



EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

**SEE, I AM DOING SOMETHING NEW:
DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT?**



RIMINI 2018

SEE, I AM DOING SOMETHING NEW:
DO YOU NOT PERCEIVE IT? (Isaiah)

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OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



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Translation from the Italian by Sheila Aileen Beatty

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Cover: Vincent van Gogh, *Almond Blossom*, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, February 1890.

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“On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini entitled, ‘See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?’, His Holiness Pope Francis sends his cordial greetings. He invites you to have a living experience of Christ present in the Church and in the vicissitudes of history, and to change your life so that you may be able to renew the world with the power of the Gospel. The contemplation of the face of Jesus dead and risen restores our humanity, even when it has been fragmented by the toil of life or is marked by sin.

The Holy Father hopes that all those who follow the charism of the late Monsignor Luigi Giussani may bear witness to the concrete and powerful love of God, who truly works in history and determines its final destiny. As he asks you to pray in support of his Petrine ministry, he invokes the celestial protection of the Virgin Mary and gladly imparts to you and all the participants the apostolic blessing you requested, extending it to those who are following by satellite and to the entire Fraternity.”

Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State for His Holiness,
April 27, 2018

Friday, April 27, evening

During entrance and exit:

Antonín Dvořák, Stabat Mater, op. 58

Rafael Kubelik–Symphonie-Orchester des Bayerischen Rundfunks

“Spirto Gentil” n. 9, Deutsche Grammophon

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

“See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?”¹ The capacity to perceive things belongs to the nature of the human being, and is part of our greatness, unmatched by any other creature. Unfortunately, we often tend to take things for granted and live superficially. Yet who among us, looking at the faces in Caravaggio’s painting and listening to the *Fac ut ardeat cor meum* in the *Stabat Mater* by Dvořák, did not desire to be seized like those people, who were overwhelmed by a knowledge of Christ that penetrated their hearts? But we wonder how we can ever know Him in this way, fragile as we are. This is why Jesus offers us a great consolation: “You need the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will lead you to the full truth.”²

Let us then ask the Holy Spirit to lead us to a knowledge of Christ present in reality and history that makes our hearts burn within us.

Come Holy Spirit

I will begin by reading the greeting that the Holy Father has sent us: “On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini entitled, ‘See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?’, His Holiness Pope Francis sends his cordial greetings. He invites you to have a living experience of Christ present in the Church and in the vicissitudes of history, and to change your life so that you may be able to renew the world with the power of the Gospel. The contemplation of the face of Jesus dead and risen restores our humanity, even when it has been fragmented by the toil of life or is marked by sin. The Holy Father hopes that all those who follow the charism of the late Monsignor Luigi Giussani may bear witness to the concrete and powerful

¹ Is 43:19.

² Cf. Jn 16:13.

love of God, who truly works in history and determines its final destiny. As he asks you to pray in support of his Petrine ministry, he invokes the celestial protection of the Virgin Mary and gladly imparts to you and all the participants the apostolic blessing you requested, extending it to those who are following by satellite and to the entire Fraternity. From the Vatican, April 27, 2018, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

1. The consequence of a shift

A quote from Fr. Giussani that we used at the Beginning Day has remained with me, spurring me on: “In the beginning we built, we tried to build on something that was happening [...] and that had bowled us over. No matter how naïve and shamelessly out of proportion it may have been, this was a pure position. This is why, because we have in a sense abandoned it, since we have settled on a position that was first and foremost, I want to say, a ‘cultural translation’ rather than the enthusiasm for a Presence, we do not know—in the Biblical sense of the term—Christ, we do not know the mystery of God, because He is not familiar to us.”³

The consequence of the shift from the enthusiasm for a Presence to a cultural translation is that we have not grown to know Christ. You can see that we do not know Christ by the fact that He is not familiar to us.

It seems to me that there is no greater challenge than the one contained in this provocation: if along the road Christ has not become more familiar, our interest in Him will grow increasingly feeble, and then everything we do will be increasingly detached from its origin, like a dry branch, and will leave us more and more disappointed, with a bitter taste in our mouths.

The work done at the Beginning Day gave each of us the opportunity to take stock of the journey we have made in these months. How can we understand whether we have grown to know Christ better? What signs help us to understand?

Fr. Giussani gave us a criterion of verification for recognizing whether Christ has truly entered and is entering more and more into our lives, whether He is becoming more familiar day by day. To understand it, all you have to do is refer to an elementary experience each of us has: we see that a presence, a person, has entered into our life to the point of becoming familiar when this determines our way of facing everything and of remaining in front of things and circumstances. Just think of your children. On

³ Luigi Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation* (Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2005), 103.

the contrary, when this familiarity is not there, or is not there sufficiently, the point of departure remains the same as before: a certain impression of things, the frameworks we bring with us. We can all see it.

This is no different from what happens with Christ. If in fact the event of Christ has no impact on my way of living and remaining in front of reality, in front of situations and daily challenges, if *the event of Christ* present does not determine the form in which we live these circumstances, this means that we face them like everyone else, starting from the *impression* they evoke in us, and like everyone else, we end up suffocating in a life that “cuts your legs out from under you.”⁴ The result is evident: a life dominated by our impressions—just think of how you wake up certain mornings—does not increase our enthusiasm for Christ, but rather, makes faith increasingly irrelevant for living, because we do not see how Christ is pertinent to the needs of life.

But if the enthusiasm for Christ does not grow more and more, where can we seek our fulfillment? You can look at your own life and note what has the upper hand in it. Since our hearts cannot stop desiring, inevitably we seek fulfillment in what we do, in our “efforts at associative, operative, charity, cultural, social and political activity”⁵ or in our profession. In this way, faith becomes just a “premise” that we leave behind. For this reason, Fr. Giussani often told us that “the fundamental mistake we can make [...] is to take faith for granted. In other words, given faith, with faith as our premise, now we can do cultural activities.”⁶ He does not cut us any slack on this point: “If everything we are waiting for cannot be totally satisfied within what was given to us, in the fact that it was given,” or in other words, in the fact of Christ, then all our activities, all that we do “becomes awaiting *our* kingdom.”⁷

So then, the inevitable question is whether these activities can fulfill us. The wake-up call is that sense of unease we feel when all our “doing” does not really satisfy us.

But if we are still poor of heart, the lack of satisfaction we feel when we expect fulfillment from the things we do can become an opportunity to sense this pressing need to return to the beginning, to that enthusiasm for Christ that won us over.

⁴ Cesare Pavese, *Dialoghi con Leucò* [Dialogues with Leucò] (Turin: Einaudi, 1947), 16.

⁵ Giussani, *The Work of the Movement*, 102.

⁶ Luigi Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza (1975–1978)* [From utopia to presence (1975–1978)], (Milan: Bur, 2006), 173.

⁷ Luigi Giussani, quoted in Alberto Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2018), 397.

I received a letter from a young physician that confirms the fact that “the urgent need to return to the beginning,” to the enthusiasm for Christ, concerns each of us, no matter our age or life story (you may have encountered the Movement a month ago and not even have reached the age of thirty):

“Dear Julián, in these months I’ve begun to understand what you’ve told us many times: if I do not verify the pertinence of faith to the needs of life, it cannot last, and the first sign is a skepticism—not explicit—I would say almost a doubt, a ‘who knows,’ a lack of belief that certain things, certain difficulties in life, can be embraced and changed by Christ. This happened for me in my work. I am doing my residency in a ward where the pace of work is intense, competition and complaining are constant, and most of my colleagues have no life outside their job. In these two years, in the effort to do my work well, I have become very absorbed in it. Two big professional disappointments made me realize that in terms of satisfaction, my work—at least the way I had been doing it—cannot give me back even a small part of what I dedicate to it: there’s an absolutely negative balance. This led me to think of work as something that takes away time from my wife and friends, and my complaining has gotten worse! As long as you are unwilling to change your point of view, and just want a solution to the problem at hand, your efforts at reading School of Community, going to Mass, or talking with friends. will be failures and will leave you increasingly skeptical that Christ can change anything in your relationship with work. But then something happened. For about two months now, I’ve been going to Mass before work. There’s a little group of people in the Movement who go every morning and afterwards have a quick coffee at the café in front of the church. For them, it’s no big deal, just a daily fact. The first morning I joined them I was happy, and I rode my motorcycle to work—which is usually a time when I become worried about all the things I’ll have to do and all the commitments I have to juggle—with the lightness of someone who’s just seen something beautiful. While I usually spend my breaks at work thinking about the next thing I have to do, they spent those ten minutes there truly present and attentive. I was also struck by their attention to me, someone they didn’t know, but also to a few homeless people who wander around in front of the church. I observed a series of things that made me wonder if maybe I could be happy at work, but it was a little thing that opened a breach in my complaining and prompted a question that pushes me to make a journey. Later, during a meeting with you and some young working people, I saw the same dynamic as the one at the café. I was amazed by your freedom in front of us, your having nothing to defend, and your curiosity about what could emerge from us. The

judgments you made blew me away and unmasked our reduced outlook on reality. I understand that such a free gaze on things cannot be produced by a more perfect and attentive understanding of Fr. Giussani's writings, or by participation in more gestures and assemblies, but only by familiarity with the Mystery. So I watched you with curiosity and envy, wondering why you responded to various provocations differently than I would have. I was really trying to identify with, to understand, how you look at things. It was beautiful because for me, in the beginning, following was exactly this way: an almost spontaneous identification that came from an amazement at a different humanity.”

Mind you, to get back to the enthusiasm of the beginning, it is not enough to dwell on old memories, or get together with friends to recall past times. The memory of the way things were does not restore the beginning to us. Remembering the happy times when they were dating or engaged does not restore to a couple the enthusiasm that has been lost over the years. Do you want to see well-established proof of this? Look at the skepticism that worms its way into the lives of many adults. What inflamed us in the beginning has to happen again now: this is the only possibility.

Regarding our other attempts to recover the beginning, Fr. Giussani expressed himself categorically: “Let’s say that today some people [...] gather together and, with the impressive memory of an event that struck them, that did them good, that even defined their lives, they want to renew it, overcoming a ‘discontinuity’ that was created over the years. [...] If, for example, they were to say, ‘Let’s get together and do a catechesis study group, or develop a new political initiative, or support a charitable activity, create a work, etc.,’ none of these responses would be adequate to bridge the discontinuity.” Nothing is clearer than this: “Continuity with the ‘then’ is re-established only through the re-happening of the same event, the same impact, now.”⁸ The beginning is always an event. To bridge the discontinuity with the beginning, what happened before has to happen again, now. The same event that moved us in the beginning has to happen.

This is what Pope Francis reminded us of in Saint Peter’s Square: “The charism is not preserved in a bottle of distilled water! [...] The [...] legacy that Fr. Giussani left you cannot be reduced to a museum of memories [...]. Faithfulness to tradition, Mahler said, ‘is not to worship the ashes but to pass on the flame.’”⁹

⁸ Luigi Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” Notes from the Assembly of Responsibles, January 1993, *Traces*, “Page One,” November 2008.

⁹ Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, March 7, 2015.

Only the re-happening of His presence now can restore the beginning to us. Christ is a present event. The one hope for us is to know Christ more if we do not want to lose the enthusiasm that won us over. This is why, ever since the Beginning Day, that line has remained a provocation for me.

2. In becoming adults, a demoralization

In the first Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, Fr. Giussani told us clearly that our enemy is “the absence of knowledge of Christ.” But what kind of knowledge is this? Since we usually think of knowledge in a reduced sense as ideas and information, Giussani let us know that he was talking about knowledge in the biblical sense: “Knowledge as familiarity, as concord, as assimilation, as presence in the heart.” He observed further that it is “as if there were no longer [after the encounter] this familiarity with Christ that made itself felt [...]. There is an embarrassment that is His being distant, like a non-presence, a not-being decisive for the heart. In actions no, in these it can be decisive (let’s go to church, let’s build the Movement, let’s say Compline, let’s do School of Community, let’s go and do some charitable work, let’s go to organize groups here and there, and let’s throw ourselves into politics). In activities, it’s not lacking [...] but what about the heart? In the heart no! Because the heart 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.”¹⁰

And this is not all. This distancing of Christ from your heart “explains another distancing, which reveals itself in an ultimate embarrassment in our relationships, in the way we look at each other, because it is only our brother Christ who can make us really brothers,”¹¹ my friends! How often have we spoken about it and experienced it in life: the distancing of the heart from Christ becomes a distancing from each other, so that among us an ultimate, reciprocal extraneousness dominates.

Now, our hearts can be so distant from Jesus that He becomes a stranger to us: “If Jesus came here in silence—softly—and sat on a chair over there, near her, and at a certain point we realized it, I wonder if in many of us the amazement, gratitude, joy ... I wonder if in many of us the affection would be truly sponta-

¹⁰ Luigi Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ,” Notes from a Lesson During the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, May 8, 1982, *Traces*, “Page One,” February 2007.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

neous. [...] I wonder if we all would be covered with a blanket of shame if we realized in that moment that we had never said ‘You,’ that we had been together, that everything had been beautiful, but nobody felt the need to say His name, [...] if we tried to live seriously the not total shipwreck of His personal ‘I’ in our collective ‘I.’”¹² How many of us today have said “You” to Christ with the familiarity with which we treat the presences that are truly dear to us?

Let’s be clear: it is not that Christ is unknown to us. “Paradoxically [Fr. Giussani pressed the point], Christ is the motive for which we live a form of life that we would never have lived—and yet He is far from our heart!” Growing up, becoming adults, even as we do many things for the Movement or in the name of the Movement, our hearts have remained far from Christ, and He may not yet have penetrated them. Fr. Giussani continued, “I don’t believe that it is a characteristic, a statistically normal characteristic, that growing up has made us more familiar with Christ, has made that ‘great absence’ more of a presence [...]. I don’t think so.”¹³

What happens if growing up does not make us more familiar with Christ? A kind of demoralization sets in, “not in the banal sense of the word, but as regards that familiarity with God that constitutes man’s life.”¹⁴ Therefore, “if morality is tending to something greater than us, then demoralization means the absence of this tension. I repeat that in theory and even in works—not falsely, but truthfully—this tension reawakens, but it is not ultimately *in the heart*, because what is ultimately in the heart is not blocked or suspended by times or conditions [...]. Just as the ‘I’ cannot suspend its life, so too, when the heart is moral, when it is not demoralized, that tension towards the ‘More,’ towards something more, seems never to fail.” There is no let-up, friends, because here the issue is the heart, not works. “So the problem is really a problem of our heart.”¹⁵

How can we counter this demoralization? At this point, Fr. Giussani renewed his stress on the importance of the friendship among us, our companionship, our Fraternity, clarifying the task: “Our companionship must first of all make us fight against this demoralization.”¹⁶

But how can it help us in this fight, so that Christ may penetrate into our hearts? We see it clearly when it happens.

“Dearest Fr. Julián, I went to the Way of the Cross in Caravaggio last night, after years of total forgetfulness of Good Friday. I’ve always had the

¹² Luigi Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù* [The attraction of Jesus] (Milan: Bur, 1999), 151.

¹³ Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ.”

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

excuse of work, and so I blithely skipped this gesture without any second thoughts. I just didn't feel the need for it. This year, who knows why, I found the time, and I understood that the key question is where my heart is grounded. It was like returning to the origin of everything. When I was in my twenties, at the times of the Easter Triduum of the university students with Fr. Giussani in Caravaggio, the Way of the Cross was one of the things that left me thunderstruck. Yesterday it floored me again, but with a piercing pain, as I listened to the choir sing 'Cristo al morir tendea' and Mary's question full of suffering: 'Will you leave Him for another love?' I was struck because she did not say 'because of sin or evil,' but 'for another love.' This morning I asked myself questions I haven't posed for decades, or maybe never asked at all. I asked why the Church proposes Holy Week every year. How often we let this time pass by as a gesture that changes nothing in us, in our lives, because after all we "already know it" and there's nothing in us to be corrected! We wait impatiently for it to be over so we can get back to concrete things like work, payday, husband and children, the house, car, birthday celebrations, and Fraternity group meetings (but in what way are we brothers and sisters, then?), the vacations of the Movement, or going to the beach with friends. Instead, the Church breaks time, literally breaks it, in order to open again the wound that is my humanity. Because you—friend, husband, wife, child, and every movement of my heart—you, who are everything for me, will not live forever, and you will betray me and I will betray you and betray myself; you, who I love so deeply, are incapable of keeping the promise you awakened in me. So then, in what should I place the hope that the heart endlessly seeks? This is what the Church proposes every year: that we discover the wounds of each day, and starting with Ash Wednesday, that we acknowledge we need everything, and that we return to the truest position, which is begging. The answer is not given to us, but asserts itself in the heart of the beggar who runs on the dawn of the third day."

This is the task of our companionship. For less than this, it would not be worthwhile to remain. "This companionship of ours," Fr. Giussani insisted, "must go deeper, it must touch ourselves, our heart."¹⁷ As it says in School of Community, our companionship must introduce us and move us to "a highly personal relationship with Christ."¹⁸

But Giussani clarified that, having reached this level, the level of my acknowledgement of "You, O Christ," the level of the heart, you cannot

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Luigi Giussani, *Why The Church?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 186.

delegate to others an answer that only you can give: “This is a responsibility [as shown in the letter I’ve just read] that we cannot unload onto the companionship. The heart is the only thing in which we are not partners [...]. If you are on a team in which each one has a role, then if each one plays his part things go well. It’s like that in the Movement, in the Movement’s activities, but not for the person! So our companionship must be rather strange. It’s a companionship upon which you cannot unload anything.”¹⁹

3. Christ, our hope for fulfillment

Why did Giussani insist so much on the need for Christ to penetrate the heart? The reason is simple: without Christ, the heart remains unsatisfied. Experience shows us that the heart cannot cheat, because it is objective and infallible. As the first chapter of *The Religious Sense* reminds us, the heart as a criterion of judgment is objective. The original needs are within us and we cannot manipulate them: they are given to us with life itself. This is why the heart is infallible as a criterion: the elementary needs are infallible, and they continually unmask our reductions and images of what should respond to the heart’s thirst. A clear sign is our lack of satisfaction not only in front of personal or family chaos, but also in front of professional success.

