax collectors and sinners with whom Jesus interacted. At the bottom of our sense of failure, frustration, and anger, there is a more or less explicit thirst for forgiveness, the expectancy of a gaze that enables us to start anew, even if at times we do not admit it even to ourselves.

The tax collectors in the Gospel are a kind of prototype of this situation, which we often share. They were surrounded by such a deeply moralistic mentality that they inevitably absorbed it, too. We can see this in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector in the temple. To understand the tax collector’s prayer we have to look at him, as the scholar Joachim Jeremias recommends, in the way tax collectors were viewed and saw themselves in those times, the same way we feel looked at by others and we look at ourselves when we make mistakes. “We must look at the publican through the eyes of his contemporaries. [...] He is overwhelmed by the pain of being far from God.” He is there in the back of the temple and does not even dare to raise his head. “In fact, his situation and that of his family is hopeless, because in order to do penance, he must not only abandon his life of sin, that is, renounce his trade, but must also do works of reparation, returning the extorted money [...]. How can he know [after a life spent doing these things] how many people he has cheated? Not only his situation, but also his imploration for mercy is hopeless!”⁷⁵ As we see with prisoners, not even being punished for the harm we have inflicted is sufficient to restore the peace we so desire. It is as though we cannot expunge the evil we have done to ourselves, which we alone know, and to others.

Commenting on some passages in the Gospel, Pope Francis identified the issue well: “None of them who were there, including Matthew, greedy for money, could believe the message in that finger pointing at him, the message

⁷⁵ J. Jeremias, *Le parabole di Gesù [The Parables of Jesus]*, Paideia, Brescia, 1973, pp. 175-176.

in those eyes that looked at him with mercy and chose him for the sequela.”⁷⁶ It is as if he could not believe this possibility. The Pope said the same thing about Zacchaeus. “Nor does he dare to hope that the distance which separates him from the Lord may be overcome; he resigns himself to seeing Him only as He passes by.”⁷⁷

How does Jesus look at the poverty of one who does not even dare to hope? To answer, “we have to identify with the people described in the Gospel,” said Fr. Giussani. Right away he added: “But we will not understand them or be able to identify with what they were, if we do not become one with Christ who said, ‘Zacchaeus.’ When the word ‘Zacchaeus’ explodes, then we understand Zacchaeus. At the moment Christ says, ‘Zacchaeus, get down from that tree. Today I’m coming to your house,’ we understand what Zacchaeus was. Think of what Zacchaeus felt, how all of a sudden he measured all the errors he had committed without even measuring them, how he felt what he was and who the person calling him was. We see what Zacchaeus was precisely by becoming one with how Christ saw him.”⁷⁸ “It is this closeness, it is this presence, a presence not of one who looks aside, but the presence of one who looks at you. It is this closeness that blows you away, that transfigures your life. As he was going home, Zacchaeus did not say, ‘Now this guy is going to tell me that I robbed a hundred here, thirty-four there, now...’ He was full of that gaze. He went home to prepare lunch for that man, for that man who had looked at him.”⁷⁹ He was full of silence.

But the tender presence of Jesus is not enough to experience forgiveness. You have to accept His presence, yield to His forgiveness, His mercy. Like Zacchaeus, you have to come down from the tree and run home to welcome Him. Again, your freedom is involved. Certain pages of some novels we have been invited to read have provided a vivid and dramatic image of this experience. Think of Manzoni’s character, the Unnamed, in front of Cardinal Federigo. “The Unnamed was amazed at the Cardinal’s passionate speech, at the words which formed so definite an answer to all that he had not yet said, nor even made up his mind to say at all. Deeply stirred, but dazed at the same time, he remained silent. ‘Well?’ continued Federigo, yet more affectionately. ‘You have some good news for me; are

⁷⁶ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

⁷⁷ Francis, *Angelus*, November 3, 2013.

⁷⁸ Assembly with a group of young people who have begun the vocational journey in the Ecclesial Association *Memoires Domini*, Gudo Gambaredo, June 26, 1993, ASAEMD, edited and unpublished type-written text, OR.STAMPA/104.

⁷⁹ Notes from the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memoires Domini Novices*, Le Pianazze, August 7, 1982.

you going to keep me waiting for it?' 'Good news? From me? When I've all hell raging in my heart, you expect to hear good news from me? Tell me, if you can, what sort of good news you think you might get from a fellow like me?' 'The news that God has touched your heart, and wants to make you His own,' replied the Cardinal evenly. 'God? God? If I could see Him or hear Him now! Where is this God of yours? [...] If this God exists, if He is the God of whom we hear, what do you think He can do with me?' Those words were uttered with a note of desperation; but Federigo replied in calm, solemn, yet inspired tones: 'Do you ask what God can do with you—what it is His will that you should become? Why, a sign of His power and His goodness. He wants to gain from you a glory which He can gain from no one else. [...] And you ask what God can do with you! [...] Is it nothing that He can forgive you, and save you, and fulfil in you the work of redemption? Are not such acts magnificent and worthy of Him?'"⁸⁰

Here is where His truth appears at its fullest; here is where His glory shines forth the most. Let's listen further to Cardinal Federigo. "Think now if I, miserable little creature that I am, and so full of myself in spite of it—can be so deeply anxious for your salvation that, as God is my witness, I would cheerfully surrender in return the few remaining years of my life, then think what charity must be in Him, who inspires me with this imperfect copy of it—imperfect indeed, but how deeply felt! How must He love you and wish you well, when He bids me love you and inspires me with the love for you which consumes me now!' As these words left his lips, his face, his eyes, every movement of his body spoke the same language as his tongue. His listener's face had been strained and contorted; it changed first to a look of astonished and intent concentration, and finally took on a look of deeper but less painful emotion. His eyes, which had never shed a tear since his childhood, began to swell up; and when the Cardinal's speech was over, he covered his face with his hands, and broke into a passionate weeping, which was the final and the clearest possible response."⁸¹ The Unnamed finally yielded. It could be seen in his face, which changed from "strained and contorted" to "astonished and intent." Without this movement of freedom, salvation will never be mine. This does not mean substituting yourself for God, to save yourself on your own. It means that God, who created us without us, cannot save us without us.

⁸⁰ A. Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, transl. Bruce Penman, Penguin Classics, London, 1972, pp. 415-416.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 416-417.

Yielding to a presence that forgives, accepting to be saved: this is the continual drama of freedom. In fact, after a moment of yielding, life returns to being heavy, and we return to measuring ourselves. This happened to Miguel Mañara, the main character in the play of the same name by Oscar Milosz. “After making his confession to the Abbot, he continued going to him to vent about his sins; he couldn’t forget them, couldn’t ‘take the bite out of them,’ tear them away. They existed; he had done them.”⁸² We can have the same difficulty. During one gathering, someone said to Fr. Giussani, “[y]ou can leave the confessional as oppressed by your sins as you were when you entered.” He answered: “For a great majority of people, Confession is not valid, *non valet*, does not have existential substance, does not have an impact on existence, or, therefore, on history. More dominant is the reaction you have at a certain point, maybe after a year, in front of the memory of sins committed: the humiliation, the weight of the consequences, especially the social ones. As long as you have done something and nobody gets hurt, you can be at ease, but when it is talked about in society or the newspapers, then it becomes something enormous and crushing. [...] ‘I’ve erred, I’ve done....’ It is a shame against myself, even if nobody were to know. I go to confession and the image of what I did prevails over the greatness and certainty of forgiveness.”⁸³

How can I see that what prevails in me is certainty, the gaze of a Presence? If it re-creates me. Because forgiveness re-creates, as happened for the Unnamed. “Only the same identical gesture of poverty can separate me from myself and make me cheerful: because Christ lives and Christ is mine, Christ is for me (*Propter nos homines*). This is important!”⁸⁴ When Miguel Mañara returns to the Abbot after confession to complain about his own sins, the Abbot responds brusquely, surprising him: “All this never existed [...]. Only He is.” But you have to yield. Fr. Giussani commented on the episode with these words: in order for our sins not to continue to burden us, to be “truly free, free from our own evil acts,” free from the sins that one has even confessed, “it is not enough to have confessed them: it depends on the clarity, the affection, and the certainty that Christ exists and Christ is forgiveness.”⁸⁵

“We want [man] to gain this salvation by himself,”⁸⁶ Péguy told us. But gaining salvation does not mean producing it with your own strength, with

⁸² Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 388.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 396-387.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 387.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

⁸⁶ See here, p. 5.

your own moralistic effort: it means embracing the salvation that has been given us by Christ, who is Christ present, living. We often are weighed down by this lack of openness.

What poverty is needed to embrace the forgiveness that is Christ! This poverty is “made possible by the fact that there is Christ, that the dominant presence is Christ, that the object of my gaze is Christ. For this reason, you can leave confession finally free, if confession means going to Christ, not if it is something else. If you go to confession to get peace about the errors you expect to commit again tomorrow, you get no peace, but if you know that because of your weakness it can happen again tomorrow, and you go to confession anyway, looking at Christ and saying, ‘and yet I prefer You profoundly more than any other thing,’ ‘and yet I say yes to You,’ this frees you.”⁸⁷

Zacchaeus was so full of that gaze that “all of a sudden he measured all the errors he had committed without even measuring them.”⁸⁸ That gaze caused a poverty of spirit to emerge in him; it generated in him an instant of poverty of spirit. It is this way for us, too. At least for an instant, we find this poverty of spirit in us, even if often we do not follow it. Therefore, Jesus’ bold move, inviting Himself to eat at Zacchaeus’ house, must be met by another, equally daring move by the freedom of the person to welcome it. But sometimes the Pharisee in us cries out: “This is scandalous! It’s impossible. Don’t kid yourself that He can eat with a sinner like you. Don’t fool yourself that you can be forgiven. Look at what everyone is saying: ‘He’s going to eat at the house of a sinner!’” So Zacchaeus, like each of us, is at a fork in the road! You can understand what an incredible challenge Jesus’ move was for Zacchaeus and for us. Nobody expressed it better than Saint Paul: “Indeed, only with difficulty does one die for a just person, though perhaps for a good person one might even find courage to die. But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”⁸⁹

Christ continues to challenge us today, as he challenged Zacchaeus then, through a historical presence: “There is no profession or social condition, no sin or crime of any kind that can erase from the memory and the heart of God even one of his children. ‘God remembers,’ always, He never forgets those who He created. [...] And I say to you: if your conscience is weighed down, if you are ashamed of many things that you have done, stop for a moment, do not be afraid. Think about the fact that someone is waiting for you because He has never ceased to remember you; and this

⁸⁷ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 388.

⁸⁸ See here, p. 36.

⁸⁹ *Rom* 5:7-8.

someone is your Father, it is God who is waiting for you! Climb up, as Zacchaeus did, climb the tree of desire for forgiveness. I assure you that you will not be disappointed. Jesus is merciful and never grows tired of forgiving! Remember that this is the way Jesus is.”⁹⁰

Accepting Christ’s embrace required a radical poverty: to accept that you are such a “need” that you depend totally on the mercy of an other requires you to be so poor that you have nothing of your own to stand on nor merits to boast of. It is necessary to have an ultimate awareness of our true need, of what we truly are. This is the truth of ourselves, without subterfuges: in order to live, to start again, not to succumb under the weight of our errors, we need a presence that forgives us, an embrace that gives us back the opportunity to begin again and look positively at ourselves. We need to be so poor that we depend totally on Jesus.

As we have said, a presence that forgives is not enough: a movement of freedom that accepts the forgiveness is needed. This is clear in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Even though they were in front of a presence that forgave, the Pharisees, in fact, were not open to forgiveness. The tax collectors, instead, even under the weight of their own sins, had that ultimate openness to let themselves be forgiven, and did not claim to have anything of their own to stand on. The parable is addressed to those who were convinced of their own righteousness, and disdained others. Jesus said: “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity - greedy, dishonest, adulterous - or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”⁹¹

At this point we can understand the Pope’s letter more clearly: “The poor remind us of the essential core of Christian life. [...] This poverty is necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him.”⁹² The poor remind us of the need that is easily silenced in us, forgotten, covered by our provisional sense of security, by the satisfactions that

⁹⁰ Francis, *Angelus*, November 3, 2013.

⁹¹ *Lk* 18:10-14.

⁹² Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016.

soothe us, by the illusion that we have dominion over things and control over life. There is no greater obstacle to our fulfillment than the forgetfulness of our poverty, of our irreducible need of an other, of our need for meaning and salvation.

The absence of awareness of our thirst for the meaning for life, together with the lack of awareness of our limits, of our evil, of our sin, and, therefore, of our need for forgiveness and salvation, close us to the encounter with the other, with Christ. Poverty, in the dual meaning described here, is the condition for entering into the kingdom of God, that is, for welcoming the very Presence of God Himself, that Presence in which God became incarnate. For this reason, Jesus said: “How hard it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples were amazed at his words. So Jesus again said to them in reply, ‘Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ They were exceedingly astonished and said among themselves, ‘Then who can be saved?’ Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For human beings it is impossible, but not for God. All things are possible for God.’”⁹³

But God, having created us free, does not want to pass over our freedom. Therefore, He comes to us first, takes the initiative towards us, to elicit it, as William of St.-Thierry said. “You first loved us so that we might love You—not because You needed our love, but because we could not be what You created us to be, except by loving You. [...] Everything [Your Son] did and everything He said on earth [...] --- all of this was actually You speaking to us in your Son, appealing to us by Your love and stirring up our love for You. You know that this disposition could not be forced on men’s hearts, my God, since you created them; it must rather be elicited. And this, for the further reason that there is no freedom where there is compulsion, and where freedom is lacking, so too is righteousness.”⁹⁴ That is, there cannot be salvation.

God awaits our freedom and never ceases to forgive us, as the Pope reminded us. “The will to respond and to change, which can give rise to a different life, comes thanks to this merciful embrace.”⁹⁵ The first change, the first conversion is to yield, to yield to His embrace. The first activity is a passivity, Fr. Giussani told us, that is, embracing something that is a

⁹³ *Mk* 10:23-27.

⁹⁴ William of St.-Thierry, *On the Contemplation of God* (Nn. 9-11, SC 61, 90-96), found in the Roman Office of Readings on Monday of the Third Week of Advent. Translation from <https://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/media/articles/he-loved-us-first-william-of-st-thierry/>

⁹⁵ Francis, Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement, March 7, 2015.

gift.⁹⁶ How we need to learn the poverty of which the Pope speaks to us! “Christian morality is not a titanic, voluntary effort,” he told us on March 7, 2015, “of one who decides to be coherent and who manages to do so, a sort of isolated challenge before the world. No. This is not Christian morality, it is something else. Christian morality is a response, it is the heartfelt response before the surprising, unforeseeable—even “unfair” according to human criteria—mercy of One who knows me, knows my betrayals and loves me just the same, appreciates me, embraces me, calls me anew, hopes in me, has expectations of me. Christian morality,” the Pope concluded, “is not a never falling down, but an always getting up, thanks to His hand which catches us.”⁹⁷

3. My heart is glad because You live, Oh Christ

Those who are aware of the boundlessness of their need, over which Christ has bent, cannot help but exclaim with Fr. Giussani: “My heart is glad because You live, Oh Christ.”⁹⁸ God responds to this unbearable nature we have, to the resounding nature of our weakness, with His presence, by becoming incarnate, by making Himself our companion. So then, “the truth of the human person is not reduced to the observation of our wretchedness, but to the amazed and exultant announcement that this wretchedness is loved. The loving, strong, and faithful Presence, more than the voluble and vulnerable fragility that is the substance of the human person, is discovered to be our true richness. It is not necessarily the case that the evidence of our own wretchedness is the point of departure, the initial discovery, because in the power of the announcement of that Presence we can also discover our own nakedness, ineptitude, and pettiness. The Presence of an other is, therefore, the substance—certainty and hope—of the human person: accepting this, affirming this, is existence as love. Because loving means affirming that an Other is your own life and that your own life is the affirmation of an Other. ‘You are me.’ ‘I live, not I, but it is an Other who lives in me’ (Saint Paul). Thus the answer of Christianity to our intolerance of ourselves is a humility that becomes love, that is, an acknowledgement of your own wretchedness (*humus* = earth) that opens to the rich Presence.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ “The very word ‘given’ is also vibrant with an activity, in front of which I am passive: and it is a passivity which makes up my original activity of receiving, taking note, recognizing.” L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 101.

⁹⁷ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

⁹⁸ L. Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù* [*The Attraction of Jesus*], Bur, Milan, 2001, p. 148.

⁹⁹ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [*In Search of the Human Face*], Rizzoli, Milan, 1995, p. 227.

The more you see your true need emerge from the depths of living, the more you understand that the answer cannot be a discourse, but must be a present presence. Those who are conscious of their real poverty can understand well what Christ introduces into history. This is what made Giussani exult, to the point of repeating often: “My heart is glad because You live, Oh Christ.” It was like this for the disciples after the death of Jesus: only a presence could respond to the tears, the sadness, and the solitude they plunged into after His burial. However, not just any presence. The disciples were still together, but they were frightened, gathered together behind closed doors, their hopes dashed. They had eaten and drunk with Him; they had seen the miracles Jesus had done and remembered them well, but their memory was not enough to overcome their fear. Only His presence could respond.

