

**“WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!” (Mk 2:12)**

**INTRODUCTION - 3. “HOW NECESSARY IT IS THAT THE HUMAN ‘I’ BE GREAT, MY FRIEND” (CHARLES PÉGUY)**

# **“You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16)**

**by Pierluigi Banna\***

Like that sick woman, we have within us the engine that moves the world, that saves us from boredom, that stops our life from being reduced to a list of things to do, but makes it something that has never been seen before. Therefore, we are welcomed this evening, because we have these three days in which we can freely express all of our desire, without fear of being judged by anyone and, like that woman, we can cry out: “Help me!”

Among you not everyone is Catholic, there are people of other religions, there are people who don’t believe, but, like you wrote to me in your contributions, you are all here because you have given a minimum of credit to this desire to find something worthwhile for your life.

This was and is the power of Christ: to extract from the rubble of delusion and of betrayal all of man’s desire, to reawaken it! Thus Jesus—this is something really amazing—was not content just to heal that woman, but sought her out among the crowd. He wanted to find her. And she was scared, because she thought he was going to denounce her in front of everyone. Everyone will find out the sins that she has done, the error she committed in touching Him. Instead, Christ calls her in order to tell her that her desire was great, her desire was just. Therefore he says to her: “Daughter, your faith has saved you.” Like the phrase from Péguy that you’ll find on page 10 of the booklet<sup>\*\*</sup>: it is as if He said to her: “Woman, *your human ‘I’ is so great, it is so great that it has moved the infinite. A God, my friend, was disturbed, was sacrificed for you!*” Betrayal, defeat, judgment, powerlessness, delusion no longer matter; all of these disappear before that gaze. Christ gives his life to pull out of the rubble of betrayal and delusion the desire of that woman and of every man: “You were not wrong to seek me out, you were not seeking me out; it was I who was waiting for you.” “It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you!” (John 15:16) This is what I would like to say to each of you this evening: there is someone who has been waiting for you here. Why? To tell you, as the Pope said in an interview this morning: “Courage, come on! You are no longer discarded; you are no longer discarded: I forgive you, I embrace you (Francis, “The Pope of the Least Ones”, interview with P. Rodari, *la Repubblica*, 13 April 2017), your desire is great.

Like one of our friends who is in jail told us, in a book I advise you all to read, also »

\* Introduction to the Paschal Triduum of Gioventù Studentesca, Rimini, 13 April 2017.

\*\* The booklet “*We have never seen anything like this*” contains the quotes cited throughout the Triduum and is [downloadable in pdf format](#).

» because it has lots of images and less text, a book that shows the religious meaning of the tattoos of the incarcerated. Massimiliano recounts that he had a phrase tattooed on his arm: "Better a ruler in hell than a slave in heaven." Better a ruler of that hell which was his life, than a slave of all the false paradises that had been promised to him and that had brought him to jail, as our friend said a little while ago. In fact, as you can read on page 11, one day, Massimiliano told one of the younger inmates: "I murdered my brothers, but it is not the life sentence that condemns me, my condemnation is becoming aware of what I have done... Later, when you become aware, you look God in the face and you see that He loves you just like on the first day" (*Cristo dentro*). Thus, after he, just like that woman, discovered himself loved just like on the first day, he had his tattoo changed: "Better a ruler in heaven than a slave in hell." Because it is more beautiful to be with the one who frees your desire, than to chase after hell.

This also happened to one of our friends, whom self-hatred and betrayal could not conquer, because of a gaze of love that waited for him: "A little while ago, I was doing really bad for about a month: I wanted to hurt myself, I was always down; all this sadness came from the fact that, although my parents were in the dark about this, I had met my mother and we started to fight. She said so many heavy things to me: that my father was not my father, but my stepfather, that I was born from a rape and that she had wanted to abort me. I was truly shaken and I couldn't bring myself to do anything, but then I finally was able to go out thanks to the Mass in memory of Father Giussani, where during the readings, I was struck by the words spoken by God: "Even if a mother forgets her own child, I will never forget you" (Isaiah 49:15). In that moment, I felt myself called, directly, as if God had told me He was there, He loved me, He was with me right in that situation. I left the Mass saying something unthinkable to myself: 'Praised be Jesus Christ that I was born from a rape,' as a way of thanking Jesus for all that had happened to me, because thanks to this, I was able to truly discover the love of God."

Each of us would like—like that woman, like the inmate, like our friend—in front of our betrayals, in front of the sense of abandonment and betrayal that we experience, to be touched by the gaze of Jesus, just like His last night on earth. In front of Judas' betrayal, just as in front of all the betrayals of life, Christ understands that He can do only one thing: give His life for Judas, give His life so that Judas' desire also can be reborn, give His life so that the desire of each one of us can be reborn.

Christ continues to look at each of us the same way He looked at that sick woman, the same way He looked at the inmate ("He loves you like the first day") and at our friend, and He tells us: "You were not born by accident, I have chosen you, I have preferred you and I give my life for your desire, so you will no longer be a slave, no longer be betrayed by the expectations of others; so that you will no longer be a slave of hell, but a ruler in Paradise."

Let us listen to a passage from the Gospel in which Jesus speaks about giving His life.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another." (John 15:9-17) »

» Now we will celebrate Mass, the gesture Christ instituted 2000 years ago on this night, the evening before His death, so that all men could continue to touch Him like the sick woman touched Him, like Massimiliano the inmate touched Him, like our friend touched Him. In this Mass, which will be celebrated all over the world, we want to remember in a special way our Egyptian brothers and sisters who, going to Mass last Sunday, spilled their blood when a bomb went off under a pew, just like Christ gave His body and blood for us.

In these days, there will be a continual struggle for all of us between the prejudices that we have about ourselves, which make us think that we have failed in life, between not being pleased with ourselves, between being slaves to the opinion of others about us, and the desire for our lives to be great, something never seen before. A struggle between prejudice and the craving for life that makes us cry out: "Help me!", "Heal me!" Think about the hemorrhaging woman who lost her blood: even she had experienced this struggle, had to push away the opinion of the gossips and of her whole people, what she had read about in the law of God. She had to conquer her regrets and her shame and let her desire win out, going straight through the crowd, straight toward her only goal, her one objective: to touch Him, to cry out to Him: "Help me!"

What do we call this putting aside the opinions of others and our prejudices in order to let this desire prevail? What do we call this attitude—because it is first of all an attitude—? It is called "silence". Silence is not just being mute, but putting our desire ahead of everything, ahead of all our prejudices and the confusion of our minds, to let only this desire prevail in us. This is the condition—think of the hemorrhaging woman who reaches out, stretching toward Jesus, not distracted by everyone else—which we will be asked to respect at various times during these days. We require it in order to give voice to that desire, which can sometimes be tiring, but which is so great as "to disturb" God. But it is an attitude that we should carry with us even when we go to bed, when we are with each other and when we are speaking, at lunch, on the beach, and during free time. We require an attitude of silence so as not to let our comments prevail, but rather this unique desire. We are not here to waste time, but to touch Him, to see if there is Someone here who can heal us. We are truly fortunate, because in these days we can cry out with all of our need to be healed. So let's sing *Cry no more*, because we are happy to be here, welcomed, because there is no reason to cry anymore, because "you were a slave, and now you are a son, [...] a feast is waiting just for you." Please stand.

*Cry no more*