Giussani’s insistence on this point demonstrates all his esteem and passion for each of us. He is the incarnation of a true companionship that never gives up calling us to the one thing that can satisfy the heart. “The absence of Christ,” in fact, “destroys and causes depression, turns human depression into a stable form. The smaller the possibility of Your presence, oh Christ, the less humanity for my heart and yours; the less humanity in a man’s relationship with his wife, in a woman’s relationship with her children, with [the consequent] slow and invading replacement of true affection, real love, charity and the gratuitousness of self-giving by a “claiming” attitude. [...] The smaller the possibility of Your Presence, oh Christ, the smaller the possibility of humanity for [...] all the people that crowd around you,”²⁰ and for us.

What is the opposite of the demoralization of the heart and the depression that seem to characterize our becoming adults? “The opposite of demoralization,” the thing we all need, “is hope.” Our friend also testified to this. What Fr. Giussani told us is strikingly evident in anyone who has a

¹⁹ Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ.”, op. cit.

²⁰ Luigi Giussani, *You Can Live This Way*, The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini, April 28–30, 1995, 28.

true experience of humanity, anyone who is sincere with what happens in her life. But what hope? What kind of hope is this? It is hope in your own destiny, your own fulfillment. But how is this possible, with all the mistakes, failures, and contradictions that we repeat, that multiply and accumulate? “It’s only where God has spoken to man that this hope exists.” In fact, the content of this hope is “the one the angel Gabriel said to Our Lady: ‘Nothing is impossible for God.’ I think that says it all. The new man that Christ came into the world to arouse is the man for whom this affirmation is the heart of his life. ‘Nothing is impossible for God’—where God is not the ‘God’ of our thoughts, but the true God, the living God; in other words, the one who became man, that is, Christ.”²¹

The Bible reminds us: “I am the Lord, the God of all the living! Is anything too difficult for Me?”²² “‘Nothing is impossible for God!’ So this phrase lies at the beginning of the true history of mankind, at the beginning of the great prophecy that was the people of Israel, at the beginning of the new people, the new world, the Angel’s declaration to Our Lady, at the beginning of the rise of the new man, at the beginning of the prospect and the move [sic] of the new man, [...]. On hearing Him say, ‘It’s easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven,’ the Apostles asked, ‘So who can enter the kingdom of heaven? Who can be saved?’ They were poor people; they had left behind what little they had. Jesus replied, ‘For you it is impossible, but for God nothing is impossible.’”²³

This is the foundation of hope. This is the basis of the possibility of being liberated from demoralization. This is what keeps alive the heart’s striving after that for which it is made. God became man, Christ. “A new man has come into the world, and with him a new road”:²⁴ the impossible has become possible. This is movingly expressed in the Easter poster: “Ever since the day Peter and John ran to the empty tomb and saw Him risen and alive in their midst, everything can change. From then on, and forever, a person can change, can live, can live anew. The presence of Jesus of Nazareth is like the sap that from within—mysteriously but certainly—refreshes our dryness and makes the impossible possible. What for us is impossible is not impossible for God. So that the slightest hint of a new humanity, to someone who looks with a sincere eye and heart, becomes

²¹ Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ.”

²² Jer 32:27.

²³ Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ.”

²⁴ Ibid.

visible through the company of those who recognize that He is present: God-with-us. The slightest hint of a new humanity, like dry and bitter nature becoming fresh and green once more.”²⁵

So, friends, we must ask the Holy Spirit for the simplicity to acknowledge Christ, to “lift up your eyes from yourself to that Presence”²⁶ who came out to meet us, and to let our hearts be penetrated, as on the dawn of a new day.

All that is needed is simplicity. “Everything boils down to having a childlike heart.” What does this mean? It “means lifting your eyes up from your own problems, from your own plans, from your defects, from other people’s defects, to look at the risen Christ. ‘Lift up your eyes from yourself to that Presence.’ It is as if we need a wind to come and take away everything we are, so that our heart become free or, rather, become free again—keep living in the flesh, going wrong like before [...]. but it is as if something else has come into the world. A new man has come into the world, and with Him a new road. ‘See, a road has opened in the desert, don’t you see it?’ In the desert of the world a road opens up, the possibility of works, but first of *one work*. “Works” are the expression of humanity; work is a new humanity, a new human companionship.”²⁷

There is no other way to rediscover the enthusiasm of the beginning that we may have lost in living. “Without this simplicity, without this poverty, if we are unable to raise our eyes up from ourselves to that Presence, then a companionship that can rid itself of that ultimate embarrassment, that makes it a true journey, is impossible. [...] I have to lift my eyes up from myself to that Presence, to the Presence of the risen Christ.”²⁸ Lifting up our eyes from ourselves to His presence is the only way to live our lives, earning it, and to save the companionship, overcoming the ultimate embarrassment among us that Fr. Giussani described.

Only Christ is able to respond to the expectancy that brought us here, as one of you wrote: “I’m waiting for the Spiritual Exercises with an expectancy I’ve never had before!” to quote just one of the many messages that have arrived full of this expectancy.

At the height of the 1968 protests, Giussani told Péguy Center friends: “It’s important to end one phase and start another: the definitive one, the decisive one, the one that can grasp the impact of time—no, the impact of

²⁵ Luigi Giussani, quoted in the Communion and Liberation Easter Poster, 2018.

²⁶ Giussani, “Familiarity With Christ.” op. cit..

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

all of history. Because the announcement that began by striking two people, John and Andrew (in the first chapter of Saint John), two thousand years ago, that announcement, that person is the phenomenon that attracted us here, and is the phenomenon that makes us stay in God's Church."²⁹

Let us ask Christ to make our hearts throb with affection for Him in these days: this is the only chance to know Him truly, in a way that is not intellectual or just a matter of ideas. Let us join with all our hearts in Fr. Giussani's prayer, inspired by a line from the *Stabat Mater* attributed to Jacopone da Todi: *Fac ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum ut sibi complaceam*. (Make my heart burn with love for Christ God, so that I may be pleasing to Him.) Commenting on Dvořák's setting of the piece, Giussani wrote: "Make everything in me burn! Everything up to the last hair of my head. Make everything in me burn, unworthy as I am, and yet made for singing, 'I adore you, Redeemer.' What freedom, what ardour of acknowledgement!"³⁰

As you entered the hall, you saw that this year each entrance features a brief quote by Fr. Giussani about the music we are listening to as an aid for immersing ourselves more fully in what is happening. As you know, the music is not chosen by chance. Over the years, Fr. Giussani introduced us to each of these works because of the powerful way they can facilitate silence. Those who looked at the Caravaggio images while listening to the *Fac ut ardeat* will have experienced this. Being distracted or using your cell phone is not the same thing as letting yourself be swept up in what is in front of you: we pay attention in order not to reduce the import of what is happening.

Let's take for example Fr. Giussani's words about Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor*, to which we have often listened during our gestures: "This beautiful song helps us to collect ourselves in grateful silence, so that in the heart, the flower of 'Yes' can germinate and come up, the 'Yes' by which man can act, can become a collaborator with the Creator, [...] a lover of the Creator. Just as it was for Mary, [...]: a boundless relationship filled her heart and time. If the religious intensity of Mozart's music—a genius which is the gift of the Spirit—penetrated our heart, then our life, with all its restlessness, contradictions, toil, would be beautiful like his music."³¹

²⁹ Giussani, quoted in Savorana, *Life of Giussani*, 417.

³⁰ Luigi Giussani, "The Feast of Faith" notes accompanying CD no. 6 of the *Spirto Gentil* series (Antonín Dvořák, *Stabat Mater/Leggende*), 14.

³¹ Luigi Giussani, "The Divine Incarnate," notes accompanying CD no. 24 of the *Spirto Gentil* series (W.A. Mozart, *Great Mass in C minor, K 427*), 12. Text available at scritti.luigigiussani.org.

I desire, together with you, to allow myself to be educated more and more by the charism to live silence, *this* silence, which is “our hearts and minds being filled with more important things,” by the most crucial presence for life. “Silence [...] coincides with what we call memory.” In these days we share together, “memory will be enhanced by the music we will hear or by the paintings we will see [on the screens]; in this way we will open ourselves to look, to listen, to feel with the mind and heart what in some way the Lord will propose to us,”³² to allow ourselves to be swept up and seized by Him.

All the efforts we make—the choice of certain music, of the songs and images—are so that we can learn to leave space for an Other, which is the one great reason that brought us here today.

Therefore, please pay particular attention to silence in these days as you travel to and from the hotels and as you enter and exit the halls. The gesture we will live depends a great deal on the contribution each of us makes: I ask for me and for all of us that we not waste this opportunity.

³² Luigi Giussani, quoted in *A Presence Within the Gaze*, The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, 2015, 18–19.

HOLY MASS

Mass readings: Acts 13:26-33; Ps 2; Jn 14:1-6

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

That evening when, in anticipation of the total sacrifice of His death and the glory of His resurrection, Jesus gave all of Himself, His body as food and His blood as drink, He encountered His disciples' resistance, demoralization, and alienation. He used Thomas's question—"Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?"—to create an incredible, brilliant, definitive manifestation of His tenderness, of His passion for the destiny of the human person. He said, "I am the truth." He also said, "I am the life." But first, He said something nobody had ever said, and nobody could ever say after Him: "I am the way," which means "I am this initiative of communion, this presence full of passion for your destiny. Not only am I the way, but I am also the companionship along the road, at every step along the journey." This is what is happening this evening, in this moment, after twenty-one centuries. "See, I am doing something new; Do you not perceive it?"

Saturday, April 28, morning

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Great Mass in C minor, K 427

Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker

“Spirto Gentil” n. 24, Deutsche Grammophon

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“We have known and believed in the love God has for us!”

There is a “journey”³³ that we must make to reach the knowledge of Christ in the biblical sense of the word—as Fr. Giussani said—if we do not want to remain blocked in the embarrassment provoked by our heart’s distance from Him.

Let’s state right away the prospect that Jesus sets before our eyes. Where does He want to bring us? We heard it in the *Regina Coeli* last Sunday: “I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know Me, just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I will lay down My life for the sheep.”³⁴ Commenting on these words, Pope Francis said, “Jesus does not speak of intellectual knowledge, no, but of a personal relationship, of predilection, of mutual tenderness, reflection of the same intimate loving relationship between Him and the Father.”³⁵ Less than this is not knowledge of Christ and of the Father. Jesus wants to bring us, His sheep, to the same knowledge, to the same level of intimacy that He, the Shepherd, has with the Father. This is the goal.

What road does the Mystery use to lead us to such knowledge? “God is everything in everything.” The Lord is everything, as Fr. Giussani reminded us many times. “The Lord is everything, not because of some feeling of ours, not because we ‘sense’ that He is everything, not because of an act of will or

³³ Claudio Chieffo, “Il viaggio” [The journey], in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 232–33.

³⁴ Jn 10:14–15.

³⁵ Francis, *Regina Coeli*, April 22, 2018.

because we ‘decide’ that He is everything, not moralistically, because He ‘has to’ be everything, but by His very nature.”³⁶ This is the truth, and has been so since the beginning. It is clear in and of itself, and does not depend on our feelings, will, or decisions. But it asks to be discovered by women and men, known in the sense we have said, to the point that it shapes our life. So then, how can it penetrate into our hearts? Only by happening.

This is the condition of knowledge in the biblical sense of the word: an event. That the Lord is the Lord, or in other words, that God is everything for the human person, and that He is familiar to the life of His creatures, has not been made evident through reflection, or achieved through “learned understanding,” but through a different modality, one that reverses the direction: God reveals Himself as Lord of the human person through history, by intervening in it. Fr. Giussani wrote: “The fact that the Lord is everything by His very nature [...] did not emerge as the fruit of wisdom, or from philosophical reflection. That the Lord is Lord [...] appeared evident through His intervention in history, though His historical revelation of Himself.”³⁷

Biblical history—a precise, particular history, formed by exact words and facts—is the document of this self-revelation of God. Thus historicity becomes the fundamental characteristic of God’s self-communication. It is exactly what happened to us within this “particular history” that is the Movement.

Listen to how Fr. Giussani spoke about the beginning, even the precise hour: “I remember as if it were yesterday: the Berchet High School, nine in the morning, the first day of school, October 1954. I remember the feeling I had as I went up the few steps of the high school entrance: it was the naivety of an enthusiasm, a boldness [...]. I see myself once again in that moment, my heart surging with the thought that Christ is everything for the life of the human person, that He is the heart of the life of the human person: this was the announcement those young people had to begin to be told and to learn, for their happiness. [...] I say these things because they constitute the one motive, the one purpose, and the one root from which our Movement arose. If there have been times that our Movement has swerved off the road, been superficial or distracted, it was exclusively because this one theme of all our efforts and all our initiative became weak or was forgotten. A great enthusiasm, therefore.”³⁸

³⁶ Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [In search of the human face] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1995), 22.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Luigi Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [An event of life, that is, a history], ed. C. Di Martino (Rome: EDIT-Il Sabato, 1993), 336, 338.

The beginning of this particular story encapsulates the method of every moment of the subsequent itinerary. But precisely because truth is made present through this method—a self-revelation in history—it can lose its evidentiary power and splendor in history, and it can weaken or be forgotten. Benedict XVI explained the reason in *Spe Salvi*: “Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere. [...] In the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new. [...] Freedom must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself.”³⁹

In front of the fact that we have fallen away, who among us does not have in his more lucid moments the desire to be seized again? How can this happen? Nothing can help us more than our identification with God, with God’s anxiety that we be attracted to him so that the life of each of us will not be lost. The Lord has used every circumstance of the history of His people to make Himself known more and more. Therefore, let us return to the beginning, to learn again what we thought we already knew.

Reading once again the pages of Balthasar’s recently re-published book, *L’impegno del cristiano nel mondo* (The Christian’s engagement in the world),⁴⁰ I could not help but feel the urgency of this return to the origins. Perhaps our awareness, gained over the years, that already knowing something or experiencing something in the past does not suffice for it to remain present, will make us more open and attentive to being surprised by how God did and does things.

1. The beginning: an act of election

“All the ancient peoples have their gods, but the God of Israel stands out from all the others because, first among all of them, He created with a unique act of election [...] the people who worships Him. [...] At the dawn of everything, before everything else, is free divine initiative [...]. ‘The Lord is pleased with you and has chosen you, not because you were more numerous than all the other peoples [...], but because the Lord loves you.’”⁴¹

³⁹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Spe Salvi* (November 30, 2007), 24.

⁴⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, *L’impegno del cristiano nel mondo* [The Christian’s engagement in the world] (Milan: Jaca Book, 2017). This volume contains essays by both authors. Subsequent citations will cite to the appropriate author and relevant essay. Balthasar’s essays in *L’impegno del cristiano* are collected in English in *Engagement With God* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008).

⁴¹ Balthasar, “Significato dell’antica Alleanza” [The meaning of the ancient covenant], in *ibid.*, 31.

It is through the experience of being chosen that one can know God. This is expressed beautifully in Moses's dialogue with God: "You have said: 'You are my intimate friend; you have found favor with Me.' Now, if I have found favor with You, please let me know Your ways so that, in knowing You, I may continue to find favor with You."⁴²

Knowing means finding favor with Him, being preferred by Him. "The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.'"⁴³ The possibility to know Him and be known by Him is grounded in God's preference, the initiative He takes, not in our own capacity. Each of us, the face of each of us, "is" this preference, this absolutely unique gesture of preference. As Balthasar said, "The love that God directs at me makes me what I am in truth and definitiveness: it establishes the 'I' that God wants to see in front of Himself and have for Himself, directed at Him. This love that chooses makes a unique person of the vague 'subject' or 'individual' that the human person would be on his or her own. God is absolutely unique, and while He grants me His love in choosing, He makes me unique as well."⁴⁴ It is truly impressive to be told these things!

"God's free choice and initiative [therefore] remain the concrete form in which grace appears among women and men. One might believe that this unmotivated, sovereign action of God marks it as coming from an arbitrary power and therefore degrades the human person to the status of a servant condemned to mere obedience, but free choice is not primarily a demonstration of power, but of love." The goal of His grace is not to make women and men slaves to a new power, but to free them. "The action of God is my liberation. The goal of His freeing me from slavery in Egypt cannot be to lead me to a new slavery and subjection to Yahweh, but only to lead me, as I follow the free God, to my [...] freedom. The foundation of election: the freedom of God must coincide with the goal of the election, which is participation in the very freedom of God."⁴⁵

How can the human person—that is, each of us—verify whether these are just pretty words or whether it is true that the goal of God's initiative is our liberation? The answer to this question characterizes God's self-revelation in history: the verification of God's promise of liberation is our participation in the very freedom of God. I understand that I know God by the fact that He makes me free. But there is a condition: I must accept and welcome

⁴² Ex. 33:12–13.

⁴³ Lk. 1:30.

⁴⁴ Balthasar, "Significato dell'antica Alleanza," in *L'impegno del Cristiano*, 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

Him. My answer, my embrace of His preference are necessary, because my liberation cannot happen without me. In order to free me, God needs my freedom. “If the fact of God’s choice is primarily such unfathomable love, the answer that He awaits, or rather, that He needs, is [...] a ‘yes’ that follows and obeys with docility and openness, [...] out of a grateful reciprocation of this love.” Only if the people assents to the choice will it see the fulfillment of the promise: “God will lead the people out of Egypt. He will make them pass through the sea and will drown their pursuers. He will miraculously feed them and provide them with water in the desert. He will pass as a cloud of fire and smoke, marking the stages: where and when the cloud stops, the people must make camp; when it moves again the people must strike their tents and proceed, always following God.” It is unthinkable that the two actors should be inverted at some point and “that Israel should take over the leadership and that God should follow behind the people. Docility and understanding the ways of God who makes the choice are the first attributes that are demanded of Israel. [...] All the obedience is an education to this freedom. ‘Be holy as I am holy,’ rightly understood [...] means: ‘Be free as I am free.’” Thus being holy, being free, means “freely putting your trust in the freedom of God.”⁴⁶ This is the condition the Lord sets in order for us to be truly free.