It is the same way for us. A present presence is needed to free us from the cogs in which we constantly get caught. This is the nature of Christianity: an event now. “The ‘event’ does not indicate merely something that happened and with which it all started, but what awakens the present, defines the present, gives content to the present, and makes possible the present. What we know or what we have becomes experience if what we know or have is something that is given to us now—there is a hand that offers it to us now, there is a face that comes forward now, there is blood that flows now, there is a resurrection that happens now. Nothing exists outside this ‘now’! Our ‘I’ cannot be moved, aroused, that is, changed, if not by something contemporaneous—an event. Christ is something that is happening to me. Now, in order that what we know—Christ, the whole question of Christ—be an experience, there has to be a present that provokes us and arouses us. It is a presence as it was a presence for Andrew and John. Christianity, Christ, is exactly what He was for Andrew and John when they followed Him [a particular story: a discourse cannot substitute for it]. Imagine when He turned around, how they were struck! And when they went home with Him... It has been just like this up to now, up to this moment!”¹⁰⁰

This event, the contemporaneousness of Christ, is the one response to the yearning of the human heart. This event is the essential thing not only at the beginning, but in every moment of development. In this regard, the Pope said: “The first proclamation must ring out over and over: ‘Jesus Christ loves you; He gave his life to save you; and now He is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.’ This first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be

¹⁰⁰ L. Giussani, text of the Easter 2011 poster of Communion and Liberation.

forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the *principal* proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, [...] at every level and moment. [...] We must not think that in catechesis the *kerygma* gives way to a supposedly more ‘solid’ formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the *kerygma*, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis [...]. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart.”¹⁰¹

The certainty of His presence grows and is sustained only with personal experience, which engages our freedom, as Pope Francis explains. We must be “convinced from personal experience that it is not the same thing to have known Jesus as not to have known Him, not the same thing to walk with Him as to walk blindly. [...] We know well that with Jesus life becomes richer and that with Him it is easier to find meaning in everything.”¹⁰² Outside this “now” of His presence, there is nothing! It is the experience that each of us is invited to have in order to reach the conviction of which the Pope spoke.

For us, the Fraternity is the place where we are educated to live the poverty necessary to be able to recognize Him and to look at everything without fear, as one of you wrote: “Last Sunday we had our Fraternity group gathering. I didn’t want to go because recently it has seemed useless to me (it isn’t what I have in mind). We were to work on the Pope’s letter to all of us. In the end, I decided to entrust myself to God, and I went. I told the others about my difficulty, my struggles, and the initial decision not to go. I perceived that I had gone there to learn to be poor, to not let my own idea dominate, but rather the faces I had in front of me. For me, this was a revelation! I understood, or understood again, what the Fraternity is: to learn to be poor, that is, to re-acquire the original gaze toward those I have in front of me. Otherwise, why should we get together every twenty days or so, if not to learn this poverty toward our friends and everyone? I hope that this experience strengthens me, and that the next time there’s Fraternity group and I don’t feel like going, I’ll ask that once again the dominant thing be the desire to return to being poor in Christ!”

In the place that the Mystery has given us—our Fraternity, within the life of the Church—we can learn what Fr. Giussani told us, that is, to live

¹⁰¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, ¶¶ 164-165.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, ¶ 266.

everything from within that relationship that has bowled us over: “Like a son next to his father, like the disciple in front of his true master, like a friend near his powerful friend, you [each of us] see *from within that relationship* [a present relationship] and work with an energy that is continually given *by that relationship*. It is as if the first object of attention were this Presence, not the “duty” to carry out. It is as if the first term of affection were that Presence, not the reality to possess. It is as if the first source from which to draw the necessary energy were that Presence, not your own ethical strength. Clarity in your moral judgement, affective inclination toward justice, strength of will, all of this matures as a consequence. In fact, in the relationship with that Presence, the totality of the person is attracted, is drawn to the good. Morality in the Church is first of all an event: the recognition of that Presence, and “staying” with it. *Live the memory*: this is the morality of Christian holiness.”¹⁰³

The only thing that changes us giving precedence to this Presence. “What does presence mean? *Sed super mel et omnia, ejus dulcis praesentia*. His presence is the best, most beautiful, the sweetest thing in our lives.”¹⁰⁴ Let’s immerse ourselves once again in the experience of Andrew and John in front of Jesus: “[A]s they stood there, watching Him (they did not understand all His words): they had never had such an encounter, they would have never imagined a look, an embrace, and an attention so human, so completely and wholly human, that carried within them something strange, wholly gratuitous, exceptional, beyond everything they could have foreseen.”¹⁰⁵

This Presence changes the lives of those who embrace it and alters history: “The Spirit who has made things, who makes things, from whom everything flows [...] this Spirit makes us more readily disciples of the Word who changed actually the history of humanity and who, by our adherence—by the forms in which we look at, hear, perceive and touch things—changes the way we use things, transforms it. It is a change that defines the ‘presence,’ which can be defined only by a change.”¹⁰⁶ We know we are in front of this Presence because it changes us. This was the experience of Manzoni’s Unnamed: he perceived he was in front of His presence, because it moved what he was unable to move, what he believed was impossible to move of his own volition, as we see in his “passionate weeping” in front of Cardinal Federigo.

¹⁰³ Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano*, op. cit., pp. 235-236.

¹⁰⁴ L. Giussani, “*Ejus dulcis praesentia*. Sweetness as the ultimate evidence of the truth: of the truth in action,” *Traces*, January 2003, <http://archivio.traces-cl.com/gen03/ptn0103.htm>.

¹⁰⁵ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 19.

¹⁰⁶ Giussani, “*Ejus dulcis praesentia*,” op. cit.

What does the presence of Christ introduce into life when you recognize and yield to it? A striving, a desire for Him, an entreaty. “The entreaty is the ultimate limit, the mysterious border of our freedom. When we entreat our freedom is engaged. Christians are not indifferent to moral good or evil, but in the perception of their own nothingness, they ask, they beg. The true and fundamental ascetic practice is to ask. You cannot keep asking for long unless you truly desire the realization of what you ask for. Asking is only asking if you truly want what you ask for to happen. Saint Augustine’s comment on Psalm 37 says, ‘*Your desire is your prayer: if your desire is continuous, so, too, is your prayer.*’ [...And] Gregory of Nyssa [wrote]: ‘*The soul is struck and wounded by the desperation of never obtaining what it desires, but this veil of sadness is taken away when it learns that the true possession of He whom it loves lies in never ceasing to desire Him.*’ [...] Never ceasing to desire Him: this is the event of the relationship between the human person and Christ, wellspring of a desire that never ceases. This is the encounter that rekindles it, the capacity to always desire Him. What is the purpose of the providential encounter that God has caused us to have, if not to make us desire God? To desire Him continually, in the clear and realistic humility of our weakness.”¹⁰⁷

Christ’s capacity to reawaken our desire is the sign of His truth. Salvation does not mean the elimination of desire. To the contrary! As Saint Bernard wrote, “‘Seek His Face evermore,’ says the Psalmist, by which he implies, as it seems to me, that even after God has been found He shall not cease to be sought. For it is not by bodily locomotion that we have to seek God, but by fervent desire. Now this desire, so far from being extinguished by the happy attainment of its Object, is on the contrary greatly intensified. How is it possible that the consummation of joy should be the exclusion of desire? It would be more true to say that the former is to the latter as oil to flame, because desire is in truth a flame.”¹⁰⁸ Thus the longing for Christ is a good indicator of the journey we have made up to this point; it reveals the extent to which we have followed His initiative. Each of us can say whether today we feel more longing for Him or whether, on the contrary, we have drifted away from Him. It is not a matter of no longer participating in certain things, but of not being interested in Christ, not desiring Him as you did on the first day, not desiring Him more than you did on the first

¹⁰⁷ L. Giussani, “*Questa cara gioia sopra la quale ogni virtù si fonda*” [This dear joy upon which every virtue is founded], supplement with *CL-Litterae Communionis*, June 1993, p. 25.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon LXXXIV, “On Seeking God,” in *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in Saint Bernard of Clairvaux Collection, Aeterna Press, London, 2016.

day. Let's ask ourselves: today, are we more needy of His presence or more skeptical? Have we drifted away from Christ, having lived a relationship with Him in form only, because deep down He was not so necessary for us to live, or has our longing for Him grown? Do I seek Him more or do I seek Him less than in the beginning? If the desire to seek Him does not arise constantly from our innermost being, then faith is reduced to something that burdens life.

As we see, freedom is always in play. "Morality," said Fr. Giussani, "is a state of tension, of urgency. If morality simply meant to 'perform' something, there would be no tension, no urgency, for we usually try to do what is required of us. To say that morality is a state of tension means that we are in a position that is continually directed toward something that is Other. It means that we stand open to correction, so that we may enter more easily into a reality that is higher than us, 'as the heavens are higher than the earth.' As Jesus said, we cannot take satisfaction in anything we do, for 'when you have done all that you were ordered to do, say, 'We are worthless slaves' (Luke 17:10). Our satisfaction lies in affirming God and reaching out to Him. Indeed, before God's mystery we are poor, we are nothing: our foundation, our *ubi consistat* lies in our relationship with God and in obeying Him at every moment of our lives."¹⁰⁹

"Lately, what has been dominant in me" one of you wrote, "is a deep gratitude for Jesus' continual preference for my life, a gratitude and a surge of emotion that are also overcoming my sense of scandal at my increasingly needy heart: this lack is becoming the dearest thing I have, even if I do not always have the grace to realize it."

In the Mass that we will celebrate now, let's ask Christ to make us more aware of our longing and need for Him.

¹⁰⁹ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering our Ultimate Destiny*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 36.

HOLY MASS

Liturgy of the Holy Mass: 1Jn.1:5-2:2; Psalm 102; Mt. 11:25-30

**HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL EDOARDO MENICHELLI
ARCHBISHOP OF ANCONA-OSIMO**

The peace of the Risen Christ be with you.

He, living presence, who loosens the strong bonds of our cherished imprisonments and who, above all, like no one else challenges the desire for freedom with an obedience that imitates Him, who made obedient love His testament and glorious banner.

He, dearest friends, who made himself poor to understand me, poor as I am, may He satisfy your life and mine with true riches.

I am grateful to Fr. Carrón and to all of you for this invitation that causes me to pray with and for you, and that re-fastens in me, strengthens in me something that for you and for me has an identity of belonging and vocational direction.

I do not know whether I will be able to tell you something useful. I will tell you, albeit in a stuttering way, something about One in whom I believe.

At the center of my small reflection is Easter. Easter, in whose grace we live, reminds us and announces to us that credibility, or faith, we might say, is not the evidence of an idea or the possession of something, or an asphyxiating sum of rules, but is the manifestation of a Person. This is the spiritual core, intimate and mysterious, where one enters only through the love and freedom that it generates.

I totally identify with the theme of your Spiritual Exercises: “My heart is glad because You, Oh Christ, live.” I would add, “I encountered You, and You freed me.” Here, the spiritual experience of Saint Catherine, whose memory we celebrate today in the liturgy, helps us. It consists in rooting oneself in the intense love of Christ and for Christ, and of a love for the Church and the history that lives in her. Dear friends, in this union of love with Christ and with the Church, in Christ and in the Church, everything is attractive, everything is freedom. This encounter or, if you like, this discovery must be built, must make itself fascinating evidence, and toil, and freedom.

You might ask me, “what point have you reached? Are you aware of being free because you have everything, having Him? Do you perceive Him as contemporaneous to you?” I do not know what to tell you, dearest friends. I only can say that all this passes in and through faithfulness to

Easter and to its being the event of salvation, in which to reside and dwell, residing and dwelling in the human time that is given to us.

Naturally, we all know that Easter places my life as disciple in a combat in which, as we proclaim in the Easter liturgy, death and life contended, and from which the Prince of life, who died, emerged and reigns immortal. This is the radical point that helps each of us to cross through history, time, and things, and for this reason, as Pope Francis often tells us, the life of the believer and disciple is not a social status, not a way of living a spirituality that makes me good and perhaps absent from history. This life, the life of the disciple, is the testimony of a faithfulness and an obedience.

In this regard, I invite you to contemplate with me briefly three essential gazes of Easter.

The first: the recognizability of the Risen One. I do not know, but often I think we are more frightened by the joy of the Risen One—even the disciples said, ‘It’s a ghost’—than by our sorrowing for the Crucified One. Experiencing the Risen Christ is not the response of an emotion, nor the discovery of a hoped-for companionship. Rather, it is the newness that makes us glad, that creates an alluring wonder. It is the Beloved whom you will never lose. It is Destiny, the Mystery that fills you to overflowing. And this, dearest friends, for me is the first great freedom: the unthinkable is possible, the Dead One walks, now, with me.

The second gaze: accept the gift that the Risen One has given us. The gift of the Risen One is the Spirit. “Receive the Spirit,” said the Risen One to the eleven frightened disciples. The Spirit is the One who will enable you to recognize who He is. He is the One who will explain everything of the mystery of Christ. In the Spirit, nothing is structured, nothing is old, nothing smells like mold. Let yourself be carried by the Spirit, the gift of the Risen Christ, to make life bear fruit, to celebrate existence even if it is marked by the cross, to free my flesh from the seductions that it offers. Chaining or trying to chain the Spirit and His charisms is the most anti-Easter of sins. The announcement of the Risen One is not the fruit of our words, our alchemies, or our social or pastoral analyses, always seeking the latest new thing. The announcement of salvation passes through and in daily life, made fresh by the Spirit who animates it. I want to remind you about a little slice of the Gospel. The Risen Jesus does not reveal Himself in a sensational gesture, but in ordinariness. Remember the Lake of Tiberias? What did He say to the twelve who were there? “Children, have you caught anything to eat?”

I would like to tell you something, and I hope you will be merciful with me. It moves me even as I say it. You have a singular and fascinating

charism: don't let it get old; don't make it a fossil! Always ask: "What does the spirit of Easter want of me today, now?"

And there is the third gaze of Easter. Cleopas and his friend were close to despair, with no more desire, dead inside. "He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread," says the Gospel. The gesture of the Easter supper is the gesture that gives life. Let's remember it: "He took the bread." It was His body. "He broke it." This means, "he sacrificed Himself." "He gave it." His bread communicates and gives life. "Do this in memory of Me." This is not just any gesture, without meaning! "You have done it to Me." In His name and, strangely, to His advantage (this "His" must be understood). Here, believe me, is the Easter Eucharistic typology of the believing disciple and of the Church, the community of believers even if they are sinners. I like the expression of the beloved Fr. Giussani: "Poverty is born of charity," which means that if you love, you make yourself poor; or, in other words, if you love, you serve the poor Christ whom you see now!

In this regard, I want to leave you with an image that I saw a few days ago and that educated me. For some time now, in our diocesan museum in Ancona, we have had on display a small painting on the works of Mercy, by an unknown (for me) artist, Olivuccio di Cicarello. Looking at the various figures, I noticed that some of them had a crown of glory. I looked carefully and saw that the figures were all different. It was not always the same figure who had the crown of glory, and I asked why. The figures with the crown of glory were not Christ or some saint of charity. The crown of glory was on the head of those receiving the charity, because in them, Christ is present. For me, this is the believable testimony of the disciple. Don't grow old, accumulating! Be young, giving! Here, too, in this way, you live freedom.

Amen.

BEFORE THE BLESSING

Julián Carrón. Dearest Eminence, I would like to thank you on behalf of all the friends of the Movement for having accepted so joyfully to be here with us this morning to share your companionship and for presiding at this Eucharistic celebration in which you testified to us about what Easter means for you. We are grateful for this testimony because in it you give us something of yourself in sharing what you hold most dear. We thank you because you have always embraced us, wherever you have been. Our friends in Ancona always tell me about the esteem you have for the

grace the Lord has given us. We ask you, as you encouraged us this morning, to pray that we may be faithful, because you sense what a grace for the Church the gift of the charism given to Fr. Giussani is. For this, we want to truly thank you for everything.

Cardinal Menichelli. It is I who am grateful to you. I dearly hope that you can be the gladness and joy of the Church. Thank you.

* * *

Regina Coeli

Saturday afternoon, April 29

During entrance and exit:

Johannes Brahms, Symphony no. 4 in E minor, op. 98

Riccardo Muti—Philadelphia Orchestra

“Spirto Gentil” no. 19, Philips-Universal

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“I will manifest the power of My name through the gladness of their faces”

“Your eyes saw everything and spoke to the heart, / the words carried the fire and the desire to go.... to go.”¹¹⁰ If we pay attention to what we have sung, we discover how everything is connected: the desire to go is prompted by eyes that saw everything and spoke to the heart, and by words that carried the fire. The bond between things is internal. It is not stuck on externally, like something added.

So then, let’s try to grasp what emerges in the life of a person to whom an encounter like the one we described this morning has happened, a person who has been captured by those eyes full of mercy, who has found the answer to the thirst for meaning and the need for forgiveness. We will see how everything springs from the same source, from the depths of our own experience.

In *Evangelii gaudium*, Pope Francis stated that, “the biggest problem” in Christian life “is when the message we preach [...] seems identified with those secondary aspects which, important as they are, do not in and of themselves convey the heart of Christ’s message.” Indeed, the content of the Christian message is something else: it is an event that moves the “I” in its innermost depths. Without eyes, without words that kindle the fire, you are instead “forced” to go; you go only out of an effort of will, not the desire to keep hold of something you have seen, not because you want to live and follow that desire.

For this reason, we need to relate “what we say to the very heart of the Gospel which gives it meaning, beauty and attractiveness.”¹¹¹ The Pope

^{*} Cfr. *Confractorium* of the IV Sunday of Advent, *Missale ambrosianum juxta ritum Sanctae Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, fifth edition post typicam, Mediolani, Daverio, 1954.

¹¹⁰ C. Chieffo, “Andare...” [To Go...], in P. Scaglione, *La mia voce e le Tue parole [My Voice and Your Words]*, Ares, Milan, 2006, p. 272.

