

WORKSHEET 7 - SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

7. Love is a judgment: even if I make a mistake, I know what corresponds to my heart

To shed further light on the topic of School of Community Worksheet 7, we are proposing a few lines from the song Assenzio (“Absinthe”) by J-AX & Fedez, and a section from the Assembly with Fr. Julián Carrón at the GS Equipe (Cervinia, September 3, 2016).

“If I could erase all the evil, I would hold it like absinthe
Tonight
So many times I would’ve liked to cry out
But instead I remained silent
Thinking of the things I’ve lost
Imagining it were different
It’s been months since I’ve looked in the mirror
And for a while now I’ve suspected that in the reflection
Would be that mask they’ve given me.”

These words from the song *Assenzio* describe an experience we have all shared: thinking that we’ve lost everything, that we’ve only been pretending, and wanting to erase all the errors of our past and finally take off the mask that they’ve put on us. Is there a way not to leave all of this dissatisfaction at the mercy of some moments of “depression?” Can this dissatisfaction be an asset helping us to find what is true? This School of Community reading and the conversation between a student and Carrón which took place at the last GS Equipe witness to us there’s a way the heart—the same heart that made J-AX & Fedez write this song, just like the heart of Peter with Jesus or this student with his friends—can recognize the true love that erases evil and allows us to look at ourselves in the mirror without suspicion.

From the Assembly of Julián Carrón with the Equipe of Gioventù Studentesca *

This summer was very important for me, because I came to the GS vacation desiring to find a relationship that really left its mark on me and to meet people that were truly interesting to me.

Why? Why is it that so often our relationships leave us with nothing?

In fact, that was what I was going to say.

How you began is really striking. Relationships are not enough for us, because there are so many relationships that don’t touch us at all.

Right. Before the vacation, I had spent a few days having fun, going out with friends, with companions with whom I felt good. I had fun. But, once I came home, and everything was over, I felt a bitter aftertaste, like I wasn’t fully happy.

Do you see how the “detector” works in us? We can pretend not to have the criterion with which to judge everything. What does it mean that you had a “bitter aftertaste”? What does it mean that you find within yourself—without have Pigi there to preach to you, without having Albertino or an angel from heaven—this bitterness which gives you an indication that some-»

* Notes from the Assembly of Julián Carrón with the Equipe of Gioventù Studentesca. Cervinia, 3 September 2016

» thing is not right? We don't need anyone to come from outside. Don't make fun of me by responding: "I don't know, I'm lost." No, you are not lost at all. The problem is whether we are loyal with this bitter taste that we find in our mouth, or not. Period. The question is one of seriousness with ourselves, Don't blame others, those with whom you go to the club, those who don't remind you of Him, the friends that don't help you; you have this bitter aftertaste and you have to decide whether you are going to follow this bitterness or whether you are going to follow something that doesn't leave you bitter. And who decides this, you guys? Each one of us, but not because we will go to heaven some day, not because otherwise we'll go to hell some day, because hell begins here, and heaven begins here.

The thing that was hardest about this bitterness was that I felt I couldn't speak about it with these friends. I felt this restlessness, but I couldn't speak about it with them, either because I didn't feel like they would understand or because they didn't really care about me, but were interested only in what was happening that night.

But do you really think you can get away with speaking to your friends in such an abstract way? You have to show them that you have met something that can help them to understand. Did you understand that there is something other than this bitterness because someone explained it to you?

No, because I felt curious.