But, as Balthasar acutely observes, this requires that the beginning “can never become the past.” The beginning is “the source you can never leave. Even afterwards, just afterwards, when there will be all the consequences, the premise can never be forgotten, not even for a moment. Our freedom is inseparable from having been freed.”⁴⁷

Our freedom is inseparable from being continually freed, yesterday and today. “Dear Carrón, I’m coming off a complicated period. There was a moment when I thought that following Christ was no longer useful and I went away, thinking that nothing would change. But then I began to live badly, and everything was insufficient. I was aware of all that malaise and sadness, but feared admitting it. I feared admitting that deep down, I only need to feel Him present in my life. I need Him in order to accept the circumstances that just have to be embraced. I am not talking about a resigned acceptance of reality, but of a new way of facing new circumstances. So I yielded. I returned and I have begun living anew. If this companionship and Christ present are missing, it is impossible to live.” Detached from Him, our lives falls apart.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32–33.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

At the moment that we take control of our freedom, forgetting that it is given to us instant by instant, we lose it, because it is inseparable from the fact of being freed. We must never forget this. “When the Lord your God brings you into the land which He swore to your ancestors [...] be careful not to forget the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that house of slavery.”⁴⁸ God’s entire pedagogical intent is to lead the people to this awareness: our freedom is inseparable from being continually freed. Therefore, we must never stray from that source, which is His action, His preference, His presence. How everything would change if we had this awareness!

If we do not grasp God’s method, if we do not recognize the nexus between our experience of freedom and His initiative, we will inevitably move away from the origin. How? By taking it for granted, treating it like something already known. What use to us is this “something already known” when circumstances close in on us? We realize that we share Kant’s temptation to move away from the source, reducing Christian life to crystalized doctrine or to ethics.⁴⁹ But the Christian life is always God’s free gift to us; it always springs anew from His present initiative, from His happening again now, and moving away from this source, reducing it to what we have in our heads, to our interpretations, means returning to slavery, whether we like it or not. For this reason, as we said yesterday, quoting Fr. Giussani, the fundamental error is to take faith for granted, to take for granted the source of all the newness that we experience in life.

The people of Israel also continually yields to this temptation. Instead of following God who works in the present, following His indications, they decide to go it alone. It is consoling to see how the people of Israel, like us, had to learn God’s method step-by-step, falling continually. The case of King Saul is very illuminating. Totally dominated by his fear of the imminent victory of the Philistines, he decided not to wait for the prophet Samuel, as God had commanded, and offered the sacrifice himself. The situation was dire, their enemies were defeating them, and so he proceeded! When Samuel arrived, he berated Saul: “You have acted foolishly! Had you kept the command the Lord your God gave you, the Lord would now establish your kingdom in Israel forever, but now your kingship shall not endure.”⁵⁰ Saul had

⁴⁸ Cf. Dt 6:10–12.

⁴⁹ “One may quite easily believe that if the Gospel had not taught the universal ethical laws in their whole purity first, reason would not have known them in their fullness. Still, *once we are in possession of them*, we can convince anyone of their correctness and validity using reason alone.” Immanuel Kant, “Letter to F.H. Jacobi,” August 30, 1789, in Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Correspondence 1759-1799* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 158.

⁵⁰ 1 Sm 13:13.

not understood. Starting from his analysis of the situation, he thought he grasped the sense of the Lord's command, but he had forgotten that the protagonist was an Other. God was not interested in the sacrifice, but that the people would begin to understand and trust in Him.

The criterion for verifying whether the people of Israel starts from the event that happened to them—the preference of God, His initiative toward them—or from an impression of things, is how they faced reality. Their history shows that on many occasions their presumption that they were capable of opening the road to freedom by themselves led inexorably to slavery. This holds true for us as well. You can see it right away in concrete experience. Making our own way to freedom on the basis of our impressions or analyses always leads us to some form of slavery.⁵¹

2. “By these facts you will know that I am the Lord”

How does the Lord make Himself known to the point of entering the innermost depths of the people, becoming familiar to them? He does so through a very precise method, a continual initiative in history, the goal of which is to make it known that He exists, not in terms of a theoretical definition, but as a real presence who takes care of His people. It is striking how the Bible links the experience of the people of Israel with the knowledge of God. There is no abstraction, no crystallization into doctrine, but instead a promise that becomes reality in history. It is pure, verified experience, because experience is not experience unless it reaches the point of acknowledging the origin that makes it possible.

God instructed Moses: “Therefore, say to the Israelites: I am the Lord.” How could they see this? How could they recognize it? Here is the answer: “I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery. I will redeem you by My outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as My own people, and I will be your God; [in this way] you will know that I, the Lord, am your God who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you as your own possession—I, the Lord!”⁵² In the fulfillment of the promise, the people has the promise of who God truly is: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”⁵³

⁵¹ Cf. Balthasar, “Significato dell’antica Alleanza,” in *L’impegno del cristiano*, 33–34.

⁵² Ex 6:6–8.

⁵³ Dt 5:6.

This is what Israel learned through experience, and what it must cherish. In fact, God invites each Israelite to “fix in your memory [...] the signs I have worked in your midst: thus will you know that I am the Lord!”⁵⁴ Only if this action of God is judged, recognized, and kept alive in the memory can it determine the action of each person and of the entire people; in this way, it can be the source of the people’s approach to reality. In fact, ethics and the people’s way of facing reality “necessarily flow from the religious foundation,” that is, from this action of God. “It is not my relationship toward God, but rather God’s relationship toward me. His salvific action establishes everything, and this everything includes at once me and my people.”⁵⁵

Therefore, the freedom of the people is expressed in an answer that always arises in front of God’s initiative, and finds its origin there: “Since I, the Lord, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God, you shall be holy, because I am holy.”⁵⁶ This invitation, as Balthasar reminds us, means: “Be free as I am free.” Because God has shown Himself to be so true, real, and effective, to the point of fulfilling His promise of liberation, the Israelites have been freed from idolatry and can be free: “Do not turn aside to idols,” because you have no need of them, “nor make molten gods for yourselves. I, the Lord, am your God.”⁵⁷

Here is another point that we must not miss: the knowledge of God is not gained in spite of the rebellion of the people, but actually through it. The Lord makes Himself known precisely in responding to the rebellion and forgetfulness of the people, as he did in front of their murmuring. God uses this occasion to challenge His people with a new initiative: “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them [God is speaking to Moses]: ‘In the evening twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will have your fill of bread, and then you will know that I, the Lord, am your God.’”⁵⁸ This is the enduring modality God uses to make Himself known to His people, and from this “they shall know that I, the Lord, am their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt.” Right after this He adds, “So that I, the Lord, their God, might dwell among them.”⁵⁹

The purpose is that His presence become familiar to them—“to dwell among them”—because only the progressive knowledge of God, an ever-greater certainty of His presence, can enable them to face circum-

⁵⁴ Cf. Ex 10:2.

⁵⁵ Balthasar, “Significato dell’antica Alleanza,” in *L’impegno del cristiano*, 38.

⁵⁶ Lv 11:45.

⁵⁷ Lv 19:4.

⁵⁸ Ex 16:12.

⁵⁹ Ex 29:46.

stances without fear: “For I am the Lord your God, who grasp your right hand; it is I who say to you, ‘Do not fear, I will help you.’”⁶⁰ But you do not stop fearing just because someone says to you, “Do not fear!” This presence must have entered into the core of our being; it must have shown itself credible within a history. In fact, only a lived history can constitute an adequate basis for trust. Everything God has done and does is “so that you will know that I am the Lord” and so that you can trust in Him. Otherwise these are words painted on the wall.

Through continual verification, the people comes to an ever greater knowledge of who its Lord is: “I will give you treasures of darkness, riches hidden away, that you may know I am the Lord, the God of Israel, who calls you by name.”⁶¹ God bestows treasures and riches on His people so they may know that He is the Lord, so they may know Him more and more for who He is, and become familiar with Him, abandoning themselves trustingly to Him. This familiarity with Him then opens access to new depths, hidden to most people, in the relationship with reality.

Unfortunately, the people of Israel often does not understand, and proves to be blind and obtuse, as in the metaphor used by the Lord: “An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master’s manger; but Israel does not know, My people has not understood.”⁶² The people of Israel does not understand; it is stiff-necked in its presumption time after time, and yields to the temptation to be headstrong. God knows His creatures too well, and knows that if His action, His initiative does not reach the heart, it will remain outside them and consequently they will not know Him through experience—an intimate, personal, deep experience that can no longer be erased, that reaches the point of determining their way of living in reality. Therefore, to face this obstacle, God undertakes a new initiative: “I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the Lord. They shall be My people and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.”⁶³ In this way, “they shall know that I, the Lord, am their God. I will give them a heart and ears that listen.”⁶⁴

God will establish a new covenant with His people, one that will reach their hearts: “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place My law within them, and write

⁶⁰ Is 41:13.

⁶¹ Is 45:3.

⁶² Is 1:3.

⁶³ Jer 24:7.

⁶⁴ Bar 2:31.

it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”⁶⁵ “I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh,”⁶⁶ a heart that allows itself to be invaded and determined by His presence.

The Israelites will be able to recognize the newness of this covenant by the newness of its fruits, according to the method by which God has educated them to recognize Him present: through the fruits they will know who the Lord is. “On that day I will make a horn sprout for the house of Israel, and I will let you again open your mouth in their midst; then they shall know that I am the Lord.”⁶⁷ “Look! I am going to open your graves; I will make you come up out of your graves, My people, and bring you back to the land of Israel. You shall know that I am the Lord when I open your graves and make you come up out of them, My people.”⁶⁸ In this way you will no longer live circumstances as if you were in a tomb.

God undertakes a new initiative to defeat the formalism with which the people relates to Him. “The Lord said: since this people draws near with words only and honors Me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from Me, and fear of Me has become a mere precept of human teaching, therefore I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion: the wisdom of the wise shall perish, the prudence of the prudent shall vanish.”⁶⁹ If the relationship with God is formal—with the mouth and with the lips—the people does not know the Lord; their heart, the organ of knowledge and adherence, is far from Him. The relationship with Him is reduced to human precepts. This is striking! But the Lord is not stopped by this, and takes the initiative anew. “I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion” so that wonder may be possible again, and so Israel may truly know Him and be able to trust Him. The way will not be that of the “wise” and the “prudent”: “The wisdom of the wise shall perish, the prudence of the prudent shall vanish.”

We are at the dawn of a new day.

3. The “radicalization” of God’s engagement with the human person

What has God done to help us overcome formalism, this distance at which our hearts keep Him, and to which we succumb so often? What has He

⁶⁵ Jer 31:33–34.

⁶⁶ Ez 36:26.

⁶⁷ Ez 29:21.

⁶⁸ Ez 37:12–13.

⁶⁹ Is 29:13–14.

done to make it easier to know Him? He has undertaken an audacious initiative: He has become involved with the human person to the point of becoming a man Himself. This is the event of the Incarnation. In Jesus, God has become an “affectively attractive presence,”⁷⁰ and challenges our hearts like no other presence. All we must do is yield to the winning attraction of His person. It is like falling in love: the fascinating presence of his beloved awakens in a man all his affective energy; all he has to do is yield to his fascination for the woman in front of him. This is why Jesus’s disciples were immediately attracted to Him, and the more time they spent with Him, the more attached they became. But, as Fr. Giussani always told us, “theirs was not a sentimental attachment, not a phenomenon of the emotions.” It was “a judgment of esteem [...], a marvel of esteem,”⁷¹ that attached them to Him.

“Jesus was a man like all others, a man who could not be excluded from the definition of man, but that man said of Himself things that others did not say; spoke and acted in a different way than others. Sign of all signs. His reality, once known, was felt, looked at, and dealt with by those who were struck by His claim, as a sign of an other: it hearkened to an other. As seen clearly in the Gospel of John, Jesus did not conceive of His attractiveness to others as an ultimate reference to Himself, but to the Father: to Himself so that He could lead to the Father.”⁷² This is how God made Himself known and continues to make Himself known. Jesus says it concisely: “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.”⁷³

Jesus enters into that history of salvation in which the people was educated by God to acknowledge, through His works, that He is the Lord. The great exegete Schlier explained why this acknowledgement is not mechanical, even with the new, unheard-of closeness of God to the human person in Jesus: “The portentous actions of Christ, which manifest the works of God, these actions or works are ‘signs’ in which the episode points to something else that transcends it and in which revelation and veiling happen contemporaneously, so that they can be recognized only by those who comprehend their character of manifestation, that is, by those who perceive the glory of God that is manifested in them. Thus the crowd fed miraculously recognized

⁷⁰ Luigi Giussani, *L'autocoscienza del cosmo* [The self-awareness of the cosmos], (Milan: Bur, 2000) 247.

⁷¹ Luigi Giussani, *L'attrattiva Gesù* [The attraction of Jesus] (Milan: Bur, 1999), ix.

⁷² Luigi Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino: In cammino* [Man and his destiny: on the road] (Genova: Marietti 1820, 1999), 129.

⁷³ Jn 14:11.

in Christ, through the wondrous work, the ‘prophet,’ ‘the one who is to come into the world’ (Jn 6:14ff), and therefore wanted ‘to carry Him off’ to make Him king.’ But Christ says, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for Me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled’ (6:26). They had seen the sign (= the miraculous action of Christ) with their eyes but they did not recognize it *as* a sign, that is, as a reference to something much more than satiety and much more than bread.”⁷⁴ To understand, it was not enough for them to see Jesus perform a miracle, something that is often true for us, as well.

In order to introduce us to this understanding, Jesus Himself offers us the true, complete meaning of His actions. In fact, Schlier wrote: “The works of Christ, being miracles, or in other words, signs, are closely connected with the words of Christ Himself. [...] The miracle flows into the word. The word sinks its roots in the miracle. [...] Both the word and the actions are ‘testimonies.’ [...] It is said of both the works and the words of Christ that they manifest [...] (2:11; 9:3; 17:6).” What? Christ Himself. “With the words and miracles Christ manifests Himself fully. His words and miracles are a revelation of Himself. [...] ‘The works I do in My Father’s name testify to Me’ (10:25; cf. 5:36). Christ *bears witness* to Himself, and in Himself to the Father.”⁷⁵

The testimony of Jesus reaches its culmination when He gives Himself to the Father for the world. “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I AM.” That “I am the Lord,” repeated so often in the Old Testament, is now said by the One on the cross, who adds, “I do nothing on My own, but I say only what the Father taught Me.”⁷⁶ This is the supreme manifestation of the Lord, who makes it possible to know God in the biblical sense of the term.

Sharing life with Jesus made Him so familiar to the disciples that in the end they recognized Him. When He sat down to eat with them on the shore of the lake, after the resurrection, John noted in his Gospel: “And none of the disciples dared to ask Him, ‘Who are you?’ because they realized it was the Lord.”⁷⁷

Through His gift of Himself even unto death, the extreme engagement of God with the world reaches its culmination. The radical nature of this

⁷⁴ Heinrich Schlier, *Riflessioni sul Nuovo Testamento* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 1976), 334–35, translation ours; English edition: *The Relevance of the New Testament*, translated from the German by W.J. O’Hara (London: Burnes & Oates; New York: Herder and Herder, 1968).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 335–36.

⁷⁶ Jn 8:28.

⁷⁷ Jn 21:12.

engagement is seen by the kind of completely new freedom it makes possible. Balthasar continues: “God’s definitive engagement with the human person in Jesus is followed by the definitive liberation of which John and Paul spoke: ‘Freedom not only from political powers, but from all the cosmic powers of destiny, from the compulsion of sin, from alienation from God, from the compulsion to aggression and murder, and from decadence, doing things that are vain and ephemeral, and finally, from death’: all these powers are ‘paralyzed,’ ‘put off course,’ and ‘without power’ through the action and winning attraction of an Other. And this was possible only if they were overcome not from the outside or from on high, but from within, through the fact that God emptied Himself in the Son, becoming obedient even unto death.”⁷⁸

This new freedom given us highlights the difference between political liberation from Egypt and this incomparable liberation, much deeper than the initial one, because it concerns all powers, from those of sin and the ephemeral, to that of death. This is what documents the boundless difference of knowledge to which we are introduced. Therefore, von Balthasar underlines that “the engagement of God ‘with us’ lies not only in an external communication unknown and supplementary to us of the forgiveness of our sins, as some imagine the event of justification. Rather, this engagement touches us more deeply in our personal core.” It makes us new! It confers upon us “a personal dignity in front of God.”⁷⁹

The newness of this freedom from powers, alienation, sin, and the ephemeral becomes evident to those who commit to following Him in a human itinerary, within which the origin of this newness appears ever more clearly. Let’s listen to the story of this young friend:

“I began the itinerary of the catechumenate last year. By pure chance, I attended the Sacro Cuore High School, and was impressed by the first Easter Triduum in which I participated. I didn’t understand much then, but I was attracted by the beauty of that companionship of people who were together in a different way from others. How is it possible to gather thousands of 18- and 19-year-olds in front of a priest? It wasn’t a concert or a soccer game, and yet we were all there and the words I heard did not seem distant from me at all; rather, it seemed like that unknown priest was speaking about me. There I began to perceive the greatness of the encounter I’d had. It was hard for me to identify it with Christ, but He began to fascinate

⁷⁸ Balthasar, “Senso della nuova Alleanza” [The meaning of the new covenant], in *L’impegno del cristiano*, 40.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

me a lot. In those high school years, Jesus gave me a dear friend, Lucia, as His human face. Her gaze on me made me increasingly curious. When I went to the university, I initially looked for someone in the Movement, but then I abandoned the search. I thought that what I had encountered maybe wasn't true or at least wasn't true enough for my life, and that I could live well without it. In February, after a holiday in Amsterdam with some friends, I returned home very sad, and felt really empty. I remember I cried for a whole week. That was when I returned to School of Community, with a great void inside, and I found people with whom I could share my need. Slowly but surely I began to see again the difference in these people I had encountered in high school. During these years, together with this companionship of friends, I slowly began to sense what was at the origin of this companionship, what it means to say that these friends are the memory of Christ. Last year at the end of January, after four months of charitable work in a community for minors experiencing difficulty, I asked to be able to join this story of the Church. Before we begin the gesture of charitable work, we always read *The Meaning of Charitable Work* together. There is a passage that says, 'I do not know what the other truly needs, nor can I measure or possess it. It is a measure that I do not possess; it is a measure that is in God.' And then, further on, 'precisely because we love them, *it is not we who make them happy*. An Other makes them happy. Who is the reason for everything? Who made everything? God.' Those two hours doing charitable work did not remain there—they helped me a lot to have a more tender gaze upon myself first of all, and then upon my family and friends. This change in myself totally attracted me. Living in this relationship with Him, everything took on a gusto. I didn't even feel like myself anymore; I found myself loving the people alongside me in an entirely new way. That beauty could not be the fruit of any ability of mine. Baptism [which she received on Saturday, March 31, the night of Easter] is saying 'yes' to Christ with all my desire to be seized completely by Him, because only He responds to my infinite desire to be loved. It is dramatic because I'm human and I'm free. Every day is a battle, but this longing and at the same time this beauty are so powerful that only He can generate them. I'm surprised by this entirely different and new way of living. It's dizzying to think that we are together 'only' because we have all received a grace and have decided to walk together, following up our first 'yes.' How powerful! How is it possible that I, with my bad temper, with all my mistakes, poor soul that I am, have in front of me people who always forgive me and look at me as a good for them? How were my parents able to understand this difference that has entered my life? I believe that what Jesus can generate if we live with Him

is truly stunning. When things are tough, I think that this encounter is not for me, and that I would prefer to live without a care and tranquilly like my classmates. But then, if I reflect seriously, I wouldn't give it up for anything in the world. How could I, and where would I go?"

Facts like this, like those that happened when Jesus walked the roads of Palestine, are given to us so that we, too, may recognize God as the Lord in the present. "I am the Lord." These are not "little nothings." They are part of the same history of salvation happening now. And just like the Israelites could be uninterested in these facts, so also we can remain indifferent in front of them.

So then, how can we remain free from powers, alienation, and the ephemeral? Only by remaining in the origin. Let's listen once more to Balthasar: "In no case can we turn our back on the source [the girl in the letter thought she could live without that encounter, that she could turn her back on the source], on the point where the grace of God originated, as if it were already known well enough as an object of knowledge or a treasure that has come into our possession that can be used in the world and be changed into a small coin." This is the illusion to which we easily fall prey: thinking we already know, holding that the origin is by now a possession of ours, thus yielding to the temptation to do things our own way, doing without the personal bond with the origin; that is, with His living presence, with His happening now. Instead, "the source is the mouth of God [it is the current, contemporary initiative of God], from which we can never detach our mouth. The source is the permanent happening by which we are placed in the truth of ourselves with the possibility of remaining there."⁸⁰

A friend wrote me: "I'm really looking forward to these Spiritual Exercises. Reading the Page One article ("Un salto di autocoscienza" ("A Leap Of Self-Awareness"))⁸¹ I really identified with what you described, that is, thinking we already know and going it alone with 'our own legs.' As you say, this is a constant temptation. At the same time, I have clearly in mind the enormous difference in my day when I face difficult situations or beautiful circumstances with an event before my eyes, hand in hand with a presence, or on the contrary, when I just depend on myself. This experience is convincing me more and more of the immense advantage of Christianity for my life and for the life of everyone." Only this can convince us. In fact, she concludes, "I don't think I've ever been so certain about this in all my life."

So then, "remaining means [...] dwelling in our reception into the grace and engagement of God [...]. The source is rich enough to make all

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁸¹ Julián Carrón, "A Leap of Self-Awareness," *Traces*, "Page One," April 2018.

our earthly actions fruitful *if* we keep it alive in us and never stray from it. This alone is the true fecundity, and therefore, the more intimately we keep close to it, the more powerful our [actions] will be. It is a source that flows into our personal source, an action that becomes the principle of every one of our actions. In front of it, the more we are like children without words, having only an attitude of reception, the more adult and mature we will be in opening to the world with an attitude of giving.” Naturally, time is needed for the source to enter our innermost being: “We must assimilate more and more this dimension of Christian practice in order not to abandon the origin of every temporal action. We assimilate it only when we consciously put it into practice, that is, when we remember in an always renewed way the original source, detaching ourselves from worldly [daily] distraction. [...] The source flows through our whole person even when we are absorbed in earthly commitments.”⁸² Otherwise, how could we live these commitments without being overwhelmed?

Therefore, just as Jesus cannot detach Himself from the Father (He wants to make us participants in His bond with the Father, as we said at the beginning), neither can we detach ourselves from Jesus present and alive and, through Him, from the Father. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also.’”⁸³ The attachment to Christ present belongs to the method chosen by God to communicate Himself definitively to women and men, a method that cannot become outdated. In fact, it is not something “to know,” something that, once we know it, we can do without. It is a present presence to be embraced, an event that happens now, to become familiar with. The Incarnation is the method God chose for saving us: in Jesus, God became man, and Jesus sets forth this method for all of history, to the end of times. “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives the one who sent Me.”⁸⁴ With these words Jesus traces out the road for the future, indicates the way to enter into relationship with Him, and through Him, with the Father. It is an invitation He extends to each one of us: without it, how will we be able to become familiar with Christ?

At this point, we can understand why Giussani was disappointed that our journey of belonging to the Movement did not lead to familiarity with

⁸² Balthasar, “Conseguenze” [Consequences], in *L'impegno del cristiano*, 55–57.

⁸³ Jn 5:19.

⁸⁴ Jn 13:20.

Christ: a true change in our lives depends on it. “This change of being is the presence of an Other.”⁸⁵ The change does not have to do with coherence, but with a presence, with a lived familiarity, like Jesus’s with the Father. Without it the change would be virtual, and nothing would last. When there is no familiarity with Christ, we lack ground under our feet for living, for facing circumstances. We remain stuck, trapped in our impressions. Our way of being in reality is not determined by the event of Christ, but—as for everyone—by our preconceptions, our mind-sets. Every day, in front of every challenge, in every circumstance—as each of us can verify in our own lives, in our own experience—the “already known” is not enough for living a fullness now.

4. The grounding for our certainty

Only familiarity with Christ can give us the certainty we need. Otherwise, where can we search for our substance? “In what we do or in what we have, which is the same. In this way, our life never has that feeling [of] [...] full certainty [...]. At best, we can become pleased with what we do or with ourselves.” You can just imagine how long this lasts! “And these fragments of pleasure in what we do or in what we are bring no delight or joy, no sense of sure fullness, no certainty and no fullness.”⁸⁶

Our certainty can only be grounded in “something that has happened to us, happened in us, entered into us, been encountered by us [...]. Our identity, the substance of our person, the certainty over time, coincides—literally ‘coincides’—with this something that happened to us. Emmanuel Mounier, speaking of his sick daughter, after having said, ‘Something has happened to us,’ corrected himself and said, ‘*One* has happened to us [...].’ One has happened to us, has given Himself to us, given so much as to enter into the flesh and bones and soul [of each of us]: ‘I live, not I, but it is [Christ] who lives in me.’” We too, when we are truly “seized,” share the experience of Mary and the shepherds and the three wise men: our identity, our substance, lie in what has happened to us. This means abandoning the position you are in and letting yourself be determined by the presence of an Other, who preferred us even before we responded. This being loved “establishes an irreversible fact” and “defines our value in the world.”⁸⁷ But you have to embrace it.

⁸⁵ Luigi Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo* [Familiarity with Christ] (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo-Mi 2008), 27.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 25–26.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

Just think of what Mary's heart must have felt every time she "became conscious of what had happened" and how "in her heart she pondered on what had happened." Let us imagine "what the shepherds felt, or what the three wise men felt [...] What happened to them revealed itself to them as something that burned with the awareness of expectancy, which initially was not an answer to this expectancy, but was a penetrating presence." For Mary, the shepherds, and the three wise men, "what happened dominated their eyes and their hearts, dominated the consciousness of their own selves. [...] That child was them, was their identity, their certainty, their fullness, and they no longer remembered how it had been before. In front of that child, they no longer remembered even their aspirations, no longer focused on them, because now this child dictated everything."⁸⁸ This is how they came to know Christ: they came to know Him through experience.

The proof that our lives are determined by the certainty of what has happened to us is the predominance of "delight and joy," unequivocal signs rooted in tenderness. "Tenderness," mind you, "is not pleasure in the sentiment we feel, but self-abandonment, feeling seized by the love that has seized us, by Him who has seized us. [...] It's like when a child opens her eyes wide and is full to the brim with what she sees and has no space to give to the feeling she has." She even forgets herself. "In front of what she sees, she is full to the brim with what she sees. [...] People love themselves only because of what they have in front of them, because of Christ in front of them, this event." This is the ultimate purpose of all of God's action, because we can never be so fully ourselves as when He prevails. What an experience of this tenderness of God for our flesh must Giussani have had, to say that it is "a million times greater, more acute, more penetrating than a man's embrace of his woman, of a brother's embrace of his brother!"⁸⁹

Knowing how easily we slide into intellectualism, Fr. Giussani gives us a final warning: "These things are not understood by reasoning about them, but by looking [...] at experience," letting ourselves be seized, attracted, fascinated, "within the awareness of this identity between me and You, of You with me, or better, within the awareness of this event that has settled in me, of this 'You who are me.'"⁹⁰

Silence is the space given for looking at this "You who are me."

⁸⁸ Ibid., 30–31.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 32–33.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 33.

HOLY MASS

Readings for the Holy Mass: Acts 13:44-52; Ps 97; Jn 14:7-14

**HOMILY BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL KEVIN JOSEPH FARRELL
PREFECT OF THE DICASTERY FOR THE LAITY, FAMILY, AND LIFE**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The Spiritual Exercises are a propitious time that the Lord gives us to refocus on our interior lives. For everyone, priests and laity, it is a matter of once again putting “before the eyes of our heart” the nucleus of our life of faith and the specific vocation that the Lord has given each of us. These are the two elements to reclaim in these days: What made me become a Christian and how am I called to “be in the world” as a Christian? The two things are inseparable: returning to the nucleus that founds my life of faith, to the original encounter with the Lord Jesus, I find again the deep reasons and most noble motivations that must animate me in the specific mission that the Lord has entrusted to me, as a priest or as a married person, as a parent, educator, person engaged in the world of school, business, information, politics, social promotion, or in any other job or work activity.

We know well that all of us are exposed to the danger of getting lost in daily life, of being caught up in the vortex of the material needs and duties that life unremittingly places before us, and so, without realizing it, we can live entire weeks or months simply “doing things.” Our “doing” becomes predominant but our “being” becomes impoverished. So we enter into a state of interior suffering, because just “doing” does not satisfy us; rather, it wears us down and leaves us empty, because it is no longer born of the fullness of what we have inside, or better, of what we “are” inside. It is not the living expression of our personality, convictions, or sensibility, in a word, of our humanity “touched” by Christ, by the Lord Jesus, but is only a passive response to the circumstances of life. It is the painful experience that we often have of losing our “center.” It is painful because precisely that “center” of ourselves, that “vital nucleus” is where our encounter with Christ happened, and there, encountering Him, we also found ourselves, because, as it says in a famous line from the Second Vatican Council, “The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light.”⁹¹ Therefore, when I lose this “center,” the dwelling place of my most authentic “I” and of “Christ in me,” anguishing questions emerge in the depths of my being: Why do I do all these things I am doing?

⁹¹ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

Today's Gospel reading presents us with confusion of this kind in the apostle Philip. When he first encountered Jesus he was immediately certain he had found in Him the truth and the answer to his thirst for meaning. We can deduce this from his enthusiastic words to Nathaniel: "We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus, son of Joseph, from Nazareth."⁹² And yet, some time later, as it appears in today's Gospel reading, Philip is less sure of himself. Jesus has just reassured His disciples, saying, "If you know Me, then you will also know My Father. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him,"⁹³ making them understand that through Him they can be certain they have met and seen the Father as well. Yet precisely in that moment, Philip asks Him, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us."⁹⁴ What happened to the "interior intuition" about Jesus that Philip had had from the very beginning? Didn't his heart have an unshakable certainty that he had encountered God in that man, in that Jesus he had met in Galilee? These moments of confusion happen to us, too, when the certainty of having found the truth in Jesus, and that in Him God Himself has made Himself present in our lives, seems to weaken, almost like a faded memory of a long-ago past.

So then, here is the grace of the Spiritual Exercises. God offers us this time to keep our "I" from dissolving and, with it and before it, the faith in which it is rooted. But we wonder how we can find ourselves again. How can new life be breathed into our faith? Let's look for an answer in today's Gospel reading. Jesus grasps Philip's confusion and after gently reproving him, dialogues with him with great mercy. Precisely in this moment when His disciple has little clarity, He opens His heart to him, revealing to him the most intimate mystery of His person: "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"⁹⁵ Jesus radiates wisdom, holiness, power over evil, clarity of judgment, and authority in speaking because the Father is present in Him and He Himself lives constantly immersed in the Father. "The Father who dwells in me is doing His works."⁹⁶ The reciprocal immanence of the Father and the Son is at the origin of all the fecundity and fullness of life that the person of Christ radiates. If you think of it, it is precisely this fullness of holiness, wisdom, and intelligence about reality that we lack, and therefore we often find ourselves empty and unsatisfied. Jesus reveals to Philip that through faith the same reality that character-

⁹² Jn 1:45.

⁹³ Jn 14:7.

⁹⁴ Jn 14:8.

⁹⁵ Jn 14:10.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

izes the Son can be reproduced in each of us: “Whoever believes in Me will do the works that I do.”⁹⁷ Jesus reveals that, as the Father lives in the Son and works in Him, so, by faith, the Son can live in each of us and work in us. This faith that makes “Christ live in us,” communicating His holiness and wisdom to us, is not just autosuggestion. It is the reasonable embrace of the testimony of women and men like us who have encountered Christ before us. Therefore it arises from the personal and entirely human encounter with other Christians, in whom Jesus lives and through whom He makes Himself present to us as well. Today’s reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells us that in Antioch of Pisidia many pagans, having met Paul and Barnabas, having seen their way of being and having listened to their words, “were delighted when they heard this and glorified the word of the Lord. All who were destined for eternal life came to believe.”⁹⁸ This same joy emerged in us when we encountered for the first time people who presented an unusual, different, and new humanity that surprised and fascinated us, and when we discovered that their differentness came from the presence of Christ alive in them. And our delight was even greater when we discovered that this “exceptional presence of the divine in the human,” Christ, gave fulfillment to the deepest and most authentic desires of our hearts. This is the way we opened to faith. This is the task that awaits you in these Spiritual Exercises: to rediscover the concreteness and beauty of the presence of Christ in yourselves, and thus to find yourselves again.

Dearest ones, in these days, ask for the grace to remember the concrete faces and circumstances through which Christ came to you one day, and to be grateful for the gift of faith received that day, a day that was long ago for some of you, more recent for others. Ask for the grace to understand how from that day on, Christ has never left you, even if you have often lost the awareness of His closeness. Ask God the Father to revive those gifts of the Holy Spirit in you that enable you to perceive the presence of Christ today as well, in the specific challenges and circumstances you are living, in the people close to you, in your family and at work, in the history of holiness that Providence is building with you, using even your wretchedness and unfaithfulness. Ask for the grace to contemplate the Church with new eyes, and in the Church, that concrete community of sisters and brothers whom the Lord has put close to you for mutual support in the faith. Never forget that for you, that is the body of the risen Christ, you encounter Him in listening to the Word of God, in the sacraments, in shared prayer, in the testimony

⁹⁷ Jn 14:12.

⁹⁸ Acts 13:48.

of faith. Ask for the grace to reject sin resolutely, trusting in God. In fact, sin destroys the most precious treasure we have: the presence of Christ in us! May we not lose Him and with Him all the benefits of the Christian life. Cherish and treasure the presence of Christ in us. This is the greatest help we can give the world! In his most recent Apostolic Exhortation on holiness, Pope Francis invited us to “allow the Spirit to forge in you the personal mystery that can reflect Jesus Christ in today’s world. May you come to realize what that word is, the message of Jesus that God wants to speak to the world by your life.”⁹⁹ Be a reflection of Christ for others, a word of God for the world! We are all called to this! If Christ lives in us, then everyone, even those who do not believe or are openly hostile, will receive great benefits, because each of us is waiting for this “word of God.” You are the “word of God”!

Jesus says in today’s Gospel: “If you ask anything of Me in My name, I will do it.”¹⁰⁰ He does not say: “God will grant your request,” but “I will do it,” meaning “I Myself will do it in you.” This means that through us, the Son wants to accomplish the mission entrusted to Him by the Father for the redemption of the world. Therefore, let us ask in prayer that Christ may accomplish His work in us, that He may bring to fulfillment in us His plans for good, and that He may make your Fraternity, born of the charism of Fr. Giussani, a living sign of God’s immense love for all people, so that through you many may come to know the perennial newness of Christ, our one savior, the only source of happiness for the world.

BEFORE THE BLESSING

Julián Carrón. Dearest Eminence, in the name of each of those present and all the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, I would like to thank you from the heart for accepting our invitation to preside at this Eucharist during our annual Spiritual Exercises. We thank you for your words and for being a living witness of the charity and solicitude of Pope Francis, whom we desire to follow with all our being, reaching out with confidence to our fellow women and men, above all the neediest, in these times that are so trying and at the same time so full of hope for a new beginning. Thank you!

⁹⁹ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (March 19, 2018), 23–24.

¹⁰⁰ Jn 14:14.

Cardinal Farrell. Thank you. I thank all of you. What I have said in my very special Italian is that you must be and you are the presence of Christ in the world. There is no other sign of God's goodness, mercy, and love than the one that passes through us. So then, what is our task for the coming years? To be the real presence of Christ in the world.

* * *

Regina Coeli

Saturday, April 28, afternoon

During entrance and exit:

Antonín Dvořák, Piano Trio n. 4 in D minor, op. 90, “Dumky”

Prague Trio

“Spirto Gentil” n. 26, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo-Universal

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“Blessed the eyes that see what you have seen”

As you will have heard, last night little Alfie died.¹⁰¹ The Pope has just sent this Tweet: “I am deeply moved by the death of little Alfie. Today I pray especially for his parents, as God the Father receives him in His tender embrace.”

Let us stand and pray together.

Glory to the Father ...

Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam.

1. Why do we have such difficulty recognizing Christ present?

This morning’s lesson described God’s innumerable initiatives to penetrate the heart of the human person with the message that should be evident to reason: “The Lord is everything.” To the difficulties we have seen emerge throughout the course of this history, our times add another, which makes the road even more challenging. In his encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis summarizes the nature of this difficulty: “Our culture has lost its sense of God’s tangible presence and activity in our world. We think that God is to be found in the beyond, on another level of reality, far removed from our everyday relationships. But if this were the case, if God could not act in the

¹⁰¹ After controversy and clashes, hearings, challenges, and appeals in court, on April 28, 2018, the events surrounding the life of Alfie Evans came to their conclusion. The 23-month-old with a grave and not definitively identified neurodegenerative disease had been hospitalized in Liverpool, where hospital authorities deemed he should be removed from life support. The Liverpool High Court decided in favor of the hospital, and subsequently the London Court of Appeals judges upheld the High Court order. Appeals to the British Supreme Court and the European Court of Human Rights were not accepted. On April 23 life support was withdrawn, and on April 28 Alfie died.

world, His love would not be truly powerful, truly real, and thus not even true, a love capable of delivering the bliss that it promises. It would make no difference at all whether we believed in Him or not.”¹⁰²

Fr. Giussani warned us about this difficulty years ago. Since “it is impossible to live within a general context without being influenced,” it is necessary to become aware of the reality in which we live, the cultural moment into which we have been born. “We ourselves participate in that mentality by which God is conceived of in the abstract or forgotten or even rejected. Thus, in practice, existentially,” continued Fr. Giussani, “we come to the point of denying that ‘God is everything in everything,’”¹⁰³ even if we acknowledge that we are on the side of those who affirm His existence.

How has this rejection of the concrete presence of God in reality progressed in our history? “The *rejection* of the fact that ‘God is everything in everything’ derived from an irreligiousness that is extraneous to the formation of the European peoples.” This irreligiousness “began, without anyone realizing it, from a separation between God as origin and meaning of life (therefore pertinent to the things that happen, to human vicissitudes) and God as a fact of thought.”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, at the beginning of the rejection there was a detachment, a separation of God from experience. This morning’s lesson was not a preliminary exposition to prepare for the actual talk. Rather, it was an attempt to show how God made Himself present as “the Lord” through His work in history so that people would not detach Him from their experience.

But—pay attention here—the root of this separation lies in a certain way of conceiving of the relationship between reason and experience, in a certain use of reason. Fr. Giussani said: “The substance of the question is clarified in the struggle about how to understand the *relationship between reason and experience*.” In experience, reality—“a reality that is given to us, one you run up against, [that] is not created by us”—emerges in front of our human gaze. So then, what is reason? “It is that level of creation in which it is aware of itself [...]. This self-awareness generates the definition of reason.”¹⁰⁵ This is precisely what has been undermined: reason, instead of being the awareness of reality that shows itself in experience, has become the measure of reality: reason has begun to impose its own borders on experience, to subject experience to its own measure.

¹⁰² Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei* (June 29, 2013), 17.

¹⁰³ Luigi Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino: In cammino* [Man and his destiny: on the road] (Genova: Marietti 1820, 1999), 105.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 106–8.

Therefore, in order to rediscover that “God is everything in everything,” the first thing needed is “the gentle reclamation of the word ‘reason,’ which is the most confused word in modern discourse.” In fact, if reason is used badly, our whole journey of knowledge is compromised. We see this in the consequences it produces. “If reason is used badly, if it is used as a measure, [...] three possible grave reductions happen that influence all behavior;”¹⁰⁶ having repercussions on our very way of conceiving of and living Christianity, or in other words, on our relationship with what we have encountered. Let’s begin with the first.

a) *Instead of an Event, ideology*

The first reduction concerns the great alternative facing us in our relationship with reality: as we said at the Beginning Day, either the point of departure is what happens, or it is our impressions, our preconceptions. “Without people realizing it, their judgment seems to be intruded upon by an already-heard discourse, something they have felt, that is, a preconception.” We start from a preconception instead of from “the factuality, the supremacy of our existence, things as they happen, things we run up against”¹⁰⁷—events.

Beginning from preconception instead of from something that happens, or in other words, influenced by rationalism, affects the way Christianity is understood and reduces its nature: Christianity is no longer “a movement of the presence day by day, [...], of the original fact, but its reduction to an abstract a priori.”¹⁰⁸ When Christianity “is handed on as a conception, a doctrine, a way of conceiving and dealing with things, then even Christianity becomes an ideology.”¹⁰⁹ What do these things that Fr. Giussani told us have to do with life? They are crucial, because when Christianity is reduced to an ideology, it is no longer capable of changing life and giving form to our relationship with reality; we can know everything but suffocate in reality. This risk is real for us: we can reduce the Movement to something “already known,” an ideology, a discourse we dominate, that is, we can substitute the Event with our own preconception. Each of us, whether we like it or not, can see evidence of this in the way we move in reality.

One of you wrote: “One evening I came home very sad and embittered because of a particular situation at work. Tired, I picked up the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 108–9.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 109–11.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 67.

¹⁰⁹ Luigi Giussani, “Event and responsibility”, *Word Among Us, Traces*, April 1998, III.

Beginning Day text and read: ‘The point of departure for the Christian is an Event. The point of departure for others is a certain impression of things.’ That day, the Event hadn’t been even the last of my thoughts: it wasn’t in my thoughts at all!” This circumstance led her to ask “why it hadn’t even crossed my mind,” why in the world it was ripped out of her experience and her way of relating with reality, and “what it meant that for Christians the Event is the point of departure in every relationship.” To answer these questions, she began looking at her own experience, and realized that “there are some circumstances that are much more toilsome and problematic, but I find myself open and available to the Mystery. In facing them, I don’t feel tired or distraught; rather, I find I’m more certain of who I am and Who is guiding my life. So then, this difference in my way of facing circumstances lies in the fact that in front of some of them I find myself totally disarmed, and the only possible position is prayer. I am poor. In other situations I already know; I know what is right, what should be done. Understanding this threw light on the meaning of poverty. I saw the relationship between poverty and Event. Only a needy and open soul can recognize the Event that is happening now.” Only when we recognize that we are poor, only when we are needy, do we realize what is happening in front of us.

Everything changes when Christianity is the happening of Christ, an Event; when it is not reduced to a discourse but is a fact in our lives.

A teacher who admitted that she had everything (two beautiful daughters, the opportunity to travel and a good traveling companion, a certain degree of economic well-being, good health, etc.) was amazed by the difference she saw in a colleague who belongs to the Movement: even though she had everything, she “lacked” something that her colleague had “in abundance.” The teacher was particularly struck by the fact that this colleague in the Movement was able to remain at peace in the midst of many wrongs done to her, and was still able to look positively at people who had harmed her. So our friend invited the teacher to participate in the life of the Movement. The teacher went to an assembly on the Spiritual Exercises, read the booklet, and then went to the Beginning Day. This changed her so much that her husband and friends were amazed, and even her students asked her what was going on with her. Her colleague in the Movement was also affected by seeing this change. She wrote me: “It may be a beginning for this woman, but it is also a beginning for me, because her experience is ‘contagious,’ and is giving me back the simplicity of the encounter. I want to spend time with her because in her face, in her wonder, in her joy, I see Christ happening. It’s easy to say ‘You,’ it becomes very easy. The other

day in our School of Community group, we entered with one attitude and left with another, all happy, very happy. It was evident that Christ was present; He was happening in her and it 'contaminated' us too: He was happening in us, too, because we were seeing Him happen. He happens! You just have to stay there and see it. I realize that, as you said in the Beginning Day text, we can take different positions in front of what happens; we can also say, 'Good, how beautiful, this is her beginning,' and immediately analyze it instead of looking at it, recognizing it as the method chosen by God to communicate Himself in this precise moment. However, when we stay where it is happening, even for a short while, it is very difficult not to be 'contaminated.' It is a very simple thing. This is the way it was in the beginning!"

Pay attention here: let's not confuse things. The event is not an emotion we feel. "I'd like to express my unease with School of Community," one of you wrote me, "because it seems that there is a tendency to equate the event with anything that produces an emotion in us, be it a beautiful day, a coffee with friends (that is, all the times our companionship made us feel good), or a kindness received from someone. In my experience, I recognize the Christian event only when I see the unmistakable features of Jesus in what is happening, that is, I recognize that what is happening is made possible by Jesus of Nazareth, born to Mary two thousand years ago, who died, rose, and lives today, because otherwise that thing would not be humanly possible. It needn't necessarily be something exceptional; it can be a simple gesture of gratuitousness that in the context is truly exceptional, or the capacity to begin again every morning in situations where living cuts your legs out from under you, and would normally produce only cynicism and skepticism."

What do these letters have in common? The victory over abstraction. Christianity is not an abstract a priori that dwells in the minds of their authors, but a fact, as it was 2,000 years ago, to look at and to follow, one that "contaminates" us and changes us. How did these people recognize Christ? Through His happening in their experience, in front of their eyes.

So then, how can we leave behind ideology, the reduction of Christianity to ideology? Only through the re-happening of the event of Christ here and now. The re-proposal of Christianity as an event is the only thing that can tear us away from preconception and ideology.

b) *Reduction of the sign to appearance*

Fr. Giussani told us that when the point of departure in our relationship with reality is our preconception or ideology, a second reduction takes

place: from sign to appearance. Ideology suffocates and suppresses the provocation supplied by reality. “If people yield to the dominant ideologies, [...] there is [...] a separation between sign and appearance: this yielding leads to the *reduction of the sign to appearance*. The more conscious you are of what the sign is, the more you understand [...] the disaster of a sign reduced to appearance. The sign [as we have always said] is the experience of a factor present in reality that points me beyond. The sign is a reality that can be experienced, the meaning of which is another reality.”¹¹⁰

Each of you can immediately understand the nature of the disaster Fr. Giussani described: just think if your son reduced to their appearance every gesture his parents made for him! If he stopped at what is apparent, he would not perceive these gestures as signs of something else, that is, of your love for him. “It is not reasonable, but because of the weight of original sin, all people are prone to be victims of the apparent, of what appears, because it seems the easiest form of reason. A certain attitude of spirit does much the same thing with the reality of the world and existence (circumstances, our relationship with things, starting a family, children to educate...): it is evident that these circumstances cause difficulty, but this attitude hinders the human capacity of probing for meaning, a search to which the very fact of our relationship with reality undeniably draws human intelligence.”¹¹¹

In this context, Giussani quoted Finkelkraut, who, referring to Hannah Arendt, observed: “Ideology [...] is not the naïve acceptance of what is visible but the knowledgeable dismissal of it.”¹¹² And Giussani commented: “Ideology is the destruction of the visible, the elimination of the visible as the sense of things that happen, the emptying of what you see, touch, and perceive. Thus you no longer have any relationship with anything.”¹¹³

We all know how easily we slide into this “dismissal” of the visible, the emptying of what happens, so that nothing speaks to us anymore, everything flattens. Even the most spectacular signs are reduced to appearance. We are not the only ones to do this; in fact, we have some illustrious predecessors.

The disciples witnessed two truly spectacular signs performed by Jesus, namely, the two times He multiplied the loaves. But a few days later the way they reacted showed how they had reduced these events, perhaps uncon-

¹¹⁰ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 112.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 112–13.

¹¹² Alain Finkelkraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 60.; cf. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 169.

¹¹³ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 113.

sciously, as happens with us. “They had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.” Jesus reprimanded them, telling them to guard against the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod. They understood that He said this because they only had one loaf of bread. So they set to arguing, “because they had no bread.”¹¹⁴ They did not realize how they had reduced the situation. Evidently, the miracle of the multiplication of the bread had not become an opportunity to experience Christ, to increase their knowledge of Him. By the way they argued about the lack of bread, it is clear that they stopped at the appearance and had not understood who that man with them was. We often say that, “if He had been in front of us, appearances would not fool us and it would be easy to recognize Christ.” But in this episode of the Gospel, Jesus was there with them on the boat, in flesh and blood. They were together in the boat with Jesus in flesh and blood, but His presence did not lead them to stop arguing. Jesus’s presence on the boat was irrelevant to their worry about the lack of bread. Amazing!

How did Jesus help them grow and leave behind that reduction of the sign to appearance? He did not perform another miracle—they had already seen many, and still had not understood, so what would have been the use of another one?—nor did He explain who He was to them. Jesus opened them up to going beyond the appearances by asking them questions. It is really something to see how He acted with them. “When He became aware of this [discussion] He said to them, ‘Why do you conclude that it is because you have no bread? Do you not yet understand or comprehend? Are your hearts hardened? *Do you have eyes and not see, ears and not hear?* And do you not remember, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many wicker baskets full of fragments you picked up?’ They answered Him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘When I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many full baskets of fragments did you pick up?’ They answered [Him], ‘Seven.’ He said to them, ‘Do you still not understand?’”¹¹⁵ In this way, Jesus challenged them to go deep down into what they saw so that they could draw forth the knowledge of Him from their experience. He educated them to look deep into what they had seen and were seeing. Otherwise they would continue reducing every miracle He performed.

In this way, Jesus provoked His disciples to use their reason fully: this is what they needed in order not to reduce the sign to appearance. A full use of reason requires the presence of an aperture (“that lively openness to the

¹¹⁴ Mk 8:14–16.

¹¹⁵ Mk 8:17–21.

object that becomes affection”),¹¹⁶ which is the original position in which we were created. Fr. Giussani said, “the heart of the problem of human knowledge does not lie in a particular intellectual capacity. [...] The centre of the problem is really a proper position of the heart [...] a morality,”¹¹⁷ which means not having a hardened heart, a heart of stone that does not allow itself to be struck by anything or anyone, but a heart of flesh, open, that lets itself be wounded by reality. This is because the human person “sees with the eyes of reason insofar as his heart is open, that is to say, insofar as affection keeps his eyes open [...]. Thus, the eye of reason sees to the degree that it is sustained by affection, which already expresses freedom’s engagement.”¹¹⁸

This capacity for reawakening their reason in full is a way through which the differentness of Christ is manifested, His exceptionality, His “divinity.” Imagine how they must have asked each other, “Who is this man who is capable of throwing wide open our reason in this way, who enables us to grasp the meaning of the things we have seen happen, but even so we did not understand?” It is the same experience we have had two thousand years later with Fr. Giussani. If we had not been educated to this openness, if we were not continually educated to it, we would not see anything, not even what we have right under our noses, without reducing it.

Thus, the disciples’ inability to understand became another opportunity for them to know Jesus better. In fact, without His presence they would not have understood. His presence threw wide open their reason, provoking their hearts to a proper position, and in doing so made them recognize the nature of His gesture. We, too, can know Christ by the fact that He, through the human instrument He uses, makes us look at reality without remaining stuck in the appearances. Otherwise God disappears from the horizon of our life. Not because God is not there. It is not that Jesus did not exist and that the disciples had not seen two stupendous miracles! The problem was that they were not wide open enough to recognize the signs all the way back to their source. Therefore, if His presence does not happen now and we are not willing to follow it, even with all the Gospels and all the texts of Fr. Giussani available, we will not see anything.

“I’m writing to thank you for the journey we are making, because belonging to the Movement has changed my life deeply. My belonging to the Fraternity is becoming an ever deeper bond that frees me from my imag-

¹¹⁶ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 22.

¹¹⁷ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), 30.

¹¹⁸ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 22.

es and those of the people around me. It's as if who I am passes through that belonging, and there I discover and know myself better and better, in an unexpected way. The last time you really provoked me by what you said about gladness, but often I don't do the work that enables me to recognize the origin of that gladness." This is what happened with the disciples. "Only in this way can Jesus become more familiar, and I swear that it is the most pressing need I have, because only when I recognize Him do I return to being present to myself, present and passionate because I am loved, and then things begin to speak to me again"—that is, life is another life. "The relationship with Him overcomes everything."

What made her certain of having reached the origin of her encounter with the Movement, of what had been given to her? The fact that things began to speak to her again, to be full of meaning, like your wife's gesture of love to you or your child. She once again was present to herself, and thus truly recognized reality. Only the present event of Christ overcomes ideology, or in other words, the reduction of what we see. "Ideology tends to affirm the concreteness of the apparent, while the apparent is only that which you see, hear, and touch. But the truly human way of looking is with reason, which (leaving it intact) penetrates the contact of the "I" with what it runs up against, clarifying and judging it, that is, recognizing the thing in its reference to something else; in fact, you can judge only if a certain depth of judgment is possible."¹¹⁹

c) *Reduction of the heart to feeling*

The third reduction emerges from what we have said up to now: the reduction of the heart to feeling. It is striking that Jesus's reproof to the disciples on the boat was "Are your hearts hardened?" The meaning of the word "heart" becomes clearer if you consider the question that followed: "Do you still not understand?" For Jesus, as for the entire biblical tradition, the heart has the function of knowing. Without the heart, you cannot understand. As it says in Deuteronomy: "But the Lord has not given you a heart to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear until this day."¹²⁰ It is precisely the use of the heart that enables the understanding of facts. Giussani grasped the deep aspects of the question: "Facts"—facts that "make the original event live again"—are "to be read with the heart, or in other words, with reason, affectively engaged."¹²¹

¹¹⁹ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 114.

¹²⁰ Cf. Dt 29:3.

¹²¹ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 66.

The opposite of reason affectively engaged is, as it says in the third premise of *The Religious Sense*, a mind that is “dead and buried”¹²²—these are his exact words—in front of what happens, as we have seen with the disciples on the boat. “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!”¹²³ Jesus said to the disciples at Emmaus. When we are “slow of heart,” our gaze on the things that happen is “dead and buried.”

In this way, Fr. Giussani outlined the crux of the third reduction: “We take feeling instead of the heart as the ultimate driver, and the ultimate reason for our actions.” What does this mean? “Our responsibility is nullified by yielding to the use of feeling as prevalent over the heart, thus reducing the concept of heart to that of feeling. Instead, the heart represents and acts as the fundamental factor of the human personality. This is not the case for feeling, because seized by feeling alone, one acts reactively, and deep down is bestial.”¹²⁴ As Pavese wrote: “I do not yet understand what the tragedy of existence may be [...] but this point is so clear. I must overcome this luxurious indulgence and stop regarding states of soul as an end in themselves.”¹²⁵

Fr. Giussani continued: “The heart indicates the unity of feeling and reason. It implicates a conception of reason that is not blocked, a reason according to the full breadth of its possibility: reason cannot act without what is called affection.” Therefore the heart—as unity of feeling and reason—is “the condition of the healthy actuation of reason.” I have always been struck by this line of Fr. Giussani’s: “The condition needed for reason to be reason is that affectivity penetrates it and thus moves the entire person.”¹²⁶ Without this, we see everything in a reduced way.

How can we get past this reduction of the heart to feeling? What enables the sound use of reason? A presence. You do not need any particular training. As we said this morning, only a presence that attracts our affections, or in other words one that is capable of attracting all our affectivity to the point of gluing us to it, can broaden our reason, according to its true nature of total openness to reality, a presence that happened to the disciples who encountered Jesus along the road to Emmaus. This may seem difficult to understand intellectually, but it is very easy to comprehend when it happens. It is the presence of a mother who, attracting all the affection of her child, broadens his reason. We discover it in the totally open, wonderstruck face of

¹²² Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 30.

¹²³ Lk 24:25.

¹²⁴ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 116–17.

¹²⁵ Cesare Pavese, *This Business of Living* (New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 2009), 33.

¹²⁶ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino*, 117.

the child when his mother goes to him. The child's wide-open gaze, evoked by the loving presence of his mother, enables him to recognize his mother for what she is, for all the good she brings him. Or think of the disciples at Emmaus: "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"¹²⁷ When it happens, it is very easy to recognize. First, they did not understand, but then He appears and "the mind returns"¹²⁸ and everything starts anew. How can we tell that they understood, and that it was not just sentimentalism that was burning in their hearts? We can tell from the fact that they "set out at once" for Jerusalem. A new movement in reality tells us that something has happened.

Only a heart conceived and lived as reason and affection, that is, one not reduced to feeling, can perceive and recognize the truth. But in order for this heart to awaken fully, a presence is needed: His presence. A heart so awakened cannot cheat when it finds itself in front of the truth unless it contradicts itself. For this reason, Christ's crucial help for the human journey is to reawaken the heart. He sets it in motion again, and at times does so simply by asking questions—"Do you still not understand?"—that keep laziness from winning. By happening, Christ reawakens the heart in a way that enables it to recognize His differentness, that is, the truth, so that the heart cannot confuse Him with a substitute. Any imitation of the truth, always false, is unmasked.

2. The need for a place that restores to us the original gaze

From what we have seen so far, there emerges the need for a place that restores our original, wide-open gaze on reality and constantly supports it.

What can overcome these reductions that make us look at the world nearsightedly? They are only overcome by an event. Paradoxically, these same reductions that suffocate us can become opportunities for Christ to reveal Himself to us, and thus to gain a knowledge of Him that is not detached from experience. In fact, we need to come across His presence in order to leave behind these reductions. This means knowing Christ from within an experience in which we see a victory over them.

Liberating us from the myopic way we usually look at reality, Christ brings forth an "I" with a heretofore unseen capacity to know. Therefore the one true alternative to ideology is not a doctrine or a system of ethics—which are incapable of broadening reason, because we can have a great

¹²⁷ Cf. Lk 24:32.

¹²⁸ Cf. "La mente torna" [The mind returns], lyrics Mogol, music Lucio Battisti.

deal of doctrine or become ethically “good” and remain closed—but a new “I” generated by an event, an “I” capable of not remaining stuck in the reduced mechanisms of our usual way of knowing (as happened to the Catalan girl we have spoken of many times, who on the occasion of the referendum unmasked the totalizing claim of ideology).

How many times have we said that the “I” wakes up from its torpor, from its reduction, in an encounter! “People find themselves again in a living encounter.”¹²⁹ The person who is born in an encounter is a new creature. You see this first of all in the capacity to know a person acquires. “The new creature has a new *mens* (Greek: *noûs*), a capacity for knowing reality that is different from everyone else’s.”¹³⁰

The “finding itself again” of the “I” does not happen just at the beginning, once and for all. As we have seen in the vicissitudes of the people of Israel and in the experience of the disciples, we are constantly at risk of relapsing into the reduction of our “I” and of our gaze on reality. So then, how can this new creature that knows reality differently continue to be alive moment to moment? It can happen only if Christ remains contemporary, in a place, and we do not separate from Him. We have already said this: “The new knowledge implies [...] being contemporary with the event that generates it and continuously sustains it.”¹³¹ The first letter I read this afternoon testified to this: “Belonging to the Movement has changed my life deeply. [...] It frees me from my images and from the images of the people around me. It’s as if who I am passes through that belonging.” In order to have that new capacity for knowing, therefore, you must not separate yourself from the event that generates it. “Since this origin is not an idea, but a place, a living reality, the new judgment is possible only in an on-going relationship with this reality; in other words with the human companionship that prolongs the initial Event in time.” On the contrary, “Whoever favours his own analyses or his own deductions will ultimately adopt the world’s way of looking at things.” Therefore, Giussani concluded, “Maintaining the original position in which the Event arouses the new knowledge is the only way we can relate to reality without preconceptions, according to all its factors.”¹³²

If that presence that re-opens our eyes does not happen continually in our life, if we do not recognize and adhere to it, our gaze on reality shrinks and we will end up denying the concrete presence of God in the world, as the Pope

¹²⁹ Luigi Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986–1987)* [The “I” is reborn in an encounter (1986–1987)] (Milan: Bur, 2010), 182.

¹³⁰ Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 53.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³² *Ibid.*

says. This does not concern only people outside the Movement, but first of all ourselves.

When we experience a different, truly new knowledge, it is easy to recognize this differentness as a sign of His presence now. Even people with no Christian background have recognized in a powerful and burning way the differentness of life of those through whom Christ makes Himself present. They manifest the wonder evoked by that differentness, and testify to how it changed them.

A young woman of Indian origin who met the Movement in Madrid, after having been in Italy on the Erasmus program, trying to escape all that had happened to her, wrote to Fr. Nacho, the leader of the Movement in Spain:

“I went to India to live a famous philosophy. I decided to go because I thought I’d find happiness there. Instead, nothing. It was a constant disappointment. Constant. I thought they would’ve been better able to explain who I am, because I’ve always had a knot inside. And nothing. The curious thing is that every day I tried to forget what’d happened to me, but the first people I thought of when I woke up in the morning were the CL people I’d met (you, Anita, Gio, Javi, Marti, Emi, Fr. Carrón). I tried hard to erase those thoughts, but they were always the first thing that came to mind when I opened my eyes. Then I decided to go to London, but the same thing happened. The whole time I had this knot inside that would not go away. I went out with various guys, but nothing came of it. When I was with other guys I thought only of Gio,”—a young man she had met here in Italy and with whom she had begun a relationship—“how he loved me, how he treated me, how I felt like I was the most precious person in the world when I was with him, and how he looked at every particular thing about me in a completely different way. So, when Gio came to London, I told him I wanted to get back together with him”—in fact, she had fled from him, too—“but he said no, because he was about to consecrate his life to God. Precisely the period when he was living this almost exclusive relationship with God was the time when he loved me more than ever. What he is living must be something very real, to have changed him so much, even if I don’t understand it. After this period in London, my mother expressly asked me not to contact her anymore, because she couldn’t bear the pain of having lost my father”—he had died a few years earlier—“and she couldn’t have someone like me who reminded her of him so much. At times the pain blinds me so much that I can’t say that there is someone somewhere who embraces me.”

But this doesn’t figure! In fact, she continues, “There’s something that I can’t deny, and that continues to seem incredible to me. If in some way

I think of someone who makes me feel loved, I think of you. I remember that at the beginning of this story, when I read the things that Jesus said and did, I didn't feel they were foreign to me. I listened, seeing people who were like Him, who spoke like Him, who treated the people around them the way He treated people. This is the one thing that's different about you as compared to all the others. I'm beginning to realize that the only thing about you that's different from the rest of the world is the encounter with Christ! The more I wonder why you do things, the more I have to acknowledge that everything you do is bound up in a relationship with Him. Why did you [Nacho] choose not to marry and have children? If anyone else made this choice, I'd think they were nuts, but you aren't stupid. Through these facts, Christ is drawing close to me again: it is there that I see that He cannot be an invention, a lie, even if a thousand times I doubt this. These are the facts that keep me from losing hope. Every day I get up asking that He not leave me all alone. I can't say I'm alone. I can't. I'm surprised that I'm telling you the truth. Christ must have been like you, a person who helped others to understand themselves, to look deep into their hearts and understand who they were: one who was lost and, when he crossed paths with Him, found himself. This is exactly what happened to me when I met you. I understand myself: I understand myself more. Before, it was as if I were dead. I can't deny I've been looked at and treated the way Christ looked at and treated people, like little Zacchaeus, a fellow who was worthless, like me. The fact is that the one thing—the only one—that all these people have in common is that everyone of them—everyone!—has a personal and daily relationship with Christ. I've realized something else, too. There is a small point that depends on me. It might seem like nothing, but instead it's everything: I have to acknowledge all these things I've told you. My person is in play in the decision whether to trust that all of this comes through Christ, or to think that it's simply a coincidence that all the people with these characteristics are in the same place. At times I see how I confuse and betray everything that I saw before. It's a forgetting of steps I've taken, which has made me more unhappy or even more stupid. But I can't forget what I've already lived, what is already inside me. I'm waiting for Him to happen again to me. I seek Him. I look at people, hoping for that gaze to return and appear, to see again those eyes that I would not change for anything in the world, those eyes that make me aware that I exist for a reason, that love me even if I don't know anything. I hope to see Him in every person I meet, and at times unconsciously I look at each person's face, even strangers, to find something of His, something precisely of Him, that can make me return to seeing that He is there, and is there

for me. Since I met Him, my life is often more restless, even painful, but it's also something more: it's alive. It's as if He were the source of my life: I was dead and now I'm alive."

This is the testimony of an "I" reborn through an encounter with Christ. That young woman knew nothing about Christianity, but after meeting friends in the Movement, she can live with truth in a world in which all the certainties have collapsed, discovering that she seeks Christ in every person she encounters, without fear of being influenced, just living the wonder of His presence, the ever-new enthusiasm for Him. "This is Christianity in history," we read in School of Community, "The dawning of a different humanity, of a different human community, a community that is new, truer."¹³³

Belonging to a "particular history," the life of the Movement, made possible such a self-discovery for this young woman ("I understand myself, I understand myself more. Before, it was as if I was dead. [...] I was dead and now I'm alive."); even though she did everything to forget what had happened to her, she could not get rid of it. The more she seeks, the more people she encounters, the more she lives, the more she realizes the differentness of what she encountered. In experiences like these, the heart demonstrates all its objectivity! Christ cannot be exchanged for just any cheap satisfaction; His gaze cannot be exchanged for any other gaze, nor His love for just any imitation of love. It is impressive to see how each of these things shows the irreducibility of Christ.

But for each of these signs to lead to certainty about Him, a journey of shared life with the people who had struck her was necessary, as was the honesty to acknowledge what all those people who so amazed her had in common. Even though she refused to recognize that Christ was the one who changed all those people she met, and even though she was not consistent, the only relationships that left her speechless were precisely those with the people who had spoken to her of Him. She met Christ because she never separated herself from her experience, and this experience led her to the awareness that there was something in the people she had encountered that could not be found anywhere else, and that she could not reduce it to their human abilities. It was something she could never have imagined, but could not deny, something they had told her about, and to which her ex-boyfriend decided to dedicate his life: Christ. She understood that she could not delegate the recognition of this factor to anyone else: the responsibility was hers alone. From then on, she continued to seek Christ in every gaze, in every encounter.

¹³³ Luigi Giussani, *Why The Church?* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 183.

Starting from an encounter, Christ is recognized as the heart of life. Another friend wrote: “One evening, I returned home after doing charitable work at the Food Bank and started telling my husband about how it had gone. At a certain point, he said: ‘I’m really lucky to live with you, because you pay attention to all the details of your days; you ask for the maximum and you always do it. You never settle and you always reflect on what happens to you. For me this is enviable! I’d like to live like you do, too.’ At that moment I almost felt anxious, and answered right away: ‘Look, it’s not my own ability or goodness! I’m this way because I’ve encountered Jesus, who’s changed my life, who makes me look at everything in the way you say is fascinating and desirable for you, too. The companionship of the Movement makes Him more alive to me and makes me more alive.’ In that moment, I understood what it means to know Christ in my experience: it doesn’t mean knowing a person extraneous to my life, but recognizing Him as the truth of myself! I can’t think of myself, how I live, the questions I have, what I do, without Him. Not ‘without thinking of Him,’ but just ‘without Him!’ I can’t say ‘I’ without Him! Like the title of last year’s Spiritual Exercises: ‘My Heart Is Glad Because You Live, Oh Christ!’”

The one practical, concrete, and effective response to the situation described earlier—characterized by the three reductions highlighted by Fr. Giussani—in which God, Christ, is perceived as abstract and extraneous to life, is Christianity as event. “See, I am doing something new: now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”¹³⁴

How does the Mystery help us to not relegate Christ to a mere abstraction? This help comes through the Church, the place of the communication of truth, the instrument of which is the miracle. “The miracle [...] is an event, something that happens that you did not foresee, that you cannot explain, but it happens; it is the content of an event that forces you to think of God.” The greatest miracle is the change of the human, a fulfilled humanity, an openness of the heart and reason, a gaze upon oneself and others, a gratuitousness, gladness, fecundity, and constructiveness that would otherwise be impossible. “Impossible words and facts. This is the miracle. Presences that are a miracle.” Fr. Giussani raised Mother Teresa of Calcutta as an example, and added: “Words and facts, [a] human presence that would be impossible to think of. So pure, so coherent, so powerful, while it remains in my fragility: your humanity is like mine, but in your humanity something flowers that comes from Something greater [...]. A miracle, therefore. It is a reality that I see, hear and touch, [...] but that

¹³⁴ Is 43:19.

I cannot reduce to what I see, hear, and touch, that necessarily points to something other. I would have to deny that reality in denying that reference. If I reduced it, I would annihilate it.”¹³⁵

But why is it that even when all these things happen in front of us, we are often like those whom Jesus rebukes? “To what shall I compare this generation? It is like children who sit in marketplaces and call to one another, ‘We played the flute for you, but you did not dance, we sang a dirge but you did not mourn.’ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they said, ‘He is possessed by a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they said, ‘Look, He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ But wisdom is vindicated by her works.” Afterwards, Jesus “began to reproach the towns where most of His mighty deeds had been done, since they had not repented. ‘Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes.’”¹³⁶

It is striking that after this rebuke, Jesus said: “I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned You have revealed them to the child-like. Yes, Father, such has been Your gracious will. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.”¹³⁷

Everyone was in front of the facts (just as we are). It would have been reasonable to submit reason to experience after having seen Jesus perform so many miracles. But the wise and learned were not willing to do so. They did not recognize Him, not for a lack of miracles, but because they refused to acknowledge them.

3. If you do not become like children

So then, here is what is needed: to be like children, to go beyond the logic of the wise, which is contrary to that of the little ones. Jesus was categorical about this. As we sang: “If you do not return to being children...”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Luigi Giussani, “Alla ricerca di un volto umano” [In search of the human face], *Tracce - Litterae Communions*, January 1996, X, XII–XIV.

¹³⁶ Mt 11:16-21.

¹³⁷ Mt 11:25-27.

¹³⁸ Claudio Chieffo, “Canzone di Maria Chiara” [The song of Maria Chiara], *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 189.

“Whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a child will not enter it.”¹³⁹ But how can I, an adult, return to being a child? This was the question Nicodemus asked Jesus: “How can a person grown old be born again? Surely he cannot re-enter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Jesus marveled at the question, and that a man as intelligent as Nicodemus did not understand its import: “You are the teacher of Israel and you do not understand such elementary things?”¹⁴⁰

This is a fundamental point, as Fr. Giussani reminded us: “The big question is to return to the origin, the big question is to return to how God made us. Really, what is morality? Morality is to live with the attitude in which God made us. Only he who has this attitude recognizes His Presence.”¹⁴¹ For this reason, Balthasar observed: “Simplicity is the premise for all the rest!”¹⁴² Without it, we do not realize what happens or understand the facts that occur in front of our eyes; they are not recognized as signs of something else, with the inevitable consequence that facts become useless, that is, they do not serve to deepen our knowledge of Christ, our familiarity with Him.

Obviously, Jesus is not asking us to remain in an infantile state. When Christ indicated the model of the child, “evidently He was not holding up childishness as an ideal, but instead the openness of the soul that nature automatically grants children, because it is such a necessary condition for the development of the human; like every value, in the adult it is achieved with difficulty.”¹⁴³ This difficulty makes it seem impossible to reach, just as it would be impossible to be born again when we are old, entering our mother’s womb once again.

But Jesus Himself testifies that it is not impossible for adults to live like children. “All His words and gestures reveal that [Jesus] looks at the Father with the eternal wonder of a child: ‘the Father is greater than I’ (Jn. 14:28). [...] [Jesus] never thinks of conquering His origin [...]. He knows He is a gift given to Himself, and that He would not subsist without Him who deprives Himself of the gift even while giving Himself in

¹³⁹ Mk 10:15.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. Jn 3:4,10.

¹⁴¹ Luigi Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Vol 2, *Hope* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 47.

¹⁴² Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Se non diventerete come questo bambino* [If you do not become like this child] (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1991), 9.

¹⁴³ Luigi Giussani, *Il senso di Dio e l’uomo moderno* [The meaning of god and modern man] (Milan: Bur, 2010), 28.

it. What the Father gives is being-self, freedom.”¹⁴⁴ Jesus knows that He is always given by the Father, and this gift fills the Son with wonder, awe, and gratitude. “In fact, the gesture of the eternal transfer [delivery] from the Father to the Son is constantly present, it is never fully passed, happened [something of the past, concluded], or owed [...]. Even though it is infinite memory, it always remains the perennially new offering, in some certain way awaited with infinite, loving trust. The Child Jesus certainly is amazed in front of everything: at the existence of the mother who loves Him, at His own existence, and, starting from both, at all the creatures of the world, from the smallest little flower to the boundless firmament. However, this wonder originates from the far deeper wonder of the eternal Son who in the absolute Spirit of love wonders at the love itself that dominates and exceeds everything. ‘The Father is greater than I.’”¹⁴⁵ This awareness of the Father was manifest in all of His gestures. As Giussani said: “And the man, Jesus of Nazareth—invested by the mystery of the Word, and therefore assumed into the very nature of God (but His appearance was completely identical to that of all men)—they didn’t see this man do one single action whose form didn’t show His awareness of the Father.”¹⁴⁶

But Jesus is not an isolated case, as Balthasar explained: “From the greatest saints you can immediately deduce that there is no conflict between being childlike [...] and maturity. [...] Even in their old age [the saints] maintain a miraculous youthfulness.”¹⁴⁷ We saw this well in Fr. Giussani. The Pope invites us to follow these presences: “Associate with people who have safeguarded their heart like that of a child.”¹⁴⁸ What made it possible for them to be childlike? At this point we can understand Jesus’s answer to Nicodemus: “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.”¹⁴⁹

Becoming children, being born again, means being born of the Spirit, which is what we receive in Baptism. The communication of His Spirit makes us daughters and sons as He is the Son, that is, daughters and sons in the Son. This means receiving everything as a gift, without stopping at appearances, acknowledging everything as given by the Father. The

¹⁴⁴ Balthasar, *Se non diventerete*, 44.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45–46.

¹⁴⁶ Luigi Giussani, “A New Man,” *Traces*, March 1999, point 2, available at archivio.mar99/parola.html

¹⁴⁷ Balthasar, *Se non diventerete*, 41.

¹⁴⁸ Francis, *General Audience*, September 20, 2017.

¹⁴⁹ Jn 3:5.

entire path that God has set out for us and continues to set out for us is for the purpose of leading us to this, so that everything that happens can introduce us to a relationship with Him. Because of our familiarity with Christ, and through Christ, with the Father, nothing in our lives is lost. On the contrary, without this familiarity we lack the substance that enables us to face reality with certainty, peace, a newness of gaze, and fruitfulness.

Acknowledging everything as given by the Father also changes our way of conceiving of the conversion to which we are called: “The moral journey is the emergence of coherence, of which we are incapable [...]. True moral coherence is when you are awed, awed by what happens in you, by the gift that is given to you.”¹⁵⁰ When we do not reduce what is given to us, everything is an opportunity to recognize God present in reality; every day our familiarity with Him can grow, a certainty in His presence that enables us not to suffocate in circumstances and that makes us free, not in an ersatz way, but a real one. We can look at things in our lives that we have never wanted to look at, as this person wrote: “My friend! I wanted to tell you that tomorrow I am setting out with my husband for a few days. In a few days, it will be the anniversary of my father’s murder. I haven’t gone to the place where it happened for thirty years, because before meeting you I did not look at this wound. I didn’t speak to anyone about it except those closest to me. But in these recent years, also because of the death of my son, I’ve seen an unexpected growth in my familiarity with Jesus. I’m no longer afraid and I am setting out. I’ll see again the places where I grew up and where I was already waiting for Him. Who knows what else He will have me discover? Thank you for your friendship, which is a great gift God has given me.”

Jesus came into history to overcome all fear, all solitude, all embarrassment among us.

Our world, which is increasingly determined by fear and distrust, needs this real encounter with Christ in history. The impetus for all our initiatives comes from the experience of His victorious and transforming presence. Fr. Giussani always reminded us of this: “The knowledge of the power of Jesus Christ is the deep reason for every gesture of social presence and communication to the world that we make,”¹⁵¹ and is what

¹⁵⁰ Luigi Giussani, *Qui e ora (1984-1985)* [Here and now (1984–1985)] (Milan: Bur, 2009), 436.

¹⁵¹ Luigi Giussani, “Storia di liberazione” [History of liberation], in Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, *L’impegno del cristiano nel mondo* [The Christian’s engagement in the world] (Milan: Jaca Book, 2017), 140.

everyone is waiting for. “When this Presence is at work in all life’s relationships, when all relationships ‘depend’ on this, when they are saved, judged, coordinated, evaluated, and used in the light of this Presence, then we have a new culture. This culture springs, therefore, from the attitude you have towards this exceptional Presence, which is decisive for life.”¹⁵²

So do not be misled: Fr. Giussani urged us to the knowledge of Jesus not so that we would retreat from reality and circumstances, but so that His presence would fill every gesture, “all our efforts at associative, operative, charity, cultural, social, and political activity.” This is how the beginning lasts and never becomes the past. “In the beginning we built, we tried to build on something that was happening [...] and that had bowled us over. No matter how naive and shamelessly out of proportion it may have been, this was a pure position.”¹⁵³ Living every gesture from within our belonging to Christ present, we will know Him increasingly better and will have ever greater reason to trust Him.

Now we can grasp more consciously the import of Pope Francis’s invitation to the people of Peru: “I [...] encourage you to gather, as people of faith and vibrant ecclesial communities, around the person of Jesus. [...] Salvation is not something generic, it is not abstract. Our Father looks at real people, with real faces and concrete histories. Every Christian community must be a reflection of that gaze, that presence that creates bonds and generates family and community.”¹⁵⁴

This is what the world is waiting for: “‘For the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed [...]’ Without being fully conscious of what this implies—because of the impossibility of imagining God’s initiative—man, in whatever age he lives, has been waiting for this new man,”¹⁵⁵ it says in the School of Community. Only this different and original presence can respond to the expectancy of today’s women and men, as we see in many stories we have told each other and in the many people we meet who are aware of their need.

In this regard, Balthasar wrote: “As long as ‘Christian’ means first of all tradition and institution, the movements of freedom of modern times will have an easy go of it.” He identifies with incomparable acuteness the way

¹⁵² Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, 112.

¹⁵³ Luigi Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, (Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2005), 102–3.

¹⁵⁴ Francis, *Meeting with the Population, Greeting of the Holy Father, Puerto Maldonado (Peru)*, January 19, 2018.

¹⁵⁵ Giussani, *Why The Church?*, 182.

the debate can become interesting: “The true comparison of views will only happen when Christians engage [...] in showing that God’s self-opening in Jesus Christ is the invitation to enter into the space of absolute freedom, the only place where human freedom can unfold.”¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Balthasar, “Premessa” [Premise], in *L’impegno del cristiano*, 24.

Sunday, April 29, morning

During entrance and exit:

Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony n. 9 in D minor, op. 125 “Choral”

Herbert von Karajan–Berliner Philharmoniker

“Spirto Gentil” n. 27, Deutsche Grammophon

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Daive Proseri. The collection of questions was very rich—over 1,100. It is a sign that our experiences and the things said in these days deeply touched questions and needs we have in life, so much so that most of the questions, as we will see, are based on personal experiences that confirm or are questioned by the things we have heard. This is really beautiful, a sign of the usefulness of a gesture like this, because if we do not put into play our experience, it would not be the same gesture and we would bring home very little.

Among the many questions, three particularly struck us. I'll summarize them first.

The first question concerns the new knowledge that increases our familiarity with Christ. This struck a great many people and returned in various ways: whether we perceive it as something that already belongs to the experience we live, or whether it amazed us as an unexpected suggestion, everyone felt the desire that our lives—at times apparently empty, repetitive, or impoverished—be filled with this familiarity with the Lord that makes everything beautiful and great, as it was for those with Him on the roads of Galilee, so that we can have the same experience.

The second referred to the centrality of memory in the Christian's life. This word is part of our DNA. Fr. Giussani practically re-invented its meaning, so well did he understand its extraordinary power in the world in which we live. As we have heard in these days, it is not just a nice recollection of the past, but rather, it is the rock that is the foundation for living the present without fear or reductions.

Finally, the third question concerns the value of our great companionship. The fact that we are not alone in this journey is not merely a consolation: it is the road.

As I said, we received a great many questions. I know that at times people are disappointed because they really care about a certain question that is particularly urgent for them, or that maybe arose listening to what you said, Julián, and they have found no answer. All of them deserve our answer, but obviously this is not possible, nor would anybody actually want this, because after all, we want to go back home sooner or later! I would like to ask if you have anything to say about this.

Julián Carrón. Thank you, yes, I would like to say that it is very beautiful that so many of you will be returning home with questions. Leave them open! We will begin a journey of companionship, working on all that we have said, as we usually do. The fact of so many have questions is the first sign of what has happened in these days, a sign that something has moved in us. Therefore, it is the first gift of these Spiritual Exercises, and is a cause of wonder for me. As we know, having questions is crucial for perceiving the answers, for understanding. We saw this when we went to school: those who made no effort to try to understand or do homework never had any questions. Only those who made the effort had questions. So then, cherish your questions and pay attention to the signs and clues of the answers that you will find along the road. In this way, life will become a fascinating adventure of knowledge. In this regard, I have always been struck by a line of Fr. Giussani's from the beginning of the fourth chapter of *The Religious Sense*: "We are made for truth, and truth is the correspondence between reality and consciousness. [...] It is also worthwhile to restate that our search for the ultimate meaning of our lives is not a matter of a particular intelligence, or some special effort, or even exceptional means. Rather, finding the ultimate truth is like discovering something beautiful along one's path. One sees and recognizes it, if one is attentive. The issue, then, is this attention."¹⁵⁷ Having questions facilitates this attention.

Prosperi. So then, let's begin with the questions.

"Yesterday morning you said that only by starting from God's choice and preference for me can I know Him and also know myself, and that what counts is the relationship He establishes with me. I sense that this is a new gaze on me that frees me from my own measure. Can you expand on this point?"

¹⁵⁷ Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 34.

Carrón. The first thing is to become conscious of this, and so we dedicated the entire lesson yesterday morning to gaining an awareness of God's preference and initiative toward us. As you can see, it always amazes us. It is never something to be taken for granted, and you can perceive all its newness, because it challenges our mentality, which says that our foundation should be what we think and our own efforts. He was the one to take the initiative. So what should be done to make this awareness more and more ours? What we said yesterday was not just a preliminary note before moving on to something else in the talk. Rather, it was an attempt to show how the preference that marked the beginning of the history of Israel touches our lives and can enter the innermost depths of our being. The experience of God's preference is so desirable that I cannot help but urgently want it to be mine and to fill me so that I live this awareness. But it is a journey, friends! The whole itinerary established by God serves to enable us to reach certainty in our relationship with Him and in His love for our life. We all see how hard it is for this to penetrate our mentality: in fact, we think that it is all a question of our efficiency, our efforts, our analyses, and our intelligence. Fr. Giussani stressed that the furthest thing from our mentality is that an event—an event that continually happens again—should be what reawakens us to ourselves, to the truth of our lives. Therefore, the issue, as it was for the people of Israel, is to pay attention to any sign of the event that is happening again, any hint of God's incessant initiative toward us, so that we can experience Him—"I am the Lord,"—so that we can look at each other with the same gaze with which the Mystery looks on us: "I have preferred you; you are precious in My eyes." All of God's gestures serve to tell us this, from the beginning up to now. Every gesture that God makes, every means He uses to draw close to us, is so that he can tell us this. This slowly leads us to the awareness that you and I *are* the relationship He establishes with you and with me, with each of us. Imagine waking up every morning with the awareness of One who tells us: "You are precious in My eyes." What newness would enter into us, no matter what we had to face! As said in the Balthasar quote from yesterday: "The love that God directs at me makes me what I am in truth."¹⁵⁸ If we do not look at ourselves in this way, we do not look at ourselves well. This gaze of the Lord happened, and nobody can rip it out of history. God is absolutely unique, and when He grants me His love, He makes me unique, too. You and I are defined by this gaze upon us. Any other image is a reduction of ourselves.

¹⁵⁸ See above, p. 21.

So then, this is the beginning of a road that is a struggle. In fact, we often relapse into the measure of whether I am able to do this or that, whether I manage to be coherent, whether my performance is adequate, how others judge me... Our road is a struggle between my measure—or that of others—and the preference that has entered into our lives. There is One who says to me: “You can measure yourself as much as you like, you can relapse into your own measure as much as you like, but you are precious in My eyes, and you can always allow My preference to enter you anew. You are not defined by your measure: you are the preference I have for you.” Only from this point can we begin to view ourselves with tenderness, with a gaze that enables us to embrace ourselves and that is not mere sentimentalism. To the degree to which you accept this gaze, you can begin to engage it in your experience, in everything you touch. As we said yesterday concluding the afternoon lesson, when this presence begins to fill all your relationships in life, when all your relationships depend on it, when they are saved, judged, coordinated, valued, and used in the light of this presence, then you have a new culture, that is, a new gaze on everything. The new culture arises from the position you take with respect to this exceptional presence that is crucial for life. It is the beginning of another world in this one. It is in our best interest not to forget this beginning, never to reduce it to something in the past, but instead for it to be always present. All of God’s effort, the endless number of initiatives He takes, are to convince us of this: “You are precious in My eyes, and none of your mistakes, none of your forgetfulness, none of your grouchy moods can erase it from the face of the earth.” Why then should we fight against this evidence in the name of our own measure, which will never be true? What’s the use? The one truth is this: “You are precious in My eyes.” Our struggle will always be lopsided, because even if we do not realize it, what defines us in the final analysis is the absolutely unique gaze Christ has on us. All the toil of living consists in this struggle to allow Him to enter. How much time will we need for the awareness of His gaze to penetrate our innermost depths?

Prosperi. Now there are two questions on the theme of memory.

“What is the difference between the ‘already known’ and ‘memory’? Is there a way of beginning from the experience you’ve had as an initial hypothesis for the judgment of everything? Or is this mistaken?”

The second question is similar, with a personal example. “Yesterday morning you said that ‘the source flows through our whole person even when we are absorbed in earthly commitments.’ Can you explain this bet-

ter? I am a self-employed professional and my day is full of pressing and unending ‘technical’ requests that I have to meet. Even though I desire familiarity with Jesus, it often seems that it does not grow. How can I always have the event in front of my eyes and increase its impact in the midst of all my work in a field that seems to have little to do with Christ? Is it a problem of strengthening memory?”

Carrón. The difference between the “already known” and “memory” in Giussani’s sense of the word, the authentically Christian meaning of the word, is very simple to understand. There are two opposing ways of relating to what happened to us. Think about how two antithetical attitudes could emerge from the same story we spoke about yesterday morning. On the one hand, the Pharisees knew their history well and took it more seriously than all the others, apparently, but at a certain point it led them to think they already knew how things stood. This “already knew,” all their knowledge, should have opened them up, but instead they were closed to the new initiative that the Mystery was taking in front of them. On the other hand, there is the attitude of Our Lady, John, and Andrew. The Pharisees were their contemporaries; they lived in the same times and had the same great history behind them, but because of the way Our Lady, John, and Andrew lived this knowledge, it generated in them a total openness to the newness that Christ brought that had been foretold by God’s many initiatives up to then. The immanence of that particular story, the memory of it opened them wide to the unpredictable action of God. In the Pharisees, the exact opposite happened. Thus the verification or test for seeing whether my attitude is the “already known” or based on “memory” lies in seeing whether I am open or closed to the unexpected that God causes to happen in front of my eyes today. A closure to this unexpected is not exclusive to the Pharisees; Peter experienced it too. When Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter responded, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” “Blessed are you, Peter, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My heavenly Father.”¹⁵⁹ Nobody had received such great praise from Jesus. But a moment later, Peter thought he already understood and knew how things stood, and he underwent the test I just described. After telling him, “Blessed are you, Peter...”, Jesus added, “Now we are going to Jerusalem, because I must give My life for you.” Peter said to Him, “Never! Don’t even think of it!” After all that he had seen—his life with

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Mt 16:15–17.

Jesus had been one new thing after another, all unimaginable events—right after giving the answer that brought him such praise, Peter did not follow the unforeseen event, that is, what Jesus told him, but put Him in the defendant’s dock: “It’s not possible! This will never happen!”¹⁶⁰ This holds for us, too. By its nature, our story of Movement should generate an endless openness to the newness of Christ’s initiative, but instead, because of the way we live it, it can become the “already known” that makes following “superfluous”: we think we no longer need to follow! You see this by the fact that like Peter, we tell Jesus what He should do. At a certain point, we reason the way Kant did, as we have described on other occasions: “If we already have the Gospel, why should we still follow? We can manage on our own.” In this position—of the Pharisees, Peter, Kant, and many times us—the “already known” takes precedence over “memory.” Therefore, yesterday morning’s lesson was not intended as a review of “sacred history,” which you already know, but an attempt to make us aware of God’s method, a method that is not yet ours, that we have not yet learned or accepted, one we are always tempted to evade, so that we often find ourselves saying, like Peter: “No, no; it can’t be this way.” We change the method, separating ourselves from the origin. But the method will always be the same: Christ’s continual initiative, to be followed. It is not just a matter of the past, but also and above all the present. For this reason, Jesus warned us: “Whoever receives the one I send receives Me,”¹⁶¹ because He continually sends others through whom He makes Himself present. Without the re-happening of this initiative, without the re-happening of His presence in front of our eyes, there is no Christian experience, and our “already known” will not keep us going even one day. God’s method corresponds to our need. We must be conscious of this.

Now we come to the second part of the question: how can I always have the event of Christ before my eyes and have a greater awareness of His presence in the midst of my work? I remember once being asked how it is possible to live the memory of Christ while at work. I answered by inverting the terms of the problem. “How can you manage to work without living the memory of Christ?” How can you manage to face so many hours of work, at times in the midst of complications and difficulties, without living His memory? How can you manage to wake up in the morning and get out of bed, to look at your wife or husband or children,

¹⁶⁰ Cf. Mt 16:22.

¹⁶¹ Jn 13:20.

without living His memory? It is precisely the opposite, as our Indian friend said: even when she tried to run away from what had happened to her, she could not avoid opening her eyes in the morning and seeing the faces of the people she had encountered and whose shared characteristic was having been seized by Christ. The memory of what had won her over determined what she expected from everything. Memory is the fruit of a familiarity that makes everything light. These Spiritual Exercises show us the road we must travel, not because we decided it, but because He designed it. We return to the origin in order to have before our eyes again the method God has used from the very beginning and continues to use in the present. The Bible is the canon of the method of God, a story that began in the past and continues to the present. For this reason, each thing, each challenge, each moment of suffering is an invitation to memory. Even our dissatisfaction is an opportunity for memory: “Is it not I that you are missing?”

Prosperi. “Could you clarify what it means to say you only understand when reason is affectively engaged?”

Carrón. Preparing for the Spiritual Exercises—the first grace for me is preparing for this moment, in the hope of being useful to you, too—I was struck by a text I have read many times from the third chapter of *The Religious Sense*. After talking about Pasteur’s discovery—you all remember the passage—Fr. Giussani gave an example: “Let us say that Mark and I are walking along the city streets. Because Mark has raised a serious problem, I am knocking myself out trying to explain things to him. He listens to me, and I grow every more impassioned and ever more lucid—or so it seems to me—as I present my arguments. ‘So then, do you understand?’ ‘Yes, yes, up to this point I follow you.’ We have been walking along talking, with our eyes fixed on the sidewalk. But he lifts his eyes to notice a pretty woman walking on the other side of the street. He continues to say ‘yes, yes,’ but in an increasingly mechanical manner as he fixes his eyes upon the lovely figure and turns his head to watch her as she moves away. This continues until she disappears in the distance. Discontentedly he withdraws his gaze and turns back to me in the very instant in which I have concluded my argument. I say to him, ‘So then, Mark, do you agree?’ And he says, ‘No, no! I am not persuaded!’” Fr. Giussani commented, “This reply is not valid.” Why? “Because he did not pay attention to my arguments. This is the offense that the majority of people commit when they face the problems of destiny, faith, religion,

the Church, and Christianity,” and of everything that happens. Why has this page struck me so much? Because of what Giussani said next: “This is the offense that the majority of people commit” because “being ‘anxious and troubled with many other things,’ in these things their minds are ‘dead and buried’”;¹⁶² that is, anything but fully engaged. “Dead and buried,” his very words! It is not that stunning facts do not happen—this is why yesterday I talked about the miracle of the multiplication of loaves—but if the mind is “dead and buried” in front of such facts, we do not see them and the “I” becomes a stone. The most remarkable things can happen, but our “I” is not there. For this reason, Fr. Giussani stressed that only those who make a real effort, those who are “engaged in what they experience,”¹⁶³ can understand. In other words, reality exists, and my “I” exists, endowed with the criterion for recognizing the truth, but the truth of reality and the nature of my “I” only emerge in an experience when my “I” is engaged with what exists and at the same time engaged with what it experiences, in what it experiences, when it runs up against that which is there. It is like when you go to buy some shoes: you look in the shop window and think, “Those shoes look just right. They match my dress perfectly and they even seem to be my size.” But you will only know if they are really the right shoes if you go into the shop and try them on, engaging in what you experience. Everything can function perfectly in our heads, as we heard yesterday. You can think, “I can leave the Movement; deep down, I don’t really need it anymore,” because you are convinced you have understood, but after you leave, when you engage in what you experience, disappointment sets in and a judgment begins to emerge. Only when you return do you begin to realize certain things. It is always the same story. We understand only if we engage with what we have at hand and in what we experience; otherwise, everything that happens will be useless for the road we must travel. Therefore, we are asked to do some work. There is no other way of understanding. We often expect a miracle that spares our freedom, but instead, as Giussani said, “Expect a journey, not a miracle that gets you out of your responsibilities or neutralizes your struggle, making your freedom mechanical.”¹⁶⁴ Only those who make a journey, starting from an encounter or a miracle, will be able to understand truly; otherwise they will find themselves in the

¹⁶² Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 29–30.

¹⁶³ Luigi Giussani, *Si può (veramente?) vivere così?* [Is it (truly?) possible to live this way?] (Milan: Bur, 1996), 82.

¹⁶⁴ Luigi Giussani, quoted in Alberto Savorana, *The Life of Luigi Giussani* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018), 634.

same situation as the disciples on the boat arguing about bread, to whom Jesus said, “Do you still not understand?”¹⁶⁵ If we do not engage with what we encounter and in what we experience, we are always back at the beginning and will be constantly ruled by our moods; we will not truly understand what we have in front of us and therefore nothing of what happens will increase our familiarity with Christ. The problem is not that we fail to do things, but that in the things we do, we fail to engage ourselves in a constant comparison with our “I,” and thus we do not know Christ. You can make a mistake, and through your error realize that what you do does not fulfill you, grasping the difference between Christ and the thing from which you expected fulfillment; you understand that what you do does not satisfy you because Christ is not present in it. When I make a mistake and realize that Christ was absent from my life, I am grateful for this, because the awareness of my mistake makes me return to Him, as happened for the Prodigal Son. The question is not to avoid ever making mistakes. In fact, faith is not the exclusive domain of angels. It is for poor wretches, limping people like us, who always learn from what happens, and thus, for human beings in flesh and blood.

Prosperi. “I was struck by the part about how God used the rebellions and disappointments of the people of Israel to cause them to grow more familiar with Him, just as Jesus answered the incredulity of the apostles not with new miracles, but by challenging them about the origin. How can we be certain that through disappointment, rebellion, and incredulity, in the challenges of reality, our familiarity with Jesus is growing?”

Carrón. This is what you have to verify for yourselves; it is not enough for me to explain it to you. We have to verify whether during our rebellions, disappointments, and mistakes God continues to take initiative with us, and whether through it our familiarity with Him slowly but surely grows. God does not make Himself present in our lives only when we are good. Even when the people of Israel murmured because there was nothing to eat, God intervened to help: He did not hold back until they were good. God intervenes and makes His presence known using everything, even our rebellion, in order to show us how He is different. It is very consoling to re-read Paul’s words about this: “All things work for good for those who love God,”¹⁶⁶ in conjunction with Saint Augustine’s

¹⁶⁵ Mk 8:21.

¹⁶⁶ Rom 8:28.

comment, “*Etiā peccata*,” even the sins. God uses everything to show us His face. You do the same with your children: when they rebel, when they are angry with you, when they close in on themselves, you continue to take initiative with them, and precisely in this, they can recognize your differentness and think, “It’s a good thing there’s Mom!” The same holds for us: it’s a good thing You are there, Christ! In the disappointments, in the falls, You do not abandon me and through every situation I can return to You. So your happiness that Christ is there outweighs your sadness for having erred. The gratitude that Christ is there prevails over the pain of sin. It is like a crying child who sees her mother and while she is still crying begins to smile at her. The more you see Christ at work in your life—and this is why you need to be attentive to what happens, to the ever-new initiatives God takes with us—the more your willingness to trust in Him grows. It is as if He were asking us, “Why are you agitated, if I am here? Don’t you understand yet? Why are you agitated about forgetting the bread? Haven’t you understood who I am?” Every time, through what happens, Christ in His tenderness reclaims us again in order to enter ever more deeply into our being.

Prosperi. Maybe you have already answered somewhat, but I’ll read the following question anyway. “I was moved to hear you say that I am made of freedom, and that I am called to participate in the same freedom with which God loves everything. You said that the origin of God’s choice coincides with the purpose of this choice. This presented a possibility I’d never thought of, a scenario I’d never encountered before: I’d never thought this of myself. In a certain sense, the familiarity with Christ that I desire coincides with this freedom, which seems to me the most precious good, a freedom full of intelligence. What preserves this freedom, and what is its connection with knowledge?”

Carrón. This freedom can seem to us like “a possibility I’d never thought of,” and yet this is precisely what Communion and Liberation is. We belong to this place to have this experience of freedom. Obviously, simply repeating a name is not enough for this experience of freedom to penetrate our innermost depths: our familiarity with Christ must grow. This is why we insist that the first and most crucial issue is this familiarity. If we do not become increasingly certain of Him, of His presence, of His passion for us, certain that the journey He has us make is for our own good, it will be impossible to experience freedom. In fact, this freedom is something surprising that flows from this familiarity, not the endpoint

of some effort or analysis of ours. Our only concern should be to follow Christ when He intervenes, as he did with the people of Israel. Then we will understand that freedom is always the fruit of being freed, of letting His presence enter our lives. We must pay constant attention to this, to how this possibility of freedom “I had never thought of” enters our lives. It is useful to return to the people of Israel to see how through all the ordeals, mistakes, challenges, and difficulties that characterized its history, God’s initiative brought forth freedom. Within salvation history, which continues today and involves us, everything is important for deepening our familiarity with the Lord. The key is to realize that if we want to be really free, we must remain bound to the origin, the source, which is Him. In fact, there is always a temptation to think that everything depends on our own effort, and not on the certainty of a presence. Instead, what preserves the experience of freedom is remaining in relationship with Him who generates it. When Israel thought it possessed the truth and broke off from the Lord who had liberated it, it received its verification: it ended up in slavery. Freedom will never be our possession: it is a gift that we receive continually. We find it hard to understand this. We treat freedom like a pen someone gives us: “Now it’s mine, and nobody can take it away.” This is bogus. Freedom is like a fire: if it is not fed, it goes out. If we leave the source, the presence of Christ who happens again, we fall into some form of slavery, as we said yesterday. This is why God works to lead us to the gaze of the child shown to us by Jesus, who receives everything as a gift of the Father. This means that I can remain free only by accepting the freedom that an Other gives me. This is the most difficult thing to get into our heads, the hardest change to make in our way of thinking. As we have said many times, conversion is at the level of self-awareness and of what the event of Christ is for us. In fact, often we use the word “event” to indicate an initial moment of ignition, after which things went forward by themselves. Instead, the event we speak of happens continually: it must always be in the present, otherwise freedom becomes impossible and is lost.

Therefore, it will be crucial to work on the first lesson in the coming months, because it is the furthest thing from our mentality: we are tempted to think that the gift received—our liberation—has become by now or can become our possession.

Prosperi. “Yesterday you said that Christ is here for us to overcome all our fears. I am afraid for my children. I am afraid to have them grow up in a culture that tells you that being male or female is not a given fact,

where the state decides whether your child lives or dies. How can I fight this fear? How can I stay in front of colleagues and friends who believe these things without continually complaining and feeling myself continually crushed?”

Carrón. This is a tremendous challenge for you and for each of us. Each of us must verify how to respond to these questions. This is crucial. The condition for our friend not to be determined by fear is for Christ to make of her a new creature. This is the leap of awareness to which Fr. Giussani always called us that is described in the Page One. The more difficult the time, the more it is the time of the person. The challenge is the generation of a subject, otherwise we will have to declare Christianity dead and buried, like something that was useful in a different era but not needed now! Christianity was born in worse times than ours, in the Roman Empire, and has gone through many truly difficult times, but no power in this world has been able to impede the generation of an “I,” of a new creature, as Saint Paul testified. If you do not experience the new creature that Christ brought into the world, you will saddle your children with your existential insecurity and make them fearful, too. Simply giving them good advice is not enough: it is not enough to combat a situation like the one described in the question. You will be able to accompany your children only if they see certainty in you; otherwise you will communicate the culture, which is born of existential insecurity. But you needn’t necessarily be in the world in this way. You can be in this world in a different way! This is the great challenge before the Church today, to generate subjects able to be in this society in a different way, not in the sheepfold or the barracks or in some protected space, subjects who are capable of living in this world unambiguously, bringing all the newness of an original presence that is born of the lived faith, because this is what interests and challenges others. This is the most powerful challenge they can encounter and which, consciously or unconsciously, they are waiting for.

These Spiritual Exercises are the attempt to continue our journey toward an ever-deeper familiarity with Christ, our certainty, so that the existential insecurity and resulting fear that nullify our contribution will not prevail in us. Only when we do not communicate insecurity, but the certainty that is born of faith and familiarity with Christ, only when we do not communicate an “already known”—which is not enough for living for us, either: we know from experience that even knowing the entire School of Community as a discourse is not sufficient for overcoming fear—but a freshness of new life, only then will we be a presence suited

to the challenges of our times. The Mystery became flesh to be able to accompany our life, so that a different presence would enter into history and spread to others according to a design that is not ours, as we have seen on many occasions.

Prosperi. “My husband and I can’t have children. This strange initiative of God in our life does not make me feel preferred. My heart cries out with my desire for maternity, but I realize that ultimately my heart has hardened, has been reduced to seeking a form of happiness I envision, and that the complaint of the disciples prevails in my life, too (why can’t we have children? why us?). How can I keep from reducing this desire, and how can I have a new heart when reality tells me no? Why does God put a desire in my heart that reality denies me? How can a hardened heart be born again from a wound?”

Carrón. What God puts in the heart is the desire for happiness, not the specific form of its fulfillment that you, understandably, have established. God responded to your desire for happiness by giving His life for you. If we are amazed and grateful for this, if we are grounded in the fullness of the presence of Christ dead and risen, then we will be able to face any situation. Otherwise fear will prevail. Becoming flesh, dying on the cross for us, rising, and therefore remaining present in history, God gave us a superabundant response, far beyond any measure. So then, how can you stay in front of the mysterious situation you described? Why did it have to happen to you? I don’t know why. Or better, Christ does not give us an intellectual response in the form of an explanation, but instead He tells us: “The answer to your desire is Me.” Only if you accept Him, that is, if you experience the unique correspondence of His presence to your heart, will you be able to look at the wound of not having children and be grateful because Christ is there. This is the hope in life. The way the Mystery will cause you to overflow with fullness and joy will be revealed through what happens. The important thing is that a lament does not prevail over wonder at the superabundance of what He gives you. We are free and glad because we have everything. I insist that if we do not experience being grounded in the fullness of His presence, if we are not grateful for having encountered Christ and do not experience that everything is His embrace, then the lament will win out.

Prosperi. “Immersed in today’s culture, people tend to dissect problems and questions and analyze them to get to the bottom of them. How can one

have a more childlike gaze on reality without censuring one's own rational approach? How can today's problems be faced with the heart of a child?"

Carrón. This is a question Fr. Giussani returned to continually: it is easy for a child to have the attitude with which we were born, that is, to be in front of reality with simplicity and sincerity, with an affirmative openness expressed as curiosity. But if adults do not make a constant effort to be educated to this, if they consider it to be only pure spontaneity, they cannot make it truly theirs, and instead, will steadily lose it, yielding to the thought that such openness is for the naive, that it is fine for children but in adults should give way to the one truly "intelligent" position, which is skepticism. "I'm not naive!": how many times do we hear this from adults? But pay attention, because the problem is not about being "naive" but about keeping the original attitude with which we were created, about having our eyes wide open in front of reality. Wouldn't you like to look upon your wife as you did in the early days? Or your children, the way you looked at them the moment after they were born? What enables adults to have this gaze? As Nicodemus said, it is impossible for us. It can only be a gift that should be continually developed through an education. If we are not born anew every time, this gaze disappears, and with it reason, which is reduced to measure. In order to know reality authentically, you must first of all have a "reason that opens up," that is wide open, before having a "reason that explains."¹⁶⁷ Therefore, for Giussani, the problem of intelligence is encapsulated in the episode of John and Andrew. In their encounter with Jesus of Nazareth, John and Andrew were attracted and fascinated, seized: in this moment, their reason, inasmuch as it was sustained by affection, opened and acted according to its full nature. Here we see that the one true reason remains wide open to reality, as happens in the child. Because of this, we said that unless we participate in a place where we are continually thrown wide open, we end up on the shoals of our analyses, adopting without knowing it "the world's way of looking at things, which tomorrow will be different from what it is today."¹⁶⁸ On the contrary, Giussani said, "The new culture [...] starts off from an encounter you have had, from an event that you are part of, from your coming across a Presence, not from books you read or ideas you hear. This encounter has a genetic value, since it

¹⁶⁷ Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 16.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 54.

represents the birth of a new subject, which arises in a precise place and in a moment of history, where it is nourished and grows as a new personality, with a unique conception, irreducible to any other; [...] a new knowledge.”¹⁶⁹ In order to maintain a true gaze on reality, are we willing to not separate ourselves from this encounter with a genetic value? Only Christ saves reason! With our own analyses, we don’t go far.

Prosperi. