

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

LESSON - 4

“Lord, if we leave you, where would we go?” (cfr. John 6:68)

by Pierluigi Banna*

At the conclusion of this morning, I return to that which, with the other adults, my heart most desires to tell you. We might not have understood anything, but we realize that even our incomprehension, as we saw this morning, can be useful. We can forget everything that we've told ourselves and fail a thousand times, but even our error can be useful because we learn more in our failure than if we did the right thing by accident. We can forget, get distracted, be bored, tossed by all kinds of contrasting emotions, spoil everything as soon as we get back to the hotel, but all this can be the occasion to start again and rediscover what is most dear to our lives: the discovery of a Presence that lives up to our humanity, so unique in this world.

To help us understand this, when we went to see him the other day, Father Carrón gave us a powerful example: “If you are walking down the street and suddenly someone looks you in the eye and hits you, what do you do? You hit him back! But if, when you get home, you open the door, and your mother is waiting to give you a slap, what do you do? You ask her: ‘Why?’” Do you see? When one encounters a presence in which he trusts, he does not react on the wave of his emotions, but all of his emotions, his wonder, his anger, his pain become the occasion for a dialogue, they push you to ask: “Why?” “Why am I distracted now?” “Why did you do this to me?” “Why this pain?” You can turn to someone; life is this wonderful dialogue. Like the dialogue of Christ with the Father, that night: “Why, Father?;” this question attached Him more radically to the Father, to the point of death: “Not what I want, but what You want.” (Matthew 26:39) So all of our feelings, all of our misunderstanding, all of our distractions, are not an obstacle, but can serve to attach us more closely to Christ, not to flee from Him, but to rediscover that He never abandons us. And life becomes this dialogue.

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matthew 26:41) So—I can assure you—in time maybe we do not become better, but we become more attached, ever more conquered by this Presence that happens in our life; our affection grows and our desire to follow faithfully, not tossed about by the waves of fading sentiment, but as the fruit of being in focus, judging every feeling, the fruit of a recognition full of affection, of true emotion, because of what »

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» has happened to us. Like Father Giussani says on page 34 of the booklet^{**}: "Affection is not a wave," like feelings, but it means "...to give ourselves over continually to the attraction of the truth, to be prisoners of truth, beauty, justice. Prisoners?!" No. "Followers!" (*Affezione e dimora*).

The witness of our friend helps us understand what it means to follow, to compare everything with a presence. He describes a situation in which many of us have found ourselves. "One evening, while the whole class was on the bus [on a trip], some friends from GS along with another friend of mine began to sing together, a bit wildly, but passionately. I was together with some of my 'jock' friends, who immediately started insulting the kids who were singing, but without trying to make my friends from GS stop singing together. In the midst of all this, a question came to me immediately and almost violently: am I happier, constrained as I am to remain mummified so as not to be judged negatively by my jock friends, or are they, who are together so freely that, if they desire to sing at night on a bus in front of everyone, they don't hesitate a moment to do it?" Do you see? It is clear. At first he was ashamed and despised them. But the heart is infallible, and so, putting that shame and contempt in focus, in front of such an irreducible presence, he asked himself: "But who is more free, who is more happy?" Thanks to his shame, thanks to his not feeling himself "one of the guys", he could rediscover, he could become attached again to those who loved him more. So he continues: "The answer was clear, between the two, I was the sad one, the one who was not free to be himself. And it soon became evident that a friendship that accepts me just the way I am was something I had never seen before." Focusing our feelings is not the fruit of self-analysis, but a surrender to the evidence, to give precedence to this evidence in front of our preconceptions, to move our affection from that which dominates (thoughts, prejudices, ours and others) to a presence that keeps happening and allows us to be faithful to it.

The path of the Way of the Cross this afternoon, like the whole path of life, is to make this comparison, like our friend made: what makes me more free? What makes me happier? What makes me more myself? Even when starting out from our own prejudices or those of others, in the end one must move his heart from what he thought, from what others think of him, to that which really holds, even if he must sacrifice, even if he must lose face. There will come, in life, just like this afternoon during the Way of the Cross, moments in which not everything will be clear, moments in which our limits, our images will seem to take the upper hand (boredom, distraction, enthusiasm, etc.), like the unfocused lenses of the binoculars. And right then we can say, full of this affection, like Peter did one day: "Even we do not understand, but if we leave you, where will we go?" (cf. John 6:68) All this confusion is useful for me to understand that only You make me truly human. Therefore I follow Him, not blindly, but faithfully, reasonably, with all my affection, with all my heart. Like the beautiful novel of de Wohl, *The Spear: A Novel of the Crucifixion*, which I recommend to you, which recounts the life of Jesus from the point of view of a Roman centurion. At a certain point, the figure of a sinful woman is described, who finally felt forgiven and freed by Jesus; her family rejects her and she goes looking for His friends—not finding Jesus; and Mary Magdalene asks her: "What do you want from Him?" and she responds: "I don't know where else to go." I say the same thing: I don't know very well what I want from life; our friend last night wanted tattoos, piercings; I don't want those things, but neither do I know what I want from life, what life has in store for me, but I have at heart only one thing: I want to walk with Him, because I don't know where else to go. I want to be a "follower" of this Man, who has made me be myself like never before, even if it means work, even if I will fail so many times. »

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

» Even if sometimes I can go astray, I know that I want to walk with Him, I don't know where else to go.

Do we have a place to turn, a presence to follow, not because we don't mess up anymore, not because we don't forget, but because where, if not in front of Him, is my humanity, without shame, finally embraced for what it is? Like the last contribution of one of you, who writes at the end of his last year of high school, and says, "I often still find myself tired [you know, my friend, even I still feel it!], I find myself wounded and skeptical, but at a certain point, I cannot do anything but go back to what I have seen in the encounter with so many people and think with simplicity: 'I can run away as much as I want, but I have never seen anything like this.'"

You guys, each one of us is called to this judgment of the heart, to search for a place of which he can say, not just on the wave of emotion, but with a true movement that lasts in time: "I have no other place to go, because I have never seen anything like this!" So, full of affection, we are followers of this Man who is moved even by our hatred. Christ does not stop in front of our fear and distraction, He is not afraid to look our sadness in the face and to take our Cross upon Himself. He continues to die like the grain of wheat, so that we can be released from the slavery of our feelings and emotions, which leave us with dust in our hands.

Full of affection, we put ourselves in the footsteps of God who never stops passing through our life, filling us again with wonder. This is the meaning of the Way of the Cross this afternoon.