In fact, the method of Jesus is totally different. But if we don't realize this, we'll start preaching to others. But did we start preaching to you when you first met GS? Jesus—keep this firmly in your minds!—did not lose a minute with propaganda when he first met John and Andrew, not a minute! "Come and see," he told them. But so many times, not being aware of how things happened with us, we change the method and then think that in order to encounter people, we have to hold a class. God invented another method. Does He want you to understand what love is? Instead of giving you a lesson about love, He makes you fall in love, an experience through which you understand much better what it means to love and be loved. He doesn't preach, He makes something happen, and this thing that happens doesn't allow you to reduce it to an abstract discourse. You are born into a family that loves you, He gives you friends through which you understand the difference that can happen in relationships, like you said before: relationships that leave their mark on you. Everything is not equal, not every way of being together, not every family is the same, not every group of friends is equal. Everything is not equal. And God makes love happen so that we can understand what love is. Love is not an abstract word. Do you know why love happens? Because when it happens, you perceive what it means to love and be loved, and what it means to have this bitter aftertaste. It is easy. God makes it easy. The issue is that we, in order to communicate it to others, have to act like God; we cannot do it another way. Like we have seen: our friend in Dublin can find herself in front of a young Turkish guy who doesn't know what she is talking about, and how does she make him understand? Living. Living! If you don't recognize this, you say: "I am incapable of communicating it and my friends won't understand." And you start to blame them for not understanding; but they cannot understand if you "explain" it to them. The problem is that you don't realize that the one who doesn't understand is you, because you are using a method to make them understand through which it is impossible for them to understand. This is particularly interesting for me, because otherwise you guys hit a dead end, and instead of being excited that they see something different in you, you blame them because they don't understand. And then? What do we do? Should we hold a class so that they can be prepared to understand? A time of pre-evangelization? Did John and Andrew do a pre-evangelization course, a pre-encounter? No! John and Andrew were already ready for the encounter. You were already ready for the encounter. The other is already ready for the encounter. Therefore all that needs to happen is the encounter; not for you to explain »

» the encounter to an other, but for it to happen. Are you ready to be loved?

Yes.

In fact, it is enough for it to happen. Certainty, it is not taken for granted that it happens just because we want it to. But you are already ready; for you to verify this event you don't need any particular condition, except your humanity. You are already ready. The Mystery made you ready for the encounter, for every encounter in life, which is only a small reflection of that true, exalted encounter with Christ.

With this desire I arrived at the GS vacation, where I met someone who was in the same situation as me, that is, unsatisfied with what he was living with his friends at the club, and wanting someone who respond to his need for something that would last forever, or at least for something that would last longer than a night at the club. But he had been able to understand that all this did not correspond to him, and he had distanced himself from those friendships that did not have any flavor and that didn't leave him happy. With this person, an incredible relationship was born in which effectively...

Do you see? How did the Mystery respond to your problem?

I met somebody.

Perfect! This is what I wanted to say before. The Mystery became flesh, the explanation became flesh. The discourse became flesh and blood. This is how God responds. First of all, He makes you meet one for whom this has already happened.

A relationship was born in which I felt a correspondence to my desire. He didn't only fascinate me because he gave a testimony that touched on my situation, but because he was able and is still able to reawaken in me this desire, to awaken the desire to be happy and above all to be able to be myself in front of the most urgent difficulties in my life. With this person, I experience that which I was looking for and desperately desiring: a relationship in which I could be free and in which I could feel someone's interest in me, always and in every instant, not relegated to one moment of the day, or to a night at the club. A few weeks after the GS vacation, I fell into the same error as at the beginning of the summer; I was confused again about what I truly needed, spending my days laying out on the beach, and again at night going to fancy restaurants and places with those same friends from before.

And so? Now you choose.

At that point, the disproportion was evident, between the great thing I had encounter and what I was living in that moment. I felt all alone, abandoned by those friends who did not correspond to me; it was a moment of infinite sadness, even in the relationship with my girlfriend. In that moment of sadness and desperation, I couldn't help but go to one person: that friend whom I met at the vacation. And again, with him, I felt like I was reborn, with just one time he reawakened in me in front of these urgent problems, and not because he solved them, but simply because he indicated to me and gave witness to a way of being in front of these difficulties with my desire for happiness.

Thank you for describing the dynamic that you lived, because this helps us to understand that the Christian encounter is not something magical that happens once and for all, and then everything goes smoothly. One can, after having seen, go back to where he was before. "Don't you see that going on vacation did nothing for you?", we sometimes say to discourage each other, because we measure ourselves only by the success that we have afterwards. But is it true that nothing remained after the vacation?

No, otherwise I would have stayed with those friends.

You were already shaped by that experience and you could not but have nostalgia for yourself, as we said earlier. You could not avoid what happened to you and you began to feel when it is missing. It is impressive, because it's not like you weren't with you friends from before, and so you said: "I was alone." Why did you say "I was alone" if you were surround-

ed by them? What did you learn about the nature of solitude?

I felt alone because, while I had experienced a type of relationship in which I was continually provoked...

But those friends also provoked you constantly...to go to the club!