¹¹¹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, ¶ 34.

insisted: “Just as the organic unity existing among the virtues means that no one of them can be excluded from the Christian ideal, so no truth may be denied. The integrity of the Gospel message must not be deformed. What is more, each truth is better understood when related to the harmonious totality of the Christian message; in this context all of the truths are important and illumine one another. [...] The Gospel invites us to respond to the God of love who saves us [as we saw this morning]. Under no circumstance can this invitation be obscured!” If we take it for granted, if we obscure it because we consider it “already known,” whether we like it or not, Christianity inevitably becomes moralism, because the origin, the wellspring that makes it reasonable and possible is no longer there. “If this invitation does not radiate forcefully and attractively, the edifice of the Church’s moral teaching risks becoming a house of cards, and this is our greatest risk.” Christianity becomes an ethical system, moralism, but then it is no longer Christianity, and even if we continue using Christian words, it loses its truth. So then, continued the Pope, “[i]t would mean that it is not the Gospel which is being preached, but certain doctrinal or moral points based on specific ideological options. The message will run the risk of losing its freshness and will cease to have ‘the fragrance of the Gospel’.”¹¹²

Let’s look at a figure who can help us understand. Imagine Zacchaeus, to whom I referred this morning, stuck in the cogs of his own making. He had reduced his desire for fullness to the accumulation of as much money possible. But all he had obtained still was not enough, as seen by the fact that when he heard people talking about Jesus, about what He did and said, about His manner towards others, he could not hold back his “desire to go,” as the song said! Where? To see Him, even if it meant from the top of a tree. And when he heard, “Zacchaeus, come down, because today I’m coming to your house,” he grasped in those words the answer to all his need for salvation. In fact, as we said this morning, Zacchaeus was entirely conditioned by the mentality that surrounded him and penetrated to the marrow of his bones, making him think, “don’t kid yourself. For you, there is no salvation!” But when he had the surprise of hearing, “I’m coming to your house,” he received Jesus very happily. The Gospel reports Jesus’ words: “Today salvation has come to this house.”¹¹³ How can we tell that salvation came? By looking at what arose in Zacchaeus in response to that unexpected visit. “Behold, half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four

¹¹² *Ibid.*, ¶ 39.

¹¹³ Cf. *Lk* 19:1-10.

times over.”¹¹⁴ As you see, everything is connected. Imagine all the attempts the Pharisees had made to force him to change, shoving in his face all the errors he had committed. They did not budge him in the least. Jesus succeeded, with that gaze of mercy that went to the root of his heart. This is Christianity. When the wellspring is missing, it is no longer Christianity, even if we use Christian words.

The gladness that changes everything emerges only from the experience of mercy. For this reason, the Pope entitled his proposal to the Church and to the world *Evangelii gaudium*, the joy of the Gospel.

1. “The dear joy upon which every virtue is founded”

The nexus with the harmonious totality of the Christian message is not the outcome of intellectual artifice, some complicated mental itinerary or some particular effort of our own. It emerges entirely from the experience of the encounter with Christ. Fr. Giussani taught us to discover it in the experience of those who were the first to encounter Him, as described in the Gospel.

“Think about John and Andrew: all their life long, the most present present was the present of that day.” Let’s pay attention to this sentence. “The most present present was the present of that day.” It does not talk about a fact in the past! The most present present is something that always remains present. “Nothing is comparable, except the renewal of that day every day of their lives. They spent three years living the life of Riley not because they flew around the world or went to the moon, but because of the connection between Him and everything they did—looking at their wives, caring for the children, going fishing, friends—such that when they followed that man through the streets, there was no space for anything else in their hearts.”¹¹⁵

The same thing happened to Zacchaeus. Imagine him in silence, his ears full of the accent of that voice, and his heart overflowing with the word of Jesus, of One who had finally called him by name! It is evident how that call echoed in everything he did. Zacchaeus was magnetized by the presence of the One who had called him. “The Presence not of someone who looks elsewhere, but the presence of one who looks at you. This closeness turns your life upside down and transfigures it,”¹¹⁶ Zacchaeus’ life and ours.

¹¹⁴ *Lk* 19:8.

¹¹⁵ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, op. cit., pp. 363-364.

¹¹⁶ Notes from the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memores Domini Novices*, Le Pianazze, August 7, 1982, archived at the Secretariat of the *Memores Domini*, Milan.

I do not transfigure my life! This closeness is what turns life upside down, overwhelms and transfigures it.

When such a Fact happens, everything moves in reference to it. “For Zacchaeus,” continued Fr. Giussani, “that man became the horizon of everything, and, therefore, everything he thought, everything he judged, was an expression of that horizon and a function of it. That face—it will be interesting when we see it!—that gaze from below to above, and that word, and Zacchaeus who runs home: that was the horizon of everything for his life, and therefore he ideally judged, thought, and actuated everything in life starting from the horizon that Jesus had introduced into his life, drawing the point of departure from that horizon and as a function of it”.¹¹⁷ Everything that happened became an event within the horizon of that gaze. For Zacchaeus, the crucial thing in life—the thing that made him a different man from that day on, that is, more fully himself—was the repercussion, the enthusiasm he found within.

What was the source of that enthusiasm? The encounter with that Man. “Everything was there. All his life long, everything was there, was that man there, that man who later died, and whom he later saw raised from the dead...”¹¹⁸ In Zacchaeus, the enthusiasm was born from the welcomed and embraced repercussion—every day, every moment, when he walked through the streets, when he was silent, when he was muddled or confused, when he could not stand himself anymore—of the encounter with that Man, of the acknowledgement of His exceptional presence. In other words, enthusiasm was born of faith.

So then, “if we are conscious of He who is among us, [...] the toil does not frighten us. Like a mother when her child wakes her crying in the night: the toil does not frighten her, because faith gives enthusiasm. Enthusiasm is a word that means in some way to make everything divine. Making everything divine means looking at people and things in a certain way, feeling people and things in a certain way, trying to treat them with truth and never tiring, even if it kills you. Faith is what enthuses us.”¹¹⁹

Therefore, faith is the recognition of the Great presence of God made man. What kind of recognition is this? It is not like observing a statue, an image, or a monument in front of you. “Faith is recognizing You within the event of life, of the day, within of the event of the present, of the instant. Faith is the recognition of the Great, different presence that accompanies

¹¹⁷ Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985)*, op. cit., pp. 442-443.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

¹¹⁹ Giussani, “*Questa cara gioia sopra la quale ogni virtù si fonda...*,” op. cit., p. 38.

our small and mortal one.”¹²⁰ This free recognition keeps our sickness from becoming mortal, our weakness from becoming nothingness. It is not enough to affirm things, even if they are true: if this Presence does not determine my life from within, it means that it remains outside me. This free recognition must spring to life in order for His presence to vibrate in the innermost depths of our “I,” in what we do, not in what we do not do, in everything we touch, in everything we look at, in everything we undergo, in everything we bear, even when we make mistakes. This recognition is the source of all the joy of welcoming Him in your home, as it was for Zacchaeus. “‘And he received Him with joy,” says the Gospel.

“The dear joy upon which every virtue is founded is faith, is the joy of the encounter we have made, is the joy of the event that happened to us and is the event that happened to us, is the joy of the encounter we have made that makes us desire to change.” Fr. Giussani urged us to look at the unequivocal signs of the germination in us of this desire born of faith, of the impact of the encounter. “Is it true or not that many among us, all of us, have desires for the good that we did not have before, have thirst for purity that we did not have before, have yearning for justice that we did not have before, have a wonderstruck sense of beauty and the greatness of the miracle of gratuitousness or charity that we did not even dream of before? We began desiring these things because of what happened to us.” As happened to Zacchaeus, “the dear joy of faith, this precious gift of faith, that was warmed and revived in the encounter made, makes us desire to be better, makes us desire virtue, makes us desire a change in ourselves according to the will of God. And the desire for change—which is not true unless it becomes an entreaty to God—is already the move, the movement of the good in our life.”¹²¹

What changes? The relationship with things. Zacchaeus “was full of that gaze and, consequently, thinks, ‘Here, I’ll give all that I have taken.’”¹²² The miracle of that encounter totally transformed Zacchaeus’ life, and, therefore, he did not in the least fear losing anything, because the experience of being entirely filled by that name prevailed over all the priorities and objectives that had made up his life before Jesus called him. Saint Paul had the same experience: “Whatever gains I had, these I have come to consider a loss [...] I consider them so much rubbish.”¹²³

¹²⁰ *Ivi.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

¹²² Notes from the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memoires Domini Novices*, Le Pianazze, August 7, 1982, archived at the Secretariat of the *Memoires Domini*, Milan.

¹²³ *Phil* 3:7-9.

“The will to respond and to change, which can give rise to a different life, comes thanks to this merciful embrace,”¹²⁴ the Pope reminded us on March 7, 2015. In this case, as well, we can observe the connection among things. Only if the radical poverty we spoke of this morning—the thirst for meaning and the need for forgiveness that we are—finds true response, can there flow from within this unique experience of correspondence (from feeling Him within our innermost depths, as gratitude) material poverty as well. Because nothing is excluded by the newness that is Christ for the life of the human person. If it did not go so far as to touch everything, even our pockets, then the event of Christ would not be true, not because it would be too undemanding, but because it would not free us totally, it would not be sufficiently attractive to free us even from material wealth. That is, it would not respond deep down to our need and would leave a part outside that we would continue to think we could satisfy ourselves, with our own possessions. Instead, the truth of Christ, the truth that is Christ, is demonstrated for Zacchaeus in the fact that His presence has prevailed over everything, even to the point of reaching his pockets.

2. The virtue of poverty

“If we belong to Christ,” said Fr. Giussani – if Christ is present in life, if Christ is imminent in life – then we, like Zacchaeus, “do not belong to the things we have,” because there is something else, something greater, that prevails. This is what is called *poverty*. “Because wealth is the attachment to yourself, to your own measure, to your own image. [...] Poverty is rooted in the awareness that I exist not inasmuch as I have this or that.” Fr. Giussani warned us without cutting anybody any slack: “Look, the line ‘we equate our substance with what we possess’—which is the line that defines all the people of this world—is a terrible possibility for us, too.”¹²⁵ As soon as Christ begins to become a fact of the past, as soon as Christ no longer determines the present, as soon as Christ does not prevail and is not the most interesting thing about living, right away we begin to fill life with other things.

And then what happens? We shift the basis of our hope for happiness onto the possession of this or that. Instead, poverty is “not basing the hope of happiness on an object of our choosing. I doubt that any of you

¹²⁴ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

¹²⁵ ASAEMD, *Audiovisual recordings*, OR.AUDIO/1030, Lenten Retreat, afternoon lesson of February 19, 1983, transcript of the recording.

have heard this definition of poverty, which is profoundly contradictory to all the images of poverty you have formed. Poverty is a virtue that arises from [pay attention to the connections among things!] the deep ontology of the human person [that is, from the radical change Christ introduces into the life of the human person]: your being one with Christ, being the presence of Christ.”¹²⁶ This is what makes poverty possible.

To make this easy for us to understand, Fr. Giussani immersed himself, as was his wont, in the Gospel stories, imagining this situation: “If you had entered the house in those two or three hours when John and Andrew were there and had said, ‘Wait a minute, Lord, put everything on hold! John and Andrew, do you want something different? Are your happiness, your joy, your safety, your light in something else? Do you want anything different?’, they would have shoved you aside like when you are contemplating a beautiful painting and some idiot goes and stands in front of it. You grab him and shove him out of the way! If this presence is present, our hope cannot help but be based on it, not on something picked by us.”¹²⁷

Therefore, poverty “is made possible by the fact that Christ is there, that the dominant presence [of life] is Christ, that the object of my gaze is Christ.”¹²⁸ This is the opposite of moralism. Poverty is the fruit of His presence in our life, otherwise it is like “a house of cards” liable to collapse from one moment to the next. If poverty is not in us, reprimands and good intentions will be useless and will fail. Rather, we should ask Christ to draw us again, to seize us again; we should return to Him just as we are. If we do not do this, it means we have already begun to drift away. Who among us, at least for a moment in our life, has not been totally taken by Christ, by the encounter with Him? We would not be here. I assure you that none of us would be here! Therefore, we have to look at that moment, at the well-spring. When something is missing, we have to return there, like beggars, and ask on our knees—as we heard yesterday evening—that the Lord have mercy on us. Otherwise we will be at the mercy of everything, and we will never be happy. We will live like “loose canons.”

As we said at the Spiritual Exercises last year, a “particular story” is always “the keystone of the Christian conception of man.”¹²⁹ Neither a discourse nor a call to ethics has the power to take our whole being and generate another way of looking at and treating things. Only because

¹²⁶ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 345.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 345-346.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 388.

¹²⁹ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, op. cit., p. 59.

Christ is present and dominates my life, fills it, and responds to the expectancy of my heart, do I discover that I am free in relation to everything. Outside this experience of His presence that dominates, any appeals to poverty are ineffective, lack bite, lack the force to change us, and their realization obtains the opposite result from the one desired. For this reason, reducing Christianity to a set of ethics is a failure in every sense. Look at Zacchaeus. None of the Pharisees' appeals to change his lifestyle could budge him even a fraction of an inch. Each of us can find confirmation of this in our own experience.

Poverty is "not placing your own certainty in anything except a present, [...] in that which is *always* present to us." To be poor, it is necessary that Christ be present, that Christianity be a present event (and if it is not a present event, it is not Christianity). So here is the alternative: either Christianity is an event that takes everything of us, from within, that makes us have a unique experience of superabundance and, for this reason, frees us from everything, from the variety of crumbs in which we place our hope. Otherwise we will always be at the mercy of one or the other possession or project. But this would be the same as admitting that there is no answer to our thirst, to our need, because even if we achieved everything we have in mind, it would not be able to fulfill our life in a real way, as we have already experienced many times. It would truly be something to cry over, not because we are insufficiently coherent, but because it is impossible for us to be ourselves. If Christ did not exist, this would be the true disaster! It would mean that there is no chance of an answer to all our expectancy. Christ is a present presence. "Out of the corner of your eye, you see the presence of Jesus there, in every day, in our every engagement with the circumstances."¹³⁰ This recognition of His present presence is the foundation of our hope.

Fr. Giussani developed the Pope's insistence on the "organic unity existing among the virtues," of which I spoke earlier, in a fascinating way. He showed how poverty is born of hope, how it is "a consequence of hope's spreading all the way to its outermost limits. Hope spreads its limits to the furthest reaches of the world, all the way to the threshold of heaven; poverty is a consequence of hope."¹³¹ Why is poverty born of hope, as the fruit of faith? Because only those who have a grounded certainty in the future, through a grounded certainty in the present, that is, through the possession of Christ present, can avoid attaching themselves to what they

¹³⁰ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 345.

¹³¹ *Ivi*.

have or plan as the prospect of fulfillment for themselves, can avoid basing their substance and their expectations of happiness on a certain possession they have established. We see this in daily life, positively or negatively. One example among many: unless I am certain that my wife or husband will not dump me in a few years, saying, ‘I want nothing more to do with you,’ I will not choose that our assets be held in common, and I will definitely prefer the legal separation of our assets (fiscal considerations aside). Only if there is a hope for the future can you decide to share your assets in common, otherwise it will be impossible, because you cannot trust each other.

“I feel that I am impelled to make you understand this,” underlined Fr. Giussani, “because it is the most important thing [...]. Faith makes me recognize Christ present, I possess Christ and thus I am certain for the future, this is hope.” Only through this certainty in the future, which is born of the relationship with Christ and is called hope, can I avoid identifying my substance with what I own, can I be free from everything. So then, “what opposes this hope is any manner in which man fixes his gaze on something that is determined by him, chosen by him, either in the present or in the future—it’s all the same.” This is the great illusion, because there is nothing you possess “on which you can place your hope; you can’t place your hope for the future on any possession, because whatever you possess is taken away by tomorrow, by time or by a bicycle: the bicycle that violently hits the individual; he falls and, falling, knocks his head on the sidewalk and dies. The next day, instead of celebrating his wedding, you go to his funeral.”¹³² How true this is for each of us! Almost without noticing it, we yoke our expectations for the future to the achievement of this or that result, to the possession of that person, thing or situation.

So then, poverty is the consequence of hope, that is, of the certainty that Christ fulfills us, because what we desire is a present Presence (and if you do not already have experience of this, nobody will be able to detach you from what you possess). At the same time, it is the condition for “saving” this hope. “Poverty saves this hope for the future, it doesn’t obstruct this hope for the future, because it stops us from putting our hope in a *particular* present possession.”¹³³ This enables us to understand what the Pope wrote in his letter, that, “poverty is mother and wall.” The new relationship with everything that takes the name of poverty is, in fact, generative: “poverty generates, is a mother, generates spiritual life, life of holiness, apostolic

¹³² L. Giussani, *Is It Possible To Live This Way? Volume 2, Hope*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2008, p. 89.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

life.” Poverty generates life: it is not a misfortune. It is mother “and it is a wall; it defends,”¹³⁴ adds the Pope. It defends us from attachment to things.

Poverty, this non-possession that is born of faith through hope, is at the same time the one authentic possession, the opportunity for a true and fulfilled affirmation of the other. “Poverty can also be defined this way: as the affirmation of an other as the meaning of oneself. The affirmation of an other as your meaning, for yourself, is love, but dynamically, as it happens, it is poverty, because it liberates you from what you would otherwise cling to. [...] Poverty is a necessary condition for love (also because someone who feels rich does not need anything at that moment; he may use, but he will not love).”¹³⁵

Having described the origin of poverty, let’s ask ourselves: what enables me to recognize that Christ has happened to me, that my life is characterized by the certainty of His presence and thus by that certainty in the future that is called “hope”? How is lived poverty expressed?

Fr. Giussani indicated three points for us, which are three consequences or signs.

a) Freedom from things

Since Christ makes my heart burst with fullness, I am free from things. “Poverty is that **freedom from things**—also from faces—that happens as the consequence of the clear identification of that from which we can hope for happiness, of that Presence from which we expect everything, which is everything. ‘You were and are everything for me,’ said Ada Negri.”¹³⁶ That from which we can hope for happiness is a present Presence.

Therefore, the deep root of freedom from things is the relationship with Christ present. “If Christ gives you the certainty of fulfilling what He makes you desire, then you are extremely free from things [...]. You are a slave of nothing, you are bound to nothing, you are enchained to nothing, you depend on nothing: you are free. [...] Now, 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. Poverty is revealed as freedom from things.”¹³⁷

The foundation of poverty is the certainty that God fulfills what He makes us desire. “On what, then, does poverty found its value? On the certainty that it is God who fulfills; Christ fulfills the desire that He creates

¹³⁴ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016.

¹³⁵ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., pp. 369-370.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

¹³⁷ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Volume 2, Hope*, op. cit., p. 90.

in you: ‘He who began this good work in you will bring it to fulfillment tomorrow in the day of Christ.’”¹³⁸ Let’s pay attention to the words Fr. Giussani used. The foundation, he says, is certainty, not a line of reasoning or a moralistic effort, but a certainty—of future fulfillment, which is certainty of a presence—without which we inevitably become attached to everything. “Poverty happens because a greater certainty allows us to tear ourselves away from something we were bound up with until now.”¹³⁹

This freedom is seen, discovered, in the way we relate with things, with people, with what happens to us in life, as Saint Paul said: “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.”¹⁴⁰ But this kind of freedom is possible only if Jesus is “‘immanent,’ [...] present within living.” Only on this condition can you “leave what you would like to have: money, health, your girlfriend, career, honor, a political position.”¹⁴¹ Therefore, poverty is “the elimination of worldly possession, which means, to a greater or lesser extent, basing your hope (that is, the meaning of your life and the substance of your person) on what you possess or on what you plan.” This is what Jesus tells us. “Don’t worry about what you will wear or eat. Your Father in heaven knows what you need.” What does this mean? Does it perhaps mean “not to have clothes, and not to have food to eat? No, it doesn’t mean that. Does it mean not having make plans for clothing and food? No, it doesn’t mean that. It is a way of possessing these things. It is not basing our hope and the substance of life on them.”¹⁴²

Fr. Giussani was not inviting us to disdain things. In fact, he said that, “the definition of poverty that Jesus gives [...] is not the abolition or censure of something: of nothing, of nothing!” He reminded us of Saint Paul’s words that affirmed this openly. “Whatever is beautiful, whatever is good, whatever is praiseworthy, whatever gives fame, that obtains the praise of others, do all this.” Therefore, Fr. Giussani said, poverty is “the detachment from a *certain* way” of having people and things: “more precisely [it is] detachment from treating the person or thing you have in front of you not according to the universe (the design of God), not according to the

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³⁹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., pp. 369-387.

¹⁴⁰ *I Cor* 7:29-31.

¹⁴¹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., pp. 369-389.

¹⁴² ASAEMD, *Audiovisual recordings*, OR.AUDIO/1458, House meeting, Gudo Gambaredo, March 23, 1970, transcript of the recording.

sentiment God has, but according to the sentiment you have, or in other words the reaction you feel. [It is detachment from] following your reaction instead of the objective destination of the thing.” Therefore, poverty does not in any way mean emptying things of their value, but rather, it is “the detachment that looks with positivity at everything, without exception, at everything that happens.” I look at everything with positivity, but I do not base my hope on what is insufficient to give substance to my living, no matter how true and beautiful those people and things may be. This introduces a new way of looking at everything: respect. “Respect means looking at one thing while dominated by the presence of another—[...] looking at one thing while out of the corner of my eye following another” thing. In other words, “the Mystery that makes you dominates me as I look at you, as I think of you. This is detachment: you are not mine. In fact, my whole relationship with you is fully consumed in affirming you.”¹⁴³

b) Gladness

What is the sign of poverty understood as freedom from things? Gladness. “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.”¹⁴⁴ The more this certainty that God fulfills us becomes mature in us, the more it becomes habitual, and the more we become free from things, and the more we become glad. “Gladness does not flower in any other soil. [...] Gladness springs up exclusively in the soil of this awareness of poverty.”¹⁴⁵ Our gladness does not depend on what we possess, because we have been freed by the One who happened to us. The origin of our gladness is the recognition that Christ is here, that He is present.

But who can convince us of this, when all around us everyone says the opposite? You have to discover its truth in your own life. However, this discovery is only for the audacious, for those who take on the risk of verifying that the relationship with Christ present frees us and makes us glad, no matter what conditions we find ourselves in, as the person this morning testified to us. Otherwise, nobody will convince us and we will try to justify our possession of things.

Fr. Giussani tirelessly pointed to and demonstrated the dynamism from which gladness flows. “I am glad’ means ‘my heart is glad because God

¹⁴³ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., pp. 392, 395, 396.

¹⁴⁴ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Volume 2, Hope*, op. cit., p. 91.

¹⁴⁵ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 347.

lives.”¹⁴⁶ The fact that God lives, that He is present, assures me about the past, present, and future, and, therefore, makes me glad. “The consistency of life, the happiness that the future holds for us, is not in what is seen.” What appears and passes cannot guarantee something for the future. Thus, it cannot offer a sufficiently substantial foundation for gladness. “Hope cannot be placed in the fact that one has a wife, one has a fiancé. Gladness is not derived from that; contentedness, which is more or less passing, is derived from that, but not gladness, because gladness rests on a possession whose perspective never ends.” This explains why, even when we achieve our projects and obtain what we wanted, we are happy as long as the feeling lasts, but we are not glad. Gladness has a different source. So then, “there is no more beautiful formula for [gladness] than this: he who has, as if he did not have. Whether one has or doesn’t have is equal... but having something that lasts for eternity... no, this cannot be equal! If you have something that lasts for eternity,” this changes “love, man’s love for woman, love for a companion, love for parents, love for the sun that rises.”¹⁴⁷

c) Free because you lack for nothing

When we are based on something that endures, on the divine, we lack for nothing “because everything is yours.” Everything is yours. “How is it that everything is yours?” asked Fr. Giussani. “Because you have what you need, you have everything that is necessary for you.”¹⁴⁸ It is striking to see how close his words are to those of Saint Paul. “Everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Kephass, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.”¹⁴⁹

This is the poverty that the attraction of Jesus introduces into history, into our life, so that we do not remain constantly enchained to the outcome of our projects. His presence glues us to Him so much, fills us with His fullness to such a point, that it makes us free and glad, because we lack for nothing.

3. From the initial impetus to the battle of life

Let’s take a further step. As we said at the beginning, the joy of faith unleashes a desire to change. However, none of this is automatic. For Zacchaeus, as for all those whom Jesus called and involved with Himself, it was not automatic. Zacchaeus, Fr. Giussani said, “was filled with that gaze, and

¹⁴⁶ Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù*, op. cit., p. 281.

¹⁴⁷ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way? Volume 2, Hope*, op. cit., p. 94.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

¹⁴⁹ *I Cor.* 3:21-23.

afterwards, as a consequence, he thinks, ‘Here, I’ll give away everything I took.’ But it is a consequence that lasted his whole life long because it is not automatic.” The desire to belong to Him is total from the very beginning, but carrying it out is not automatic, and, in fact, it continues all your life long. Therefore, nobody should measure himself, because in the relationship with the Mystery there is no measure. “Each of us knows the impetus with which we give ourselves, and then afterwards draw back; therefore, it is the battle of life. But by now the thing that makes life transfigurable has become a fact.” We already have the “virus”—a beneficial virus, obviously—within us. His presence has already opened a breach in our life. “It is the opposite of the episode of the rich young man (*Mt* 19:16-30) to whom Christ said, ‘Come with Me,’ that is, I want to be close to you. And, the Gospel says, ‘he went away sad.’ The rich young man, sad.” These are the two options that emerge from all we have been saying and that we see so often in our world: “Either transfigured or sad, because you cannot stand still in the same place you were before Christ called.” After Christ called us, came towards us, we cannot remain as we were before. “Either transfigured or sad [...] either you become sad [...] or you are transfigured”¹⁵⁰ by the newness that Christ introduced into life. In fact, you can be rich in money, projects, and ideas, and yet still be sad.

But this transfiguration is not mechanical, nor does it happen once and for all. Zacchaeus did not automatically eliminate all his mistakes. “When Zacchaeus felt bowled over by that gaze and that invitation, he said, ‘I’ll give half of my goods and four times as much to those I’ve robbed,’ but maybe he lost his temper two days later with his wife, and seven days later with his children, and the horizon evoked and defined by that face and voice that had called him, by that man who had come to his house, caused him acute pain at having mistreated his wife. And the next day, let’s say, he asked her forgiveness, or maybe he did not say anything to her. But the next day, two hours later in the day than the last time, he lost his temper again. So, if consistency is the rule of the ethical journey, of the moral journey, well, we are not capable of being consistent! [...] Consistency is a grace. It is the renewal of the surprise of the encounter with something that is more you than you, without which you would not be yourself.”¹⁵¹

In the encounter with Jesus, the method was put in Zacchaeus’ hands: to let a presence enter, rather than trusting in moralistic efforts that had

¹⁵⁰ Notes from the Spiritual Exercises of the *Memores Domini Novices*, Le Pianazze, August 7, 1982, archived at the Secretariat of the *Memores Domini*, Milan.

¹⁵¹ Giussani, *Qui e ora*, op. cit., pp. 432- 433.

already proved incapable of changing him. As I said earlier, Christianity is an event. And when it becomes moralism, its nature changes. It is no longer Christianity, even if we continue to use Christian words.

Remember what the Pope told us in Saint Peter's Square? "Christian morality is a response, it is the heartfelt response before the surprising, unforeseeable—even 'unfair' according to human criteria—mercy of One who knows me, knows my betrayals and loves me just the same, appreciates me, embraces me, calls me anew, hopes in me, has expectations of me. Christian morality is not a never falling down, but an always getting up, thanks to his hand which catches us."¹⁵²

The presence of Christ introduces a battle into life. Why? Fr. Giussani says, "Christianity is such a gift given to our nature" that the Christian, "that is, the person who lives conversion, and thus lives the awareness of belonging to Christ, [...] who lives the memory of Christ, is another person. [...] It is another birth." And here is the problem, because even though this birth has happened, even though this encounter has occurred, "we remain made of flesh and bone, we remain also born of our mother and father. 'In sin my mother conceived me' [...]. It is true, we remain in the sepulcher, suffocated by the bodily limits in which we continue to be born, and this second birth is like something extraordinarily extraneous." Therefore, we see "this phenomenon by which, since faith was given to us, and in a truly gracious and providential encounter (who knows how the Lord God did it!), in certain moments our soul grows and rises. In front of the call, our soul is 'reawakened,' and moves, but then the gaze of everyday life returns to being all glabrous, all homogeneous, all bounded, all suffocated. It is as if we never join these two moments of thought and of gaze upon ourselves, except from the outside." As we were saying yesterday, the two moments do not join except "moralistically [or formalistically], in the sense that, since we have faith, certain things cannot be done, and certain other things must be done." And so, "what you do or do not do is not the expression of a new consciousness (conversion), of a truth of yourself, but is like a toll paid, rendered to something external, even if devotedly and profoundly acknowledged and esteemed."¹⁵³

At this point we can understand better the import of what Fr. Giussani said in the passage quoted last night. "No expression of a movement like ours is of worth if it does not invoke the memory of the presence of Christ

¹⁵² Francis, *Address to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.

¹⁵³ See here, p. 15.

in the heart of the concrete vicissitudes we live. Rather, it worsens the situation of the human, because it promotes formalism and moralism.”¹⁵⁴

The choice, which hearkens to the reason for battle, is clear: “Either God is life, or it is as if He is outside our door.”¹⁵⁵ Here, once again, the mystery of human freedom comes into play. (“We want him to gain this salvation by himself,”¹⁵⁶ Péguy wrote.) How? “The objection of our carnality, the objection of the sepulchral weight of the limits of daily things, that make us live in indifference, in cynicism, or in disgust and boredom, according to the moment or our mood, all this must be daily bowled over and run through, challenged, challenged now, challenged by Christian hope.”¹⁵⁷ Otherwise, formalism spreads among us, and the newness we have encountered does not change everyday life. This necessarily involves our freedom.

This is why the battle is constantly ongoing. Only those who remain steadfast in the faith will be able to see the triumph, the victory of Christ in life, accepting the human rhythm of change, which passes through our freedom. It is at this level that we can understand the importance and purpose of our being together, as Fr. Giussani reminded us in the book of the Spiritual Exercises. “The Fraternity is simply a help to live the truth of yourself in everything you do, [...] and the truth of myself in everything I do is that I belong to an Other. [We often think]: ‘But me, like this?!’ Yes, me, like this, just as I am; I belong totally to an Other.”¹⁵⁸ Even if I continue to make mistakes, what has happened to me will never be erased. It is an event that establishes itself deep down at the roots of my being. I have been marked by this encounter forever. We realize this when someone abandons the Fraternity, but cannot help but miss what he lived there—if he lived something of real significance.

We are together because we have the hope that, “the consciousness [...] of belonging to Christ” will invade “everyday things, everyday life, everyday actions, in family, at work, in the Movement, in society.” If this is not the case, Christianity will lose all its interest for me, because, as Fr. Giussani said, it will end up “suffocated in cynicism, satisfied superficiality, or the desperation of boredom.”¹⁵⁹

“In order to hope, my child, you must have obtained, received a great grace,” wrote Péguy. The hope that our daily life will be invaded, in all its

¹⁵⁴ See here, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ See here, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ See here, p. 5.

¹⁵⁷ Giussani, *Una strana compagnia*, op. cit., pp. 195-196.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

aspects, by Christ comes from being very happy, from having received a great grace. Fr. Giussani affirmed right away: “My friends, the great grace is this reality in which we are: it is what the Church has called Fraternity. It is this experience of faith.” All of us are here because, “at a certain moment, there was something inexpressible; there was a perception, a presentiment, an emotion; there was a persuasive accent. This is the great grace that we have obtained, according to all the discretion with which God normally moves in the life of the person, according to the discretion with which the freedom of God respects our freedom. The grace of faith has been given to us; we had a presentiment of it as something profoundly persuasive and pertinent, or rather, as identical to life. We should be very happy about this! This is the point. We should be very happy about this because without faith even the face of a beloved woman (as Chesterton said) would be like a name written with black chalk on a black wall in a dark room.” Our hope consists in the fact that, “having begun it, He brings His work to completion in us. We just have to let Him enter through a small opening, through the small opening of that ultimate devotion, esteem, and intelligence that are the reason we do not throw Him out entirely. It is necessary to allow Him to penetrate through this crack.”¹⁶⁰

How can we be always aware of that Presence from which we expect everything? Giussani showed us a simple and sure road: “Repeating gestures of consciousness, and paying attention to the place where Christ Himself awakens our consciousness.”¹⁶¹

a) Therefore, the first indication for the journey is to repeat gestures of awareness. First of all, prayer; that is, asking and remembering, the constant renewal of your awareness of what you are: one with Christ. “This renewal of awareness is not automatic.” Freedom is always in action. “You have to want it. You have to desire it! Prayer may seem arid for you,” and many times it may be so. “It can seem like licking pumice, but as you continue praying with constancy, it is as if the arid things in you (the pumice) become sweet to the palate. The human person and the universe would seem like an enormous pile of arid pumice stones if you did not ask to know and taste, if your primary intention was not to ‘make myself aware of this; remind myself of this as often as possible during the day.’ This is prayer! [...] This is how a person becomes a person, by constantly repeating [...] gestures of awareness.”¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-198, 202.

¹⁶¹ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?*, op. cit., p. 346.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 348-349.

b) The second indication is attention to the vocational companionship. “The God who makes the sky and the stars established the place where you gain awareness. What is this place? The vocational companionship, this vocational companionship that has as its place, in the literal sense of the word, the sphere of time and space (space: where you plant your feet; time: hours and minutes) where the companionship gathers, in which the vocational companionship expresses itself. The vocational companionship, by expressing itself, calls you to this. If you are distracted, it does not call you to anything, but if you are not distracted, if you want to be yourself, to become yourself, you recognize that the companionship is there to call you to this. Would we have gotten together if not for this? [...] You cannot be in the companionship, or think of it, without in some way being called to this deeper truth.”¹⁶³

Implicit here is a third suggestion, which comes from the second: living your circumstances in a new way. In fact, with its call, the companionship uncovers the meaning of circumstances, and, in this way, they become a constant call to be aware of His presence. “The companionship calls you to an admirable effect, reminds you slowly that everything has this meaning, everything is a call to this, everything: the flower in the field, the fruit on the tree, the child that is born...” Jesus taught His disciples to look at all of reality as a sign of His presence. “The vocational companionship accustoms you to making every moment and circumstance—of work, of travel, of silence, of play, of time passing, on the tram, or on the train [when you find someone particularly annoying, when you find someone particularly likeable, when you listen to music]—a call to the truth of your ‘I,’ to this participation in being.”¹⁶⁴ Everything points to the memory of Him.

Being increasingly invaded by Christ is the only thing that gives rise to a new way of treating things: poverty, which means using things for destiny. But this way of using them is something we have to learn. “We are called to do a work [...] poverty is not automatic [...]. Poverty is our initiative. If it is not our initiative, it is not poverty. Poverty is an act of freedom, not something you are subjected to. You grab onto it in order to journey, to build, to respond to the vocation of God.”¹⁶⁵

How do we educate ourselves to this poverty? In this case, as well, Fr. Giussani’s suggestion is simple and easy to practice: “Repeating gestures of awareness.” They are gestures that, together with School of Community, have always characterized our journey.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 349.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 350.

¹⁶⁵ *Ivi.*

The common fund

“Monthly support of the common fund of the entire Fraternity, which implies sacrifice, is in function of an increase in the consciousness of poverty as an evangelical virtue. As St. Paul said: ‘We have nothing yet we possess everything.’ The true way to possess everything is to be detached from everything. One can pledge even a few coins, but to pay them with faithfulness has a fundamental value as a reminder, because it is both a concrete and unitary gesture. Whoever does not commit himself to this directive may not be considered part of the Fraternity.”¹⁶⁶

I am amazed at how peremptory Fr. Giussani was in this statement, which shows us the close relationship he saw between the gesture of the common fund and belonging. “Nothing demonstrates one’s belonging,” one’s desire to belong, “like faithfulness to the common fund.” This is why we remind each other ceaselessly about the value of this gesture. In addition to offering us such a specific proposal on the theme of poverty, Fr. Giussani also gave us tools that are accessible to everyone, so that, in a simple and easy way, we can be educated to this dimension of the Christian life. In response to the invitation to donate to the common fund, each of us should ask ourselves: “Why do I donate? Why in the world should I do it?” In order to respond, you have to keep in mind everything we have said. “Therefore, the problem of the common fund, as the easiest aspect of *ascesis*, of belonging, has to be recalled to our attention, at a time that is psychologically unfavorable and onerous in terms of the responsibility we have taken upon ourselves. Tell your friends that giving to the common fund is a form of prayer: it is an expression of *pietas*.”¹⁶⁷

Knowing how easily we slide into being schematic or going through motions, Fr. Giussani explained: “This is the symbolic and educational value of the sacrifice of the ‘common fund.’ There may be a person who cannot do anything else and has this as his offering to Christ, as his participation, as a demonstration of his desire to be available to this entity that he sees as great, this entity that Christ has created in His Church and that we call by our name, Communion and Liberation. There may be somebody who is not able to do anything other than make the sacrifice of contributing to the common fund, and this is literally like his prayer. But if he puts his heart into this, even those who do the minimum, only

¹⁶⁶ L. Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, p. 253.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90.

the minimum, but with their hearts in it, absolutely cannot help tending also to do the maximum.”¹⁶⁸

As one of you wrote, “Dear friends, recently my wife and I received an unexpected sum of money. Fortunately, we do not have any urgent material needs, and we have learned that everything that is given to us has a purpose, which is the opportunity to make Christ known to everyone.” Look where he gets the reason for making the offering. If it is not connected to all the rest, the common fund is reduced to a tax to pay, one that people would willingly do without. The letter continues: “The Fraternity is ‘our house,’ the solid point where we experience the embrace of Christ and from which we embrace the world.” Do you see? He did not read all the texts I have just quoted, but he experienced what is described there: in this place (“our house”) this person has learned to embrace the whole world. “And so we thought of making an extra donation to the common fund.” If we do not connect things to the wellspring, every gesture becomes extrinsic. Fr. Giussani proposed the common fund to help us conceive of and live every detail in connection with the whole.

In recent months, we sent a letter about updating the personal data of Fraternity members. In fact, for several years we have received no communications from many people who are members of the Fraternity. It may seem like a formality, but the answers we received were surprising. Some communicated that they had taken another road, and some instead expressed the desire to renew a relationship. Some wrote us about a situation of solitude, and others expressed a certain degree of shame because they can give very little to the common fund. All this tells us how much we need to be close to each other.

I’ll read you a few of the answers we received. “I had stopped paying my common fund contribution, but when your email arrived, I once again felt a sense of belonging to that ‘something’ that I encountered years ago. I had simply ‘gotten lost’ in the difficulties of my life.” This is the purpose of our being together: you can get lost, but there is always someone who knocks on your door.

Another of you wrote that, unfortunately, he could not come to the Spiritual Exercises because of work, and then added: “Regarding the common fund, I stopped paying it because of financial difficulties, and then, over time lost track of it in my distraction, forgetting this small gesture that taught me the importance of sharing.”

There are those who are facing difficulties: “Unfortunately, the current economic crisis has forced me to make drastic choices [...]. I haven’t spo-

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

ken with my fraternity group about it; my pride would not allow me to participate in the Spiritual Exercises either, because of lack of money.”

And then there are those who feel solitude, but at the same time want to begin again. “Let’s say that I am very distracted, but when I received the message I was saddened by my negligence. I would like to try to take the situation in hand and begin again.”

Some found that their contributions had stopped because of a mix-up at the bank. “It’s obvious that this doesn’t justify me, but these things happen because of my human weakness.” Don’t be embarrassed, friends! This is why we permit ourselves to discretely knock on your door every so often to continue to remind you of the reason we are together.

Taking the proposal of the common fund seriously can enable you to discover something about yourself and for yourself. “After almost eight years of very hard short-term contract work, I have been hired as a physician. Right away, I thought of increasing my contribution to the common fund out of gratitude. During these years, this place has made my unstable work situation the opportunity to ask myself about the true basis of my self-worth.” Look at the connection she makes: “A paycheck or a certain kind of contract is not what establishes my value, but rather, the infinite nature of my heart.” Fr. Giussani proposed this simple gesture so that each of us could understand the value of living more deeply.

Another person wrote: “This evening I admitted to myself that postponing payment of the common fund in hopes of better economic times is of no use to me.” It is not a problem of quantity, friends, but of faithfulness. Nobody should judge anybody about the amount of their contribution. What we insist on is faithfulness to it, because this is what helps us reach awareness of ourselves and of what constitutes our substance. “I took seriously the indications that you gave at the Spiritual Exercises: ‘A little is enough: the important thing is constancy.’ This enables me to embrace my reality now with mercy.” We just need to accept being embraced as we are: this is what ‘enables me to embrace my reality now with mercy. I am increasingly certain. Even if I don’t understand everything, even if everything is mysterious, my experience tells me that an immense good for me is in action here!’”

There was also a person who expressed gratitude for a scholarship received from the Fraternity: “I’ll never be able to adequately express my gratitude to you for making me see that every work of the Movement reminds us of the fact that, ‘He wanted to come among us, when He could have simply settled for giving us help,’” as the Christmas poster said. This is the thing that saves not only the need of the current moment, but all of life.”

Finally, a friend wrote me: “I haven’t paid my common fund contribution for a while, not for lack of money, but out of forgetfulness and laziness. Since my boyfriend and I decided to get married a few weeks ago, things have changed.” It is striking that someone should think about the common fund when she is about to get married. Why did it occur to her? “If I hadn’t encountered Christianity through the Movement, I never would have gotten married. Right away, I savored the communitarian dimension, the dimension of the Church, in relation to my and our decision to say ‘yes’ in front of God. I owe everything to this place. For this reason, today I paid my monthly contribution to the common fund. I don’t have much of an income, but I decided to increase my contribution, doubling it, and it still seems like a small amount! I would give so much more for this encounter that has changed my life, and that I hope, through the missions and the life of the Movement, will change the lives of other young people like me.”

Her words are the living confirmation of the truth of what Fr. Giussani told us: conceiving of your own life, “as a function of the Movement is nothing other than the practical translation of the missionary impetus, because the Movement is nothing other than the way, our way: the way in which we have been introduced to live life and the world according to the heart of the Church.” The gesture of the common fund is to educate each of us “to conceive of your own life, family life, your own profession, the education of your children, free time, your own energies, your own money, in function of the Movement, that is, in function of something bigger, where you act in total freedom, because without freedom it is not a human response. A response of 1% in freedom is better than an apparent response of 50% without freedom, or even 100% without freedom.” Therefore, the common fund “translates into basic terms – even humdrum terms, so concrete are they – the link you feel and live between everything that you are and do and this thing that is bigger than you, which is the participation in the Church, or Movement, through which your small person with your small daily gestures [...] become a collaborator in a great design.”¹⁶⁹

I want to remind everyone that there is *one* common fund, just as there is *one* Fraternity. The common fund has *one* goal: to build the work that is the Movement (which, in parentheses, supports many initiatives and faces many needs). As we have been taught, this is much more to the glory of God and comes before support of any other initiative, precisely because

¹⁶⁹ FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION, Milan (FCL), *Audiovisual documentation*, Assembly of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation of the Marche Region, Loreto, January 15, 1984.

the Movement is the origin from which we receive everything, the source of our gratitude.

In this regard, I'd like to read you what a friend wrote: "Now we come to my not contributing to the common fund. I've never truly faced the question. Since I founded a [charitable] work, every year I contribute quite a lot to it. Certainly, I could have continued donating a symbolic amount to the Fraternity, but I thought that would be a farce." But no! It would not be a farce at all. The reason for faithfulness to the common fund is so that you do not forget the origin, the source of your generosity, my friend. We have to be aware of this, because if generosity is detached from the origin, sooner or later it will end. This holds true for any gesture. Detached from its origin, everything becomes just a matter of empty forms and is lost over time. It's like when you cut off a radiator from the source of heat.

The origin is the One who gives you everything you are and have! This holds for everyone, even for those in grave difficulties, as a friend from Venezuela testified, whose home country is undergoing a truly dramatic situation. While he was on a trip here in Italy, at the end of a meeting, some friends from one of our communities offered him some money, wanting to contribute to the needs of the friends in Venezuela. But he did not want the money, and asked them to donate it to the Fraternity common fund, saying: "Without the Fraternity, my work would have no future." This is an example of how the gesture of the common fund is truly educational for our awareness of belonging.

In this sense, I want to remind you that the first thing to have in mind is the Fraternity common fund; the second is the concrete needs of the community in which we live; and the third is the needs that God places in front of us as a provocation to our charity, according to the discernment that each person must exercise.

The gesture of the common fund is a sign of the freedom of the self in action, who is able to grasp the connections between things. Otherwise dualism wins out, and things do not last forever. Through the proposal of a simple and free gesture, Fr. Giussani wanted to make us understand the connection with the source of everything, without which any kind of generosity would be lessened. It is a step of awareness that we have to take constantly.

Only this journey can allow us to respond to the Pope's invitation at the end of his letter: "In a world lacerated by the logic of profit that produces new poverty and generates the culture of waste, I never cease invoking the grace of a Church that is poor and for the poor."¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016.

Charitable work

We are constantly educated to have this attitude through the gesture of charitable work. “Christ made us understand the deep reason for all this, revealing the ultimate law of being and of life: charity. The supreme law of our being is to share in the being of others, to put ourselves in common. Only Jesus Christ says all this, because He knows what every thing is, what God is from whom we are born, what Being is. I can understand the whole word ‘charity’ when I think that the Son of God, in loving us, did not send us His riches as He could have done, revolutionizing our situation, but instead became miserable like us: He ‘shared’ our nothingness. We go to do ‘charitable work’ to learn to live like Christ.”¹⁷¹

Charitable work is a simple gesture, within everyone’s reach, to enable everything we have said up to now to emerge from the innermost depths of our living. It is a gesture for learning to share, embracing Pope Francis’ reminder about a risk to which we are all exposed: “Whenever our interior life becomes caught up in its own interests and concerns, there is no longer room for others, no place for the poor. God’s voice is no longer heard, the quiet joy of His love is no longer felt, and the desire to do good fades. This is a very real danger for believers too. Many fall prey to it, and end up resentful, angry and listless. That is no way to live a dignified and fulfilled life; it is not God’s will for us, nor is it the life in the Spirit which has its source in the heart of the risen Christ.”¹⁷²

In order to be able to testify to the authenticity of the Christian life with courage, as the Pope asked us to do in his letter, “reverting to the past” is not sufficient. Only something present can change us. Therefore, only if a new beginning happens over and over incessantly can we discover in ourselves that “courageous beginning directed at tomorrow,” of which the Pope speaks. This brings to life “the revolution of tenderness and love”¹⁷³ that moves us to return constantly to our roots, as Fr. Giussani always encouraged us, so that our belonging does not become formalism or moralism, to the point that we lose interest.

As we see, all that we have been saying involves the authenticity of the Christian life, and thus the fullness of our existence. Only in this way can we go to the poor, “not because we already know that the poor person is

¹⁷¹ L. Giussani, *Il senso della caritativa: Scopo, Conseguenze, Direttive* [The Meaning of Charitable Work: Purpose, Consequences, and Directives], Società Cooperativa Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2010, p. 7.

¹⁷² Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, ¶ 2.

¹⁷³ Francis, *Letter to Julián Carrón*, November 30, 2016.

Jesus, but to return to discovering that that poor person is Jesus,”¹⁷⁴ as the Pope wrote us. “It is essential,” we read in *Evangelii gaudium*, “to draw near to new forms of poverty and vulnerability, in which we are called to recognize the suffering Christ, even if this appears to bring us no tangible and immediate benefits. I think of the homeless, the addicted, refugees, indigenous peoples, the elderly who are increasingly isolated and abandoned, and many others. Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all,”¹⁷⁵ who is called to embrace and accompany every fellow human being.

His is an invitation to openness, attention, and closeness without limits. It seems to me that with this, the Pope is calling us to that typically Christian attitude that Fr. Giussani made familiar to us: ecumenism, the positive embrace of everything and everyone that is born as a repercussion from being “totally possessed by a love,” by “the love of Christ ‘brimming over with peace.’”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴ *Ivi*.

¹⁷⁵ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, ¶ 210.

¹⁷⁶ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 117.

Sunday morning, April 30

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Symphony no. 40 in G minor, KV 550

Frans Brüggen—Orchestra of the 18th Century

“Spirto Gentil” no. 36, Philips-Universal

Don Pino. The morning is the beginning of the drama of two freedoms: my ability to entreat You, beg You, and recognize You every day is born from Your response, Your initiative toward me, Lord.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Julián Carrón. Good morning to everyone!

Davide Proserpi. Gratitude is the first sentiment that emerged from the over one thousand two hundred questions that arrived, and that we read, one by one. Gratitude, as we know well, has the same root as grace, because it is the fruit of grace. The heart that is open—this is what it was put in our chest for—the heart that awaits expectantly, recognizes the gift that has been given to us in these days. Why are we grateful? Because once again we have been brought, accompanied to see what Christ is capable of doing in our life. Like the first two disciples, we have come here today with many questions, but surely one of the first ones is: “Who are You?” We have heard the answer: “Come and see.” That beginning lives again today, just as it did at the beginning. This is the main reason for our gratitude, as the sign that the charism given to us for the entire Church is still alive, as Cardinal Menichelli reminded us in his homily yesterday. Because it remains alive only in this beginning happening anew. What happened in the beginning? What happened for me, and for each of us, at the beginning of everything, at the historical beginning, that is, when we had the encounter? The irruption into my life, into our life, of a newness that generated an unimaginable attraction, because we were able to see, were able to encounter the face of Jesus present, with His human features.

The second word that describes our sentiment today is “desire,” the desire not to lose this beauty, and thus the desire to get to work, to pursue

things more deeply, to know more, to see more. The questions we received talk about the repercussion provoked in us by the proposal that was made. Almost all of them arise from a desire to understand without reducing what was said to us to the point where we already are and to what we already know.

Precisely for this reason, today we begin to help each other understand. Naturally, this work will also accompany us in the months to come, so we should not be discouraged if it seems we have not understood everything right away, because we can do this over time.

We'll begin with two questions related to the topic proposed the first evening: the relationship between freedom and salvation.

"Friday you defined our freedom as necessary for our salvation. What do you mean by salvation?"

"I would like to understand better this salvation that you insisted on, because I see it as something far away in time that will arrive at the end of my life. Why should it be interesting for me now, in the challenges I face day to day?"

Carrón. Precisely because of what David just said, salvation is the thing that is the least far from our life. It is the closest. The great grace we have received is the news that God has overcome the distance. A thing that would have remained far from us, or that would only have concerned the future, has made itself present. We are here because it has made itself present. You would have to tear away the experience you have lived in order to say that salvation is far away. We have so much growing to do in our awareness of how salvation has begun to enter into the innermost depths of our life and of how it already fills it with light, fullness, joy, and gratitude! We can see in the songs we sing that it has begun to enter in. They are not the musical "decoration" of the Spiritual Exercises, but the expression of a human experience that is born from the closeness of this salvation. "Cry no more for what you did and didn't want to," we sang. "Cry no more for the want that went undone. / Cry no more for the love that you said 'no' to. / Cry no more, a slave is now a son."¹⁷⁷

When we lose the awareness of a Presence that entered into our life and changed it, salvation seems far away, and so all the rest dominates in us: plans or regrets, measures and images. But when the encounter dominates, we can say in a true, fulfilled sense what we have just heard in the song: "If you weren't here / poor me... / I would be something dead / an

¹⁷⁷ R. Veras and R. Maniscalco, "Cry no more," *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 324-325.

extinguished candle / a useless woman...¹⁷⁸ Who indeed can say this with truth? Whom can we say this about, if not the One who vanquished the distance, who became presence in our life and who enables us to savor salvation now, already? If we do not start from the experience we have had, we cannot grasp the meaning of the questions that are asked. For this reason, the Gospel does not provide a definition of salvation, but rather shows it happening. Let's return once again to the example of Zacchaeus. That man desired to encounter someone who could respond to the thirst that not even all the money he had accumulated could quench, someone who could redeem all his inadequacy, all his mistakes. Therefore, as soon as Jesus approached and looked at him, speaking to him, Zacchaeus found himself in front of a Presence that affirmed him, esteemed him, in a way that had never happened before in his life, and this was the first sign for him of the closeness of salvation. He had an experience of correspondence with himself, with his thirst, that he would never have imagined. This is the wellspring of the desire for change. That encounter freed him from attachment to his treasure. Zacchaeus began to detach himself from the dearest thing he had had up until that moment: money. "I will reimburse what I have taken." The Gospel relates that when Jesus entered Zacchaeus' house, He said: "Today salvation has come to this house."¹⁷⁹ Salvation was close for that man, really close. The more alert and conscious we are of the drama of living, the easier it is to recognize salvation. Never had Zacchaeus experienced such gladness. This was the same thing experienced by Manzoni's Unnamed character, who wept for joy. Everything becomes new and different.

There is a way of asking, "what do you mean by salvation?" that makes us understand that we have kept the word, but detached it from the experience of living. How right Fr. Giussani was! "We Christians in the modern climate have not been detached directly from the Christian formulas, from the Christian rites, from the laws [...]. We have been detached from the human foundation,"¹⁸⁰ torn away from experience. And then we no longer know the meaning of the words.

Therefore, it is not a matter of re-explaining what salvation is, but rather of leaving the question open—our human question—so that we can discover its meaning from the depths of our lived experience! Nobody can

¹⁷⁸ "Se tu non fossi qui" [If you weren't here], lyrics and music by M. Terzi and C.A. Rossi, 1966. Song performed by Mina.

¹⁷⁹ See here, p. 53.

¹⁸⁰ See here, p. 16-17.

make us understand what salvation is with a discourse, just as they cannot convince us to be Christians “with a cold reading,” with an explanation. Never!

Christianity is not a line of logic, a discourse, or a list of things to do. It is an event. To understand its essential relationship with freedom, as the first of the two questions asked, we need to look at Zacchaeus once again. After salvation came to his house, Zacchaeus began to look at what might seem to be an obstacle, and might us exclaim, “do I still have to use my freedom?!” in an entirely different way. What would his answer be? “But it is precisely the freedom that I discovered in the encounter with that Man, in all its value, and that I want to use much more!” Finally, a passion for freedom! Not a burden of freedom. Christianity exalts our freedom. We begin to have a positive gaze on everything, friends! Salvation is the gaze that reached Zacchaeus and has reached us, too, that makes life different and makes us look at everything with an ultimate positivity. “My heart is glad because You live, Oh Christ.”

Prosperi. “How can you love and respect the freedom of the other when you see your husband who, even though he has had the encounter and was seized by Christ, is blocked and does not desire to change? I have come to the point of hating this freedom. How can you hope for salvation if you have a wall in front of you that seems to allow no light to pass through? How can you stay in front of the other with tenderness and mercy?”

And here is the same question, put differently: “How can you wait for and respect the freedom of a son, when you see that he is muddled in life, sad and alone? My desire is to see him happy. I always ask for the miracle of change for him, but waiting for his freedom to move is taking too long, and I’m tempted to ask Christ that the change happen now.”

Carrón. Ask him! Ask Christ that it happen. However, God’s plan does not always coincide with ours, and others are not always open to the grace that God gives them. There are both things. Behind these questions is all our difficulty with our own freedom and that of others, because things do not happen according to the timetable we have in mind. For this reason, the most important thing is to see it from God’s point of view. Who knows what trepidation He must feel, looking at our awkward attempts, seeing how much we resist! He already knew that we would resist: you run a few risks when you create a free being! But why does God not hate our freedom and erase it from the face of the earth? Why, notwithstanding everything, does He love it, just as you love the freedom of your son, and show us

that He loves it, more and more each time? Because, as we said, without freedom salvation would not be ours, and He was willing to sacrifice everything for this freedom. When you feel like knocking your kid's head against the wall because he will not stop crying at night or is as stubborn as a mule, you have to draw upon all the resources of your "I" not to do it, simply because you love his freedom. Unlike God, we often hate the freedom of the other, as well as our own. If things do not happen according to our plans, we tend to think that our husband or our son cannot be fulfilled, cannot find their road according to a design that is different from ours. Often I find myself answering a question of the kind by saying: "Can you absolutely swear that the one possible way for the Mystery to bring your son to his destiny is the one you have in mind?" I have yet to find someone who says yes! Thank goodness for that, because it means we still use our reason as a category of possibility: we admit that we might have missed some little crack through which the Mystery can bring our son to his destiny, without trampling his freedom. So then, it is clear that the question is really about ourselves, because your son will have to face it for himself.

What does God do with a person who wavers, complicates things, or loses his way? God draws near, just as you do with a child: instead of knocking him against the wall, and kicking him out, you look at him again, start again, accompanying him in whatever way you can, groping your way, and you wait. Why? Because he is your son. Instead of hating our freedom, God became man to become our companion, to place before our eyes a Presence more fascinating than the pursuit of our affairs, than all we are attached to or will be able to procure for ourselves. If God is far off, you may think of doing whatever you please, but when God enters your life, as He entered Zacchaeus' house—it is not as if Zacchaeus had never heard anyone talk about God, but it was a God reduced to rules to obey—His nearness makes a change possible.

The important thing is to approach our children the way Jesus approached Zacchaeus when He entered his house. Every time you struggle with your freedom and that of your children, when you do not know what to do in front of the presence of your husband or your wife, imagine being in front of him, or her, or your children with the same certainty with which Jesus entered the house of Zacchaeus, disarmed, without any forcing or violence: "Can I come to your house?" It takes great certainty about destiny to enter a house in this way, to not succumb to rigidity, irritation, or fear! If we seek other ways to "enter" into the freedom of the other—be it our son, husband, or wife—it is because we lack certainty. In fact, this certainty of the victory that Jesus derives from the relationship with the Father is what enables

Him stand before our freedom without hating it, continuing to knock on our door. And knock, and knock, and knock again. He embraces you, forgives you, welcomes you, and looks at you again. Waiting, begging, without being manipulated by your tantrums and caprices, and without hating your freedom. Who would not want to find such a presence in his life if he had lost his way? This is what has happened to us. We are here because of the encounter with this Presence who forgives, who looks at us again. Those who embrace this Presence, to the extent they embrace it, begin to love the freedom of their children, begin to love their own freedom. It is because of the certainty that Jesus has introduced into life that, though we do so limping, we can love our freedom and that of others.

Therefore, the fundamental question is how we can become increasingly sure of the resurrection of Christ, so as not to become afraid at the first sign of difficulty, since everything has already been won. We are children of One who is risen from the dead! The victory, that is, our salvation, has already happened. How long it will take for this victory to spread and be embraced freely by free people is in the hands of an Other to whom we must abandon ourselves, just as Jesus abandoned Himself to the design of an Other up to the very last moment: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹⁸¹ For us, the choice is no different than the one Jesus had to face. If we do not have Jesus' certainty about His relationship with the Father, then we get angry, we pull out our sword like Peter, and violence explodes in many ways. But Jesus stops our hand, just as He did with Peter. "Put your sword back into its sheath, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and He will not provide Me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?"¹⁸² "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," and He abandons Himself, trusting in the design of His Father.

Prosperi. "You said we have to open up to ourselves, to look with fondness at the human that is in us, to take seriously what we go through, and that this work is crucial. Does this mean that everything about me is fine? What does it mean to 'observe our experience clearly,' as Fr. Giussani said? When all my humanity comes to the surface, I am stricken with tremendous fear, almost terrified of looking at it, embracing it, and allowing something else to enter, as if there were the risk of breaking a delicate equilibrium that I have built for myself. How is it possible to follow with simplicity

¹⁸¹ *Lk* 23:34.

¹⁸² *Mt* 26:52-53.

this movement of my humanity that comes to the surface, without being overwhelmed by it?"

Carrón. One of the most stunning consequences of my encounter with the Movement was to discover that I could love my humanity, as I think has happened to any of you who have been the object of a love: you experienced someone who was not scandalized by the human that was in you and who embraced you just as you were. But, at a certain point, we all see a measure enter into the picture. If we go beyond certain limits, they become fed up with us, just as we become fed up with ourselves. Only Christ looks on our humanity with an irreducible fondness. This is why we recognized and recognize His presence in our humanity. Only the relationship with His presence can enable us to look with fondness on the human that is in us. Before meeting Fr. Giussani, I had never heard anyone say, "How human is my humanity!"¹⁸³ Since then, I have never looked at my humanity without this love. It is not a matter of effort: it is a matter of love for my humanity! We have been made well. To have fondness for our humanity, we need to look at it in its originality, that is, look at it as God made it, because it remains just the same as it was willed by God, friends! Not even original sin and the influence of society can keep our humanity from recognizing something that corresponds to it when it runs into it. Through original sin, our nature is wounded, but not destroyed ("Human nature has not been totally corrupted,"¹⁸⁴ says the Catechism. It "still desires the good"¹⁸⁵). Otherwise, there would not have been Christianity, and we would not be here today. The fact that we are here bears witness that our original human structure has not been erased and that our humanity is made well! Only if we learn to look at it in this way can we love it, because it makes me recognize You, Oh Christ! No error committed can keep my humanity from recognizing Christ when He appears before my eyes. Nothing can keep my humanity from vibrating anew in front of Him present, when I run up against that phenomenon of a different humanity in which Christ becomes present now. How often have we discovered it in our life! So then, you understand the nature and value of your humanity: it is made to recognize Him, made to be filled with His presence.

When I met Fr. Giussani, who looked this way at his humanity, I finally understood why my humanity was so important, and I began to love it. Since

¹⁸³ Cf. L. Giussani, *Affezione e dimora [Affection and Dwelling Place]*, Bur, Milan, 2001, p. 42.

¹⁸⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 405.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 1707.

then I have had my share of stumbling and reductions, but I have never lost the esteem for the humanity that is in me. I often find myself telling people: “You have to look at yourself the way I look at you, otherwise you do not look at yourself well; you look at yourself badly.” I do not say this because I consider myself clever or better, but simply because I look at them the way I have been looked at. The problem is whether we encounter someone who looks at us well, the way Christ looked at Zacchaeus. This does not mean getting a seal of approval that justifies everything we do. No, no, no. That’s not it. Looking for justification for what we do is stupid. I do not want anyone to justify anything I do (especially my errors). I want someone to look at me for what I originally am. I want someone who can give me back the original gaze on my humanity, like Jesus. This is why He enters into any kind of darkness, into the home of any Zacchaeus in the world, with an ultimate fondness. Christ does not allow Himself to be wedged into our reductions. He knows that behind Windows there is DOS, that is, behind the appearance of things, behind all the mistakes of Zacchaeus, there is a heart, a human structure that awaits Him and can recognize Him. For this reason, do not be afraid, friends! On the face of this earth, One has appeared in whose company I can look at everything, even what I find difficult to consider. Everything, without being scandalized. There are examples of this in some of the letters I have received in these days, but I will not read them now out of respect for the privacy of the writers. As soon as you perceive this gaze on yourself, even if you are one person in a crowd of twenty-one thousand, you begin to look at your humanity with sincerity, with positivity, looking at even those things that you have not been able to admit for years, even to yourself. In order to speak to the humanity of each person, it is not necessary to have “personal” meetings in a private space. Fr. Giussani spoke in public, in front of everyone, but when I listened, it was as if he was speaking directly to me, and this freed me. What is most needed at the personal level is what is said in public to everyone, Fr. Giussani said.¹⁸⁶ Personal dialogue does not exist to

¹⁸⁶ “Remember that if what an authority tells you when the person speaks to everyone does not touch you, does not reach you personally, as if in a personal conversation, it is not true. Even when you are in this person’s office, which may be so full of friendship, tenderness, and affection, they are still phooey. Spiritual direction can give a little boost when it is necessary, but it can never take the place of the fact that the relationship between the authority and the individual person, not the group, happens precisely when the authority addresses everyone, not when speaking to the individual alone. The authority will speak to the individual to compensate for an incapacity that the individual has in applying things, maybe. In this sense it will be of help. [...] but (and remember this) the interaction to give a higher priority to is the one that happens in public and is directed at everyone.” Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza*, op. cit., p. 384.

cut us slack. What I have to say, I say to everyone, and people feel liberated by this. What is true, what is helpful for life, we can say in front of everyone, so as to be able to look together at what happens to us, helping each other on the journey.

Prosperi. “What are the necessary conditions so that our striving to be sincere with ourselves is not reduced to an effort of will? The answer to Christ is possible only through the enthusiasm for an embrace you have received. However, you added that it is not something automatic. How can we overcome the fear of resisting? How is it possible to truly abandon yourself to the initiative of an Other?”

Carrón. In order to understand these things, you simply have to see how they arise. When they arise from within experience, they are not an effort of will: when a crucial encounter happens, I do not want to lose the gaze that touched me. Observe your experience: when you fall in love, you do not go to—oh, I don’t know—the movies with that person out of an effort of the will. Or when a fan goes to his team’s game (I won’t say which team, or violence may break out here!), does he do so out of an effort of will? If someone said to him: “Why are you going to the stadium, where it may rain or be cold, when you can watch the game on television?” He would answer: “You’re an idiot! It’s not the same!” This striving comes from inside; it is not a matter of will. The fan does not want to miss a live game! And he certainly does not avoid difficulties; it is a lot more trouble to go to the game than it is to sit there on his couch watching it on television. Let’s not confuse things. The fact that someone goes to a lot of trouble, freely, is not the same thing as an effort of will, because otherwise the alternative would be doing nothing at all. No, no, no! People do nothing because they are not passionate about anything, because they do not love anything. This is the point. The more you love something, the less your gestures are an effort of will. When this love is missing, every act remains external to us, like something added: I do it because I have to, because otherwise they won’t pay me at the end of the month, or because I have dues to pay, otherwise I won’t be admitted to the club. This happens for lack of love. On the contrary, when you see the birth of love, when you are embraced, everything becomes very easy. Even those who resist come to a certain point when they yield and then, like the Unnamed, weep uncontrollably. Yielding, not resisting, is the abandonment to a love, like the child who at a certain point surrenders in your arms. The problem is how much time we need to surrender. I always say that it costs a lot more to keep resisting than it does to yield. But this is

a battle each of us has to fight, because God does not want to give answers before the right time. He waits, waits, and waits, like a beggar, at the door of our “I.”

Prosperi. “That poverty is a beatitude was a dizzying discovery. Why is it that in our experience we perceive poverty as an undesirable vulnerability, rather than a confirmation of the journey we have made?”

Carrón. We look at this vulnerability without true attention to experience. Our ideal, the *desideratum*, is not to be vulnerable, because—almost without realizing it—we conceive of salvation as no longer being thirsty, as the abolition of desire. But what salvation would it be if it deprived us of our desire? We could not call it salvation. For this reason, the exaltation of desire, of our humanity, is the clear sign of the truth of Christ. In fact, when Christianity disappears as a significant fact in history, there is a return to fearing desire, as was the case before Christianity. In a 2016 work, re-published in *Avvenire*, the philosopher and essayist Tzvetan Todorov (who died recently) wrote revealingly that in the Enlightenment, “[t]here is an absence of measure, and thus hubris is always a risk. [...] Regarding the great figures of the Enlightenment, I regret that I was not vigilant enough, and in the joy of sharing many of their ideas, I was not on the alert for their excesses.”¹⁸⁷ It almost seems like an invitation to reduce the “excess” of desire. Human desire is measureless, and as such it is perceived as something dangerous for the life of the human person, as hubris: it would seem necessary to re-size it and keep it under control. In other words, when we find that there is no adequate response to the infinite nature of desire, it would seem that the only alternative in order not to be disappointed is to reduce its importance. Instead, only the infinite made flesh, only Christ, is able to save the full dimension of desire, because He is able to correspond to it. The clear sign of Christ’s truth is that He constantly reawakens our desire and sets it in motion. Instead of recognizing this, we think: “How is it that having encountered Christ I still have these desires?” Thank goodness you still have them, because they are precisely what demonstrates that Christ is the answer to our humanity! Only the divine can respond to and keep alive all your humanity, all your passion, all your longing, all your desire, all your original poverty. So then, poverty becomes desirable and appears to us as a dizzying discovery. Or, as I always say to you, would you

¹⁸⁷ T. Todorov, “Todorov e le ombre dei Lumi,” [Todorov and the shadows of the leading figures of the Enlightenment], *Avvenire*, March 7, 2017, pp. 1, 24.

prefer not to long for the person you love? The day you stop longing for him or her will be the end! The most inexorable symptom that it is finished is the fact that, at a certain point, you no longer miss him or her.

Only Christ makes possible the continual reawakening of desire: this is the most evident sign of His differentness and His truth. He is the only one able to save human desire without reducing it. All the others, the other positions, deep down (and this shows their insufficiency) have to censure something, some part of human experience: in some way, they censure what they cannot find an answer for. Since desire is too big, they try to reduce it if they can. But who can reduce it as they would like? Try to do it! Once you have all tried, know that there is an alternative: His name is Jesus, the only one capable of keeping desire awake without having to censure anything.

Prosperi. The last thing you said touches the point raised by most of the questions. Christ makes our desire grow, rather than reducing it. We feel our desire grow and this is the sign of an attitude of poverty. At the same time, yesterday you said that poverty means possessing things in a different way. So how can these two things be taken together: the fact that this poverty involves an ultimate detachment from things, so that ultimately I am not attached to anything, and yet I desire? Thus, as you also said before, I want to be able to desire things more, above all those I love most. This is true for our affections and also for our plans. Why should it be a mistake to make plans for our life? I'll read two questions that exemplify the problem.

“If we abandon everything to follow Him, what happens to the desires and particular expectations for our families and work that we try to realize every day? How can I detach myself from projects that, in any case, I have to pursue?”

“What link is there between poverty and work? I perceive the separation as a failure to do what the circumstances ask of me. I imagine the separation almost as something negative.”

Carrón. This question emerged powerfully at the Spiritual Exercises of the CL university students, too. It was the first one asked at their assembly. “If deep down my desire is greater than what I imagine, if my desire only finds peace in You, Oh Christ, then what is the value of all the other things? Why should I waste time pursuing the daily and particular desires I find in me?” Everything was overturned when I simply posed a question to the girl who asked this question. “Have you ever fallen in love?” “Yes.” “And

when you were in love, what value did the other things have? Were the concrete things and all the rest of your life disqualified?” “No.” “So, then, what should we say? What experience do you have when you fall in love? Is the value of the other things reduced or heightened?” “They blossom again.”¹⁸⁸

Do you see? Loving Christ, loving an exceptional presence, one that finally corresponds to my desire, does not make desire disappear, or diminish the value of my plans or of reality. The opposite happens: it intensifies everything. The more Christ enters into life, the more He makes everything interesting. “In the experience of a great love,” Fr. Giussani always told us, adopting the words of Romano Guardini, “everything that happens becomes an event in its sphere!”¹⁸⁹

Even the most humdrum things acquire a unique importance. Loving Christ does not mean negating something. Instead, precisely because Christ fills my heart in an absolutely overwhelming way, with a superabundance I cannot even explain, I am freed from all my plans. I roll up my sleeves and work as never before. I throw myself in wholeheartedly. I make plans, engaging all my intelligence, affection, desire, and intuition, but I am free because I do not depend on what I do to be happy. You see this clearly in work: in the pagan world, work was absolutely worthless, and thus relegated to slaves. Those who could afford it did not work. Work had a totally negative connotation. Who introduced a new gaze upon work? Christ, when He said that work is participation in the work of God. There is no greater valorization than this. For this reason, Fr. Giussani said, those who do not love their work are not living poverty. In God’s design, work is the tool that “obliges” people to be of service, in function of something greater than themselves. Fr. Giussani compared it with love: God makes you fall in love so that you can emerge from your selfishness. In the same sense, God causes us to emerge from our selfish self-affirmation, forcing us to “work for.” But the temptation that arises is to possess your own work. Therefore Christ introduced poverty as a detachment from work, as a detachment from relationships, or, if you wish, He introduced a freedom. You just need to discover in action what happens when Christ enters into our life—this is why we emphasize

¹⁸⁸ J. Carrón, *A te si volge tutto il mio desiderio [All My Desire Is Turned to You]*, Società Cooperativa Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milan, January 2017, pp. 36-37.

¹⁸⁹ “As Romano Guardini, whom I have already quoted many times, said in his very beautiful line (it is the most beautiful I have heard in this regard, and the most succinct): “In the experience of a great love, everything that happens becomes an event in its sphere.” The great thing for which everything becomes an event in its sphere (that is, it is determined by it) is faith. [...] and faith is the recognition of that Presence: Christ is the content of faith.” L. Giussani, *Certi di alcune grandi cose. 1979-1981 [Certain of a Few Great Things]*, Bur, Milan, 2007, p. 398.

terms like “within,” “immanent,” “acknowledge You within my experience”—it makes you throw yourself into what you do with all your strength, and at the same time, it makes you free. This is the maximum you can imagine: engaging yourself, getting involved, committing yourself to something all the way, and at the same time remaining free, without devaluing what exists. It is fundamental. So what is the problem? Our mistaken attachment to work. In fact, when we lose our job, since we have an image of what we have in hand, an image of our role, we have enormous difficulty in accepting another type of job, because our substance depended on the job we held, the role we had, the money we earned, etc. Instead of allowing Christ to free us from the cage of these images, allowing ourselves to begin again from wherever we can, we prefer to have enormous difficulty. This is seen clearly by those who accompany people who have lost their job, until they find another one. The difficulty they experience is not a matter of lacking the necessary skills for finding another position, but comes from the fact that they have to change their mentality. They have to become poor, detaching themselves from the image they have, otherwise they cannot make it through this situation of epochal change. But the problem is not the epoch: it is being attached to work in a certain way.

Prosperi. The final series of questions concerns the last part of yesterday afternoon’s lesson: the image of the Fraternity and its gestures.

“I often wonder about the gestures we do together. What do we propose? How do we propose it? What awareness do we have of the deep reason for seeking moments of communion? How can I verify whether they serve me and others, that is, whether we are helping each other in a way that really corresponds, as you described at the end of the afternoon lesson? What is the origin of a gesture and what makes it a gesture of awareness?”

“We have recently joined the Fraternity and do not yet have a small Fraternity group. What criteria should we use for choosing the friends of the Fraternity group?”

“How can we help each other to be increasingly in companionship within our Fraternity group?”

Carrón. Precisely in order that there be this help, I emphasized that we cannot leave behind our humanity as we make the journey, as if the religious sense or the heart were something that served in the beginning, but then, once you have had the encounter, is no longer of use.

As we have said, the Fraternity has a very simple purpose: to help us journey in life. Whether this happens or not is something all of us can

verify every time we get together. Each time, we verify whether the gestures help us to journey or not. We can tell when we pray Morning Prayer distractedly and nothing happens, or when, instead, we are present to what we are saying, and something happens. Friday evening at the beginning of the Spiritual Exercises, I wanted us to sing together as soon as we entered, as an attempt to educate us to being present to what happens. Similarly, the purpose of this morning's song¹⁹⁰ before the *Angelus* was to help us to be aware of the fact that we are like an empty vessel. Very often we "enter" into gestures mechanically, in a hurry for them to finish, thinking: "We have to do it because we are in CL. We have to do it because they taught us to pray the *Angelus*," (remember the "toll to be paid" that Fr. Giussani talked about?). That is, we do them as if we were not there, and for this reason the *Angelus*, like every other gesture, changes nothing in us. Just think if instead of entering the hall mechanically, you were to take thirty seconds to say to yourself, "the pain I feel, the tiredness, the difficulty I experience, the awful day ahead of me ...", and then you prayed the *Angelus* with this awareness. I challenge you to verify what would happen.

The same thing happens with the Fraternity. When do I realize its value? When I see that it helps me. The Fraternity should be a place where you can be yourself, where you can present your difficulties, where you feel helped by the simple fact that you participate in it, such that you return home different. Otherwise, what sense would it have for us? However, it is unlikely that this will happen if we go distracted, separated from the human foundation, as we said yesterday. The time with Fraternity members demands that we do not "park" our humanity, that we strive to make it useful for ourselves and the other friends there with us. For example, a gesture like the one we are living now is a great exercise of humanity, to the degree to which we are actively present and involved, because salvation is impossible without freedom. This is why I started out with that beautiful reading from Péguy. God wants us to cooperate in our salvation, otherwise it will never become ours. Therefore, if you are not fully engaged and committed, and do not verify whether the things you live in the Fraternity help you, don't come to me later to ask whether you are happy or not. You see it yourself, first of all. It is not that, all of a sudden, when we gather, we no longer have the criterion for judging what we do!

There is one more question. What criterion should we use for choosing our Fraternity group? Deep down, for those of us who have encountered something, choosing is an acknowledgement. We did not sit down at a

¹⁹⁰ A. Mascagni, "Al mattino" [In the Morning], *Canti*, op. cit., p. 180.

conference table and decide what corresponded to the needs of our heart: we found it in front of us and we acknowledged it. It was obedience. So then, what is the criterion for choosing the Fraternity group? Recognizing the people who help you most to achieve what you want for your life, and following the person who makes you glad. If certain travel companions help you, you discover it yourself. The Mystery does not need to send you an angel to make you understand, nor do you need to ask me about it. The Lord is the one who makes your life vibrate through these friends, making you experience them as a help for your journey. So then, it is easy: just follow what the Mystery makes us experience, as happened when we followed the Fraternity. The criterion that causes me to be here is the same one to use for choosing the Fraternity group.

I wish you a successful work in the coming months.

During the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Avila, Spain, preached by Fr. Julián Carrón on Sunday, May 7 there was a final assembly, three questions and the answers to which we include below.

You said that it is necessary to make a journey to discover our humanity as a vital presence and to perceive the cry that constitutes us. You also said that the first step is to be open to ourselves, and to look at ourselves with fondness. I have some difficulty understanding what this gaze means. It is also hard for me to understand when you talk about genuine experience as the point of departure, encouraging me not to stop at particular sensations, but to go deep down to the true needs that I can recognize, for example, when I go through painful experiences, which in effect re-awaken the need for meaning that only Christ can fulfill. I would like to understand this better.

Julián Carrón. May I ask you a question?

Yes.

Given that you are here, I would like to take advantage of the opportunity to dialogue with you. In your life, have you had the experience of noticing something that you had never noticed before? You have to start out from your experience. As I always say, I am not interested in answering your questions, but in helping you understand how you yourselves can answer them. Can you remember a moment when you discovered something that was already there but you had not been able to see before?

Yes.

This is the point of departure. What enabled you to see that thing? Where did you learn that gaze? In other words, what enabled you to have that gaze you just asked me to explain?

In the first place, having listened to someone who told me that you can look at things in a different way.

Where did you listen to this person? At the university? Doing yoga? At the movies?

No, here, with all of you.

The fact is, friends, that history is real and concrete! When we talk about a particular history, we refer to a certain place. You had that experience here. Why here? If you do not do this work on the things that happen to you, you will not find the answer to your questions, because everything will remain an abstraction. Why here, do you think?

Because you all look at things in this way.

Us, why us? What do we have that the others do not have? You must have met a lot of people in your life, but then why only with us have you had this experience? What do we have that is different?

I get the chills saying it, but it is as if you had Christ closer by.

We have Christ closer by or Christ is here?

He is here.

This is our great problem. If we do not understand this, we will not grasp the nature of Christianity, and everything will become a big abstraction. The Samaritan woman at the well had met many people in her life, but she was truly able to look at her thirst only when she found herself in front of Him. The woman with the hemorrhage had sought out many physicians and nobody could cure her. She could not give up, because life pressured her, because she was suffering, because she was in pain, because she knew there was a chance of getting better, so when she heard people talking about a real, concrete, historical person who did certain things, she hurried to Him, longing to touch even the hem of His cloak. Who enabled her to stay in front of her illness without censoring it? Did she perhaps have to censure it in order to enter into a relationship with Christ? No, it was precisely her illness that pushed her to enter into a relationship with Christ, not the act of pushing it aside in the closet of life. Also, she could not set it aside. She felt the pain inside herself, and could not get up in the morning without the urgent need to find a solution to that situation. How different life would be if we felt this pain or this infirmity! Pain drove her from within, pushed her to seek Him out. But only in front of His presence was she able to look deep down at her illness, with no need to reduce her own humanity. She learned this whole gaze upon herself by staying in front

of a Presence. A fully developed sincerity with and loyalty to herself, her true need, was possible only in front of that Presence, as happens for us, too: when we do not have the presence of Christ in front of our eyes, we are not able to look at our pain.

Years ago, Rosa Montero wrote an article in *El País* in which, recalling an episode of her life, at a certain point she said, “desiring is always trouble.” Therefore it is better not to consider your own desire. She added: “Desiring is always a problem, and even more so when your desires are fulfilled.” Then she quoted Saint Teresa—how could we not quote her here in Avila?—“There are more tears shed for answered prayers than for unanswered ones.” Why? Because when you receive an answer, and you realize that it is not sufficient, that is when the problem begins. If I am waiting for someone to satisfy my desire, and this someone arrives, but actually my desire is not resolved, then the problem grows, rather than lessens. “It is because of this, because of this exasperating lack of trustworthiness of desires and because of their infinite capacity to wound us in one way or another, that some oriental religions and philosophies reject them.” In this epoch, we are turning to certain religions that, in order to avoid suffering, invite us not to look at the human. Away with the tooth, away with the pain. If I do not acknowledge it, I do not have it. It is as if we said: “The woman with the hemorrhage does not look at her infirmity, and thus she does not have it.” Or, “I do not think about thirst, and thus I am not thirsty.” Not desiring is equated to not suffering. Those who are convinced by this reasoning are welcome to apply it: then they will see what happens in their life. But, Rosa Montero then realized, “we Westerners think that desire is the driver of life and that the peace you can reach by doing without it is all too similar to the tranquility of a cemetery.” So then, what is to be done? “Maybe the point of the question is to desire within our horizon.” So here is her proposed solution: to regulate desire, like the thermostat. “To desire what we can reasonably obtain, what is within our reach. In other words, to learn to desire what you have.”¹⁹¹ In an instant, the human person, the original nature of the human person, is erased. It no longer exists. The “I,” with its original need, is swept away.

We are not here at the Spiritual Exercises to look up at the sky mournfully. We are here for a dialogue with modern thought in all its profundity and density. We do not isolate ourselves to see how we can defend ourselves from reality. We have not come here to defend ourselves from reality, but to look it full in the face. Each person must decide. What enables us

¹⁹¹ R. Montero, “La piscina que no fue y otros deseos,” *El País*, April 18, 2010. Translation ours.

to look it full in the face? Maybe then you begin to understand the title of the Spiritual Exercises. Gladness is possible because of the fact that Christ exists. He is the only one who saves desire, the only one who had the audacity to look at the desire of the Samaritan woman at the well, the only one who enables us to look at our desire. If not, we return to the paganism before Christ: desire is hubris, something very dangerous, and therefore we settle for something less.

There is a scene that always strikes me in *Fanny and Alexander*, the Ingmar Bergman film. Towards the end they are eating lunch, and one of the main characters says: “We Ekdahls [the name of the family] have not come into the world to see through it. We are not equipped for such excursions. [...] We must live in the little world. We will be content with that.” The best thing would be to settle. Life is for this: being happy when you are happy, when you manage to be so, and being kind, generous, affectionate, and good. What is happiness? He explains: “Take pleasure in the little world. Good food... gentle smiles... fruit trees in blossom, waltzes...”¹⁹² This is the proposal, just like that of paganism before Christ. When Christ disappears from the horizon, when we no longer see Him, there is nothing left to do but adapt, settle for pretty waltzes, fruit trees in flower, and a good lunch. See for yourselves if this responds to the need you have. This is the point at which we find ourselves. The challenge is not of another nature. Do not be confused on this point. We are not here to talk about marginal things. We are trying to discover what life is and what responds to it. So then, look at it. The mere fact that I can look at it is already the first sign of His presence.

Therefore, if you discover that, in the midst of the culture that surrounds you (and that fills us, too, and tells us over and over: “It is better if you do not ask me questions, because I am not equipped to consider your questions. Let’s censure them and distract ourselves with things, and in this way we will get by better”), there is a place where you can look at all the human that is in us, and ask yourself why.

The second point of the first lesson, when you talked about forgiveness, struck me a lot and helped me very much, because many times in my life I have been overwhelmed by the experience of forgiveness, by the surprise of forgiveness, like the Unnamed. But I have also seen myself like Miguel Mañara, who met Jerónima like I met the Movement, a good twenty years ago, but I see that in my life there are things that I have done badly that have

¹⁹² *Fanny and Alexander* (film, *Fanny och Alexander*, SV-FR-RFT 1982), dir. Ingmar Bergman, Gaumont, 1982.

left marks. You see it, you see that your evil was able to cut a life short. In that moment you feel unforgivable; you end up feeling unforgivable, and you hate yourself. You said that the issue is not to abandon ourselves. I believe this is the case because often we are full of ourselves. In confession you abandon yourself, you always abandon yourself. It is not a mechanical gesture. It is total abandonment. I believe that it is a revolution to live this way. It is the greatest liberation. What enables you to abandon yourself at this level?

Do you understand why Péguy says that God wants salvation to be ours? It is normal that, if you truly realize your own evil, the more you are conscious of it, the more you see how unforgivable it is and how you cannot erase it. I do not erase it from the blackboard with the swipe of an eraser. It returns. This is why guilt has always been a very human experience. In fact, if I love another person, I am pained by the harm I have done to the person I love, but this is not the same for someone I do not love. How many times have we seen people who have done harm, for example, in a terrorist attack, and always carry it inside themselves? Serving their time in prison does not heal the wound caused by the evil they did. Certain things that a person has done do not disappear over time. Rather, the more time passes, the more you realize the evil you have done, the wounds you have caused, and you are unable to heal, because you cannot resurrect the people you killed; you cannot bring them back to those who suffer and who hate you for taking them away. We are in front of a crucial question, and, if we cannot solve it, there is no chance for peace. So then, I understand the revolution that Jesus introduced into life. What is God's response to our drama? Not an abstraction, not a psychological analysis, not a theory, but a specific history: a human, concrete presence that tells you, "your sins are forgiven." Do you understand the joy that runs through every page of the Gospel? Nothing of the kind had ever been seen before. It is so far beyond all imagination that it almost scandalizes us. I am always reminded of a person who was the victim of a terrorist attack and had been hit with seven bullets in his body. When he heard some CL person in Italy talk about mercy, it turned his stomach: "What!? What are you saying?!" Our words did not heal his wounds. What finally enabled him to look at the wounds and be free from that infernal mechanism in which he was stuck? What freed him from those cogs from which he could not extricate himself, because the longer he lived, the more he saw that scene over and over before his eyes? In fact, he said: "I could not wake up in the morning without remembering the scenes of horror I had lived through, or that others experienced and told me about, all the faces of the suffering of the people." But at a certain time, after spending a period with some of our friends, he began to open up to another perspective. "Since

I met you, the first thing I see before my eyes when I wake up in the morning are your happy faces.” There was no other way to heal the wound: a particular story and the faces of people who are happy freed him from the cogs in which he was caught, and finally he was able to escape, to free himself from the shackles that imprisoned him. What enables this liberation? A grace, as I was saying yesterday: the spark given us by an instant of poverty of spirit. But as we saw in *Miguel Mañara*, this does not happen once and for all. In most cases it does not happen this way. Therefore Miguel Mañara returns to the abbot after the latter heard his confession and absolved him, to lament about his sins, as we lament about our own. What did the abbot tell him? He repeated the judgement the Church gave Miguel on the day he went to confession: “Your sins are forgiven. None of this ever existed.” The Church does not use empty expressions. Her words are not swept away by the wind. They are a judgement. All of this is forgiven. But this judgement must enter into the innermost depths of the “I.” Mañara fought a battle to accept, welcome, embrace, and abandon himself to this judgement. This is the work each of us must do. Each of us knows we have been forgiven, but we must return to listening to the announcement of this forgiveness, must return to recognizing it present, must have it anew in front of our eyes, must continually challenge our pain with this good news. “The fact is that you are thinking about things that no longer exist (and that never happened, my son [Your sins are forgiven!]). All this never existed.”¹⁹³ You have to challenge every remorse, every time, with this truth, the truth of ourselves, which we continue to resist yielding to. It is as if you said, “I doubt the beauty of these mountains.” If the mountains could talk, they would say, “what do we care about your doubts? Your doubts do not change the reality of our beauty.” Modern people that we are, we thought that we decided what reality is with our thoughts, and that it is real according to the way we think it is. No. Reality is real if it is real. If it is not real, even if you thought that it was, it is not real, because you are not the one who makes it real. “Your sins are forgiven.” The problem will be the time it will take you to convert to what is real (in this case, to the fact that your sins no longer exist), and thus to allow Christ to enter your life. The gaze that defines life with truth is the one Jesus introduced, but I must welcome it. This cannot happen without my freedom. That gaze cannot be mine without me. God, who created us without us, cannot save us without us. This is the freedom needed for salvation to be ours. This is why I always ask how you can live without re-reading the passage in which Fr. Giussani talks

¹⁹³ Cf. O. Miłosz, *Miguel Mañara*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1988, pp. 48-63; quoted in Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 63.

about the “yes of Peter.”¹⁹⁴ You have to re-read it to answer the question you asked. I need to read it in order to look at myself anew the way Jesus looked at Peter. I have to return to reading it in order to be able to look at myself in a real way, that is, to be able to look at myself the way He looked at me and the way He looks at me now. If we do not allow His presence to enter, there is nothing to be done. When you are sad, re-read it to recognize His presence because without the recognition of His presence there is nothing to be done. When you are despondent and feel unforgivable, you have to return to reading the “yes of Peter” as a beggar, with thankfulness. “Thank goodness I am sad, discouraged, and feel unforgivable, because otherwise I would not have returned to read it. I would not have felt the urgent need; I would have thought I already knew it.” I constantly return to read it to grasp the entirely gratuitous way in which He forgives me. He forgives us and leaves us all the time we need to welcome Him, to yield to His forgiveness, to His embrace.

What is this presence of Christ that you describe? What is it like? Does it have something to do with the flesh, with circumstances, with history, with people, or does Christ exist, but unseen and untouched? Does He coincide with the flesh, with the other, or is He like something added, without this flesh? In order to explain better, in the song yesterday, Andare..., Chieffo is speaking with Fr. Giussani, the man Luigi Giussani. “Your eyes saw everything and spoke to the heart, / the words carried the fire and the desire to go.... to go.”¹⁹⁵ The carnality of His presence appears evident when you talk about the first of Jesus’ followers: John, Andrew, and Peter. However, when you talk about His presence today, how can you make it concrete, in the flesh, with first name and last name? I would like it if you could concretize it more in our experience, in our history, to help us to identify it, each person individually and everyone together, as a companionship.

How would John and Andrew have answered your question whether Christ is something that involves seeing with the flesh?

That coincides with the flesh.

Coincides with the flesh. As Fr. Giussani said: “It is in the flesh that we can recognize the presence of the Word made flesh. If the Word was made flesh, it is *in the flesh* that we find Him.”¹⁹⁶ It is in a human reality, but not just any human reality. It is in a human reality bowled over and transformed by Christ. He makes Himself present in history through those whom He chooses and who acknowledge Him, welcome Him (here is free-

¹⁹⁴ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades. *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 60 ff.

¹⁹⁵ Chieffo, “Andare...,” op. cit., p. 272.

¹⁹⁶ Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù*, op. cit., p. 123.

dom again) and are changed by Him. Just think of what has happened to each of us. Why are we here? Because we ran into a different humanity: a way of living, of being together, of facing problems, and of looking at our need and that of others that we had never seen before. We found ourselves in front of such human features that we were magnetized and could not help wondering what the origin was of that perceptible difference of life. It was not a human reality in and of itself that attracted us, but a humanity shaped by Christ, with a certain accent, made up of people with first name and last name, who became involved through the testimony of a concrete man, as you said. But this makes us understand something crucial: just as Christ made Himself persuasively present through the *yes* of Fr. Giussani, and many others who followed him, so Christ makes Himself present now through our *yes*, our lived following. Christ is not a label that we apply in just any old way in order to spend time together or to face circumstances. He bears witness to Himself through the change that He provokes in the flesh of our life, if we allow Him to enter. And it is easy to recognize Him at work, because His features are unmistakable. Similarly, there is a way of being together—with distraction, with absent-mindedness, or with presumption—that does not glorify Him.

I was very struck by an episode that happened a year or so ago and was later recounted in an article.¹⁹⁷ A Muslim immigrant arrived in Italy and was assigned to a center for hospitality. A volunteer asked him, “would you like meat or fish?” The immigrant broke down in tears. He was not a sentimental fellow. “Why are you crying?” asked the volunteer. The immigrant told him he had worked for eighteen years under a boss who had abused and beaten him. But now, among “the infidels,” someone had finally called him by name and even asked him what he wanted to choose from the menu. “Is it really possible that these people are destined for hell?” was his final question. When I told this story during a conversation in Italy, I said: “What did that man perceive? This thing could not have happened if the Word had not become flesh.” Some people said, “Please, let’s not exaggerate! It depends on our education. We are this way because we have been educated to welcome people.” No, it is not a question of “good manners,” and someone has to come from outside to make us realize what has been given to us and has become part of our way of looking at reality. This is something that would not have happened, would not belong to us, if Christ

¹⁹⁷ Cf. J. Carrón, “Il Natale dei credenti, gesti di umanità che muovono il cuore” [The Christmas of believers, gestures of humanity that move the heart], *Corriere della Sera*, December 23, 2015, p. 35.

had not entered into history. But we, too, have lost our awareness of this. In fact, the dialogue I just mentioned was with people from the Movement!

After the first lesson of the Spiritual Exercises in Italy, I received this message through a friend: "If you have the opportunity, give my thanks to Julián. If I could have, I would have washed his feet with my tears, like Mary Magdalene. Not even in the first encounter did I see so evidently the presence of Christ and feel such enormous desire for Him as I did today." So many times in the encounter with someone, we discover ourselves saying this. Christ is not "without" or "next to," but "within" the flesh. Each of us must see where it happens for us, where we discover Him, where He is given, through whose hand He is offered to us now. Otherwise, we will be like the disciples soon after the Resurrection: everything they had seen, including all the times they had eaten and drunk with Him, was not enough to overcome their sadness. Only His present presence can overcome it. Therefore, the issue is crucial. This is why the more time goes by, the more we are interested in participating in this history. Our interest in this history coincides with our interest in the experience of His contemporaneity. At times it is the person who is last to arrive, like the immigrant I spoke of before, who recognizes the value of our companionship more than we do ourselves, we who are inside this companionship. The last to arrive makes us aware again of what has become obscured in us, to the point that we ask where Christ is and whether He is in the flesh or elsewhere. So then, the problem is whether something happens in front of me, or when I am in a certain place with friends (there, not outside, not nearby, not after, but in that very moment) such I cannot help but feel a strong desire to say His name. Each of us must identify where it happens and with whom it happens: within what flesh Christ reaches me today.

HOLY MASS

Readings for the Holy Mass: Acts 2:14,22-33; Psalm 15; 1 Pt. 1:17-21; Lk. 24:13-35

HOMILY BY FR. FRANCESCO BRASCHI

They had just one desire: to get far away from the city that had been the theatre of their failure and of Jesus' death. Their eyes were sad because they realized they had hoped in vain and were empty now, not knowing what else they could place their hope in. For many months, tenaciously, fancifully, they had cultivated hope in a Jesus who was a worldly and political liberator, even though Jesus Himself had always done everything to counter these ideas about Him.

They were truly foolish and slow-hearted!

Foolish, that is, incapable of comprehending reality (the adjective used does not indicate a moral quality, but rather an incapacity regarding knowledge) and slow-hearted, that is, with a heart incapable of beating more quickly, of becoming passionate about something different than the image they had in mind.

It is no wonder they did not recognize Jesus as He walked alongside them on their flight from a reality that had become unbearable. But had they truly ever known Him? In any case, they had already wrapped Him up, caged Him in their dreams while they were still with Him.

And now Jesus was reduced to a topic for discussion, maybe even for quarrelling among themselves, in the search—for the umpteenth time—for someone or something to blame for their failure.

And yet, the Risen Christ drew even closer to them, precisely to them.

He was the one to take the initiative again, to reawaken in them the desire for a companionship that is human, first of all, who showed them that reality still had something to say to their closed-ness. They recognized Him in the breaking of the bread. In the gesture of the Eucharist, but also in the multiplication of the loaves, that is, in the re-happening of the experience of an unimaginable fullness, of Christ's limitless giving of Himself, precisely to them.

This launched them back on the journey. It restored meaning to the companionship from which they had distanced themselves, to which they now desired to return, where they found a confirmation of their experience of encounter with Christ.

We, too, have experienced Christ's initiative in these days. He has walked alongside us on our journey, has offered us, in Fr. Julián's testimony, words that re-ignited the entreaty and desire of our hearts.

Not even the struggle intimidates us, if we are sincere about what is happening to us now. Christ, *vir pugnator*, still breaks bread for us, here and now. His coming closer to us, His giving Himself again in the broken bread is a solid certainty for which we can truly be glad.

Notwithstanding everything, notwithstanding ourselves, glad.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest friends,

You cannot give yourself gladness. It is radiantly clear, like the sun. You can only ask for the grace to receive it as a gift. In addition, gladness asks that this gift respond to our heart and thus be a present gift. Jesus is the personal gift that surprises the existence of those who welcome Him, and gladdens them with an incommensurate joy. Nothing, not even pain, weaknesses, and sin, are an objection to the growth in gladness, over the passing years, as the creative dimension of the heart from which true life springs forth.

My wish for each of you is that you may experience more and more oneness with the face of the Servant of God Monsignor Luigi Giussani.

With affection and a special blessing,
His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan

Dearest Fr. Julián Carrón,

I send you and all the friends of the Movement my greetings and prayers for the good outcome of these Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. I am united with you in the journey of the charism that has changed our life and has made us passionate about the announcement of Christ, dead and risen in the world and in the service of the Church.

The title of these Exercises, “*My heart is glad because You, Oh Christ, live,*” proposes the dominant fact of our life, the source of peace and joy that, as Pope Francis reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia*, is “an expansion of the heart” (*AL*, 126). This happens today in communion with the charism of the great body of the Church. In this way, everything is different and truer in the circumstances in which the Lord calls us to live. For me personally, this also holds true in the complicated situation [in Taranto] that would seem to oppose the value of health with that of dignified work.

Full of trust, I ask for the entire Movement the gift of the Spirit and the openness to follow the steps you indicate to us.

Invoking upon all of you the blessing of the Lord and the protection of the Mother of God,

I greet you warmly,
His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Fr. Julián,

The title chosen for these Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity expresses the certainty that accompanies our life: *My heart is glad because You, Oh Christ, live*. In these times full of challenges for our faith, how beautiful and peace-giving it is to return every day to recognize the Presence that enables us to live and breathe in every circumstance!

I am close to you and the whole people generated by the charism of the Servant of God Fr. Giussani, and I accompany you with my prayers. May Our Lady reawaken in each of you the “glad certainty” that only Christ makes possible, and may the Holy Spirit make us passionate witnesses for our fellow brothers and sisters.

His Eminence Corrado Sanguineti
Bishop of Pavia

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness Pope Francis

Your Holiness,

We have taken the opportunity of the most important gesture of our Movement, the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL, which 22,000 people attend in Rimini and thousands of others in 16 nations participate by satellite link-up, to make the contents of the letter you sent us at the end of the Jubilee of Mercy increasingly ours. Entering into your call to poverty, “necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him,” we have re-lived the experience of the poor in the Gospel—Matthew, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman at the well—who recognized Christ as the one adequate answer to the need that they themselves were.

In the living memory of Fr. Giussani, we have learned about the experience of poverty you proposed to us as generated by the attraction of Jesus in our life (that dear joy upon which every virtue is founded). The certain hope that God fulfills the desire of the heart makes us glad with the gladness that flows from Easter, as Cardinal Menichelli reminded us during the Eucharistic celebration, and poor, that is, free from the possession of things, because, having found Christ, we need nothing more.

We then took up the words of your letter about the urgent need of “sharing with the needy,” to which we constantly educate ourselves through concrete gestures: in sharing the need of the elderly, children, the sick, and the poor, we see how boundless it is.

Evangelii gaudium accompanied our meditations, reminding us that only Christ present is “the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart” and that everyone has the right to receive Him, without exception, as you testified to us precisely in these days in Egypt.

Grateful for your message and blessing, we continue to pray in support of your universal ministry. Thirty-five years after the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity, we entrust ourselves entirely to your hands. Use us, Your Holiness, to spread this positive embrace to everyone and to everything that is born as a repercussion of being entirely possessed by the love of Christ, “overflowing with peace.”

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Holy Father,

The contents of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity was the letter that Pope Francis sent us at the end of the Jubilee of Mercy, in which he called us to live poverty as “necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him.” You continue to be a witness to us of this poverty, which is born only from being rich in Christ. Those who have been bowled over by the great Presence lack for nothing. Through the intercession of Fr. Giussani, we ask Our Lady to fill your days with gladness, and we ask you for a blessing on our entire Fraternity, journeying in the today of history.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Dearest Eminence,

At the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, for which 22,000 people gathered in Rimini, we meditated on Pope Francis’ call to poverty in the letter he sent us at the end of the Jubilee of Mercy, that is, to the essence of Christian life, “what we truly have at heart: the need for Him.” We feel that the Pope’s invitation to Catholic Action is addressed to us as well, to “share the life of the people,” to “show that it is possible to live the joy of the faith,” testifying to it in the daily circumstances we live.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Eminence Kevin Joseph Farrell
Prefect of the Dicastery for Laity, Family, and Life

Most Reverend Eminence,

Twenty-two thousand members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, and thousands more connected by satellite link-up in 16 countries, renew their openness to being instruments of the Church’s mission, in faithfulness to the charism of Fr. Giussani and in following Pope Francis, who called us to live “the essential core of Christian life,” that is, poverty, which is “necessary because it describes what we truly have at heart: the need for Him,” for Christ present who frees us.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Angelo Scola
Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Angelo,

In these days the Lord has surprised us, causing us to experience the gladness you spoke of in your message. Meditating on the letter the Pope sent us, we return home more aware of being poor, that is, needy of Him, full only of Christ. Fr. Giussani continues to speak to us through the testimony of his life, which was seized by Christ and is, for this reason, fruitful in us, his children, who desire to re-live his experience today.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Bishop of Taranto*

Dearest Filippo,

Grateful for your message, we return home from these Spiritual Exercises more needy of Him and more open to sharing in the life of everyone, especially the poor, as Pope Francis asked us, and to testify to Christ present, who makes life glad in any circumstance.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Bishop Corrado Sanguineti
Bishop of Pavia*

Dearest Corrado,

We thank you for your message and assure you that “the glad certainty” of which you spoke is a bit more real in us because of the experience of Christ, who bent down over our boundless need once again and has made us poorer and freer, because we are more filled with Him.

Fr. Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici

*(Guide to the images drawn from art history that accompanied selections
of classical music during entrance and exit)*

The patrimony of Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna is among the most important Christian iconographic testimonies from the early Middle Ages (fifth and sixth centuries). The itinerary starts from the Basilica of San Vitale, with its the scenes from the Old Testament and continues on to the domes of the Arian and Neonian Baptisteries, then moves on to scenes from the life and passion of Christ on the walls of the Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and concludes with paintings from the apse of Sant'Apollinare in Classe and the Mausoleum of Galla Placidia.

1. Basilica of San Vitale, choir vault, *The Mystic Lamb*
2. Basilica of San Vitale, apse conch, *Christ Lord of the World*
3. Basilica of San Vitale, south lunette of the chancel, *Abel and Melchisedek Sacrificing*
4. Basilica of San Vitale, north lunette of the chancel, *Abraham and the Three Angels*
5. Basilica of San Vitale, north lunette of the chancel, *Abraham and the Three Angels*, detail, *Sacrifice of Isaac*
6. Basilica of San Vitale, north lunette of the chancel, *Abraham and the Three Angels*, detail, *Offering to the Three Angels*
7. Basilica of San Vitale, north wall of the chancel, *Moses Receiving the Ten Commandments*
8. Basilica of San Vitale, south wall of the chancel, *Moses with Jethro's Flocks in Madian*
9. Arian Baptistery, dome, *The Baptism of Jesus*
10. Neonian Baptistery, dome, *The Baptism of Jesus*
11. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Miracle at the Wedding of Cana*
12. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes*
13. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Calling of Peter and Andrew*
14. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *Jesus Heals the Blind Men of Jericho*

15. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *Jesus Heals the Woman with the Flow of Blood*
16. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*
17. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well*, detail
18. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Resurrection of Lazarus*
19. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican*
20. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Widow's Mite*
21. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *Christ the Judge Separates the Sheep and Goats*
22. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Healing of the Paralytic*
23. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Healing of the Paralytic*, detail
24. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Exorcism of the Gerasene Demoniac*
25. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, north wall of the nave, *The Healing of the Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda*
26. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Last Supper*
27. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane*
28. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Kiss of Judas*
29. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Arrest of Jesus*
30. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Jesus On Trial Before the Sanhedrin*
31. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Jesus Predicts Peter's Denial*
32. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Peter's Denial of Jesus*
33. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Judas Tries to Return the Thirty Silver Pieces*
34. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Jesus' Trial Before Pilate*

35. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Way of the Cross*
36. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *Resurrection: The Myrrh-Bearing Women at the Tomb*
37. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Disciples on the Road to Emmaus*
38. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, south wall of the nave, *The Incredulity of Thomas*
39. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo, *The Apse Cross*
40. Basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe, apse, *Saint Apollinare at the Foot of the Cross*
41. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, *Central Vault with Starry Sky and Cross*
42. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, lunette over the south entrance, *The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence*
43. Mausoleum of Galla Placidia, lunette over the north entrance, *Jesus the Good Shepherd*
44. Archbishop's Chapel, *Christ the Warrior*

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