

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

LESSON - 3

“We have never seen anything like this!” (Mark 2:12)

by Pierluigi Banna*

“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.’” (John 12:23-26)

This was the great reason which dominated all the feelings of Christ. It is not a philosophy. And let’s please not say: “He is great, but I could not do that!” I am the first one who could not do that. This is not the problem now; in this moment we should simply look at the “good reason” of Jesus: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.” (John 12:24)

Guided by this good reason, Jesus is moved and begins to cry because His friend Lazarus has died (cf. John 11:33-35), He gets angry with those who transform the temple into a religious market (cf. Mark 11:15-19), He even gets tired from so much healing and speaking (cf. John 4:6), always searching for all men, because they are like sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mark 6:34). All these feelings, so profoundly human, that filled His heart, all the hardships that He willingly, freely faced, were ordained toward one purpose, in the obedience to the Father who had never betrayed Him, they had only one reason: to give His life in order to release man from his conditionings—as we said last night—, to free man from this dictatorship of feelings, to break open the heart and mind of man.

We do not already need to be Catholic to understand all this. It struck me that some of us who are here, non-Catholics, responded to the question: “Why did you come?”, with: “Because here my humanity comes out, here you are speaking about me.” And another told me: “When you speak about God, I don’t follow so much, but when you talk about relationships, you say many true things.” Jesus does not need, as Pope Francis would say, proselytes, people who have a ticket and pay the entrance fee, saying: “Yes, yes, don’t worry, I’m coming to the meeting.” Jesus has only one interest: to free man and to make him finally feel like himself. Even if a man refuses Him? Even if a man hates Him? Yes! Even Judas, even me. He was so moved by the nothingness of man, to the point that He was moved even by the »

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» betrayal of His own friends. Like Father Giussani says (on page 33 of the booklet):** "God was moved by our betrayal, by our crude, forgetful, and treacherous poverty, by our pettiness. 'I was moved because you hate me.' [...] is an emotion, it is like an emotion; it is being moved, it has being moving within it." (*Is it possible to live this way?*) From the first day of His mission, all His feelings were ordained to this being moved by each of us, He lived everything consumed by this passion for man, until death. He does not die because of hatred, but for love of man. So let us listen to *O côr soave* (on page 34), which says that Jesus was not so much killed by a piercing knife, by the violence of men, but He sacrificed Himself, He was killed for love, by an arrow generated and let loose by Love in person.

O côr soave

"I was moved because you hate me." It seems impossible that a man can love so much that he offers his life for those who hate him. It seems impossible, but it happened. His friends saw Him continually live like this and they kept saying: "We have never seen anything like this!", from the first day they met Him, because of this continual passion for man, this passion for me, for me just as I am, with my obvious limits (even the ones that aren't so obvious!). From the day those first disciples met Him, they continued to repeat this phrase ("We have never seen anything like this!"), surprised at His personality that was so capable of penetrating to their core, of revealing their character. It was not just an occasional impression, a fleeting sentiment.

So many of you have described your encounter with GS like this: no longer judged, set free; not perfect, but preferred, and not because of a particular performance; simply embraced. Like one of you says: "For the first time in my life, in front of difficulties, I have met a presence for me, that goes beyond what I am and is always able to go beyond my discomfort, pushing me to bring out the best in me."

So, to say: "We have never seen anything like this!" in front of certain experiences that bring out the best in us—is this not an emotion that passes? No, because certain facts continue to happen, facts that are so "explosive" that every time they embrace us again, they make us start again, they conquer us again and they do not make us drunk with emotion, but make us go to the depth of these emotions and make us fall deeper in love, they fill us again with a question—it is a good sign that questions are born—: "But who are You that in front of me, my smallness, my nothingness, you give me all of this?" as one of you writes. Another friend of ours, speaking about all that happened after the death of her mother, asks: "Who is this who can make even a tragic fact something wonderful?" Another is conquered by the movement and says: "It is going well, because it is the beginning!" But then he invites his parents and even they are happy. And then he is able to say: "Yes, but I am not capable of this. The emotion has passed." And instead he invites his grandparents and even they are fascinated. Then he does something "impossible", something comparable to the resurrection: he invites his math teacher! And even she is interested! Do you understand? The math teacher: it is the revolution of the cosmos! If it can grasp the heart of a math teacher, that means it can conquer everyone! I do not say this because I have it out for math teachers—I have the greatest respect for them—, but to underline the greatness of Christ.

From the first day to the last day of their life, the apostles were continually put in front of certain facts that threw open their questions; it was a continual surprise at what He did, how He looked at illness, how He never condemned sinners, how He put the wise ones of His »

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

» time to shame, but most of all how He grasped the depth of their humanity, so much so that they kept repeating: "We have never seen anything like this!" And like our friend who invited his math teacher, even the disciples will ask themselves: "Who are You who take such initiative in our lives and who conquer us like this? Who are You? We have never seen anything like this!" And even I repeat it, but not impulsively like I would say it in front of a sunset or a beautiful night. I say: "We have never seen anything like this!" in front of a presence, wanting to get behind it, wanting to know it better, not wanting to let it go. Like another one of you says: He met some people from GS working at a hotel over the summer and was amazed at how they treated him, like a brother, that they even invited him on vacation; but he told them: "No, I don't belong to the Church," and left it at that. The shift changes and some other kids from GS come, who didn't know the ones from before, but he sees how they also treat him like a brother, like a friend, and he likes them; and then he asks: "But who are you?" "We are from GS." And he: "Then I am going on that vacation!" It is not the emotion of an instant, but a presence that continues to happen and deepens his affection for these new friends. The vacation is beautiful. After the summer, this guy thinks: "So, now I'll return to life like it was before" (remember the song *Non son sincera* we listened to at the beginning?). He returns to school, but changes classes. He has a new classmate who says: "Let's get together and study some afternoon." What beautiful discussions he has with this classmate! He has such a straightforward humanity. So he starts to tell this classmate about his summer and this guy tells him: "You know, I met GS too." And so they started GS in their school. Our friend ends his story: "Today this companionship is part of me every day." An affirmation like this does not depend on the fact that our emotions last; the point is that certain facts are stubborn and don't give up on us. And we, with all the spinning of our emotions, should come to grips with these facts; because we can see if our emotions, our doubts, our questions, can be focused in order to understand if these facts are true or not.

The last fact that truly moved me, because it seems to return us to the very beginning of the Church, has to do with a friend who comes from a family that is atheist, who knew nothing about religion. But one Sunday his little brother went to play soccer at the parish came home and recounted what happened there. "We were surprised—our friend says—that he went to the church on Sunday. After a few weeks, he came home and explained the Mass to us; another time we were amazed. We let him be; he's a kid and everything is surprising for him. In the following weeks, the same thing happened and then my mom started to get interested [Do you understand? In the end, all of our possible emotions have to come to grips with the facts that continue to happen]. We moved to another city [everything seemed to be over]; almost right away I met GS and my parents met CL. One weekend, when we were at the house, we started to speak about this: one reflection after another proved my brother right [they focused their binoculars in front of these facts and said: "Maybe he is right"]; there is something truly beautiful that we didn't know existed. We didn't even know what the Mass or Christianity was, and we ended up deciding to get baptized. It doesn't end here, though [the emotion about being baptized is not enough], it was not only the change from being atheists to being Christians, but everything changed. The way we looked at things, our attitude, the way we were at home... before my parents we so superficial, incomprehensible in their daily life, while now the way they are is beautiful; sometimes they pick me up from GS waiting for me to tell them how it went. Respecting the topic 'We have never seen anything like this,' I can say that I have never seen anything similar, nothing at all! Has something changed? Yes, everything has changed!"

For 2000 years, stubbornly, obstinately, irreducibly, facts happen in each of our lives—they are repeated in time, not by our strength or by the conviction of people, but simply by »

» the initiative of the Mystery in our life, they happen—facts that sustain emotions, emotions that ask us to go behind them, that provoke questions, that generate affection and attachment, if only we do not remain on the surface of our fear or our amazement.

"Who are you?" "This companionship is a part of me every day." "Everything has changed!": is this an emotion without reason or a new feeling in life, the fruit of a comparison with the heart, which makes us live and makes us more attached? It is not a simple emotion that leaves us empty, but, like Giussani says (on page 33), "the initial amazement [of the disciples], was a *judgment*," and it is not a cold judgment, but "*a judgment that fused them*;" "it was like a glue" (*L'attrattiva Gesù*) that attached them more and more to Him. It is a judgment full of affection, it is not an emotion, but the discovery of someone whom I love, to whom I can give all my weakness and all my questions, to whom I can say: "I am struggling, I don't understand," without shame. I can finally be myself, because I have never felt so human as when I am with Him. Full of this affection, we can begin to look at our humanity, like He looks at it: we can, like Him, not be afraid of any aspect of our humanity.