With that friend that I met on vacation, I was able to be myself.

Ah! What makes it possible to be yourself and therefore overcome solitude? What is solitude? It is not “not having someone next to you;” you were full of that, and yet you felt alone. The solitude we are talking about, true solitude, Father Giussani says, is the lack of meaning; it is the powerlessness that I feel in front of my dissatisfaction. Therefore, I can be surrounded by people and be alone, because they are not able to respond to my powerlessness, to my incapacity to be happy. If we have more and more and more, we are not for this reason more full and less alone. Pay attention, because it can happen even in this environment: if we live GS in this way, even when we surrounded by friends, we can be alone. Because the issue is not to be surrounded by people, but whether or not these friends bring “the answer to my powerlessness, if they give me something that leaves its mark in me,” as you said before, “if they give me something that responds to my need; otherwise, surrounded by people, I am alone.” I am amazed that you guys hit on all the questions, for example, that you realize that you can be surrounded by people and, at the same time, be alone. This is a gift! You discover it in your experience, and I don’t have to tell you. Because if I told you without you having had an experience already, you would not understand what I was saying; and instead you understand it, and not because someone had to explain it to you. Otherwise, you don’t just lose friends, but you don’t understand the relationship with your girlfriend, nor the closest and truest relationships that you have, those which mean the most to you. Everything crumbles in our hands. This is lethal. And it is not a problem of moralism or of eternal life, because it has to do with living now; Christ came to give us one hundred times more. Otherwise, if we don’t meet someone that stops us from losing everything—you can admit to yourself or no—if you feel alone when you are with your friends, what are these friends? Nothing. How can you have affection for them? You are only superficially affectionate, because you go to the club and not because they help you to respond to your desire for happiness. Who is the true friend? The friend is the one who can help me to respond to the only thing that matters in life: to be happy. If he doesn’t respond to this, he is fooling around. He is not a friend, even if I call him “friend”, because we do not call our “friend” the first person we pass on the street; because we go to have a beer with him, but then he doesn’t leave a mark on us. So we begin to understand what it means to be a friend, what it means to have a friend, what it means to overcome solitude, what it is to have a true relationship with a girlfriend. And when we see that everything is falling apart, we cannot help but go back, to miss that friend thanks to whom we were reborn. Do you understand why we are Christians? Not because we are good—in fact we do the same crap as everybody else—, but because something has happened to us that we cannot forget; limping, one step forward and two steps back, falling down, getting discouraged, but without ever changing the road. Why? Because it is there that I am reborn, even from my own ashes, as you see. Don’t be afraid that this discouragement can happen. The most important thing is that when the Lord makes you aware of this, you remember that friend; and then you can decide again to follow him, not to beat yourself up that you fell. Why are we surprised that weakness is weak and that you lose your way a minute later? Like Giussani says: it is not like Zacchaeus didn’t fight with his wife anymore. But we have an image of holiness without any stain; here is the whole drama of life. The problem is not that we never get anything wrong. The Gospel tells us everything that Peter did, it didn’t erase any of his errors, just like we shouldn’t erase anything that happens to us, because it

is this that makes us aware of the fact that I can mess up a hundred times, but I cannot erase the memory of the friend who made me be reborn. Now you decide! All the drama is here, in the moment when I become aware and the game starts over, the drama begins again. And all the sins that I can commit cannot stop me from returning. Therefore, if I don't return, it is not because of the errors, but because I don't want to return. No one has stopped you from coming back. Our whole life is played out in this moment, and God has made everything He has made so that we can say Yes, even after we have said No. Jesus, in fact, does not stop at what Peter has done, but asks him: "Do you love me?" And I ask you: "Do you want the life you have found? Do you want to be born again?" So go for it! No one is stopping you; no one can spare you. This is your freedom, the drama of your freedom. Because, like Péguy says, in a phrase that we quoted at the Fraternity Exercises (this bit of Péguy is stupendous!): "To that liberty, [...] I have sacrificed everything, God says / to that taste I have for being loved by free men, / freely." ("Il mistero dei santi innocenti" [The Mystery of the Holy Innocents], in Charles Péguy, *I Misteri*, Jaca Book, Milan 1997, p. 343) God does not want servants, He does not want slaves, He wants friends who love Him as free men, freely. Do you prefer to be love freely or not? And should God have less desire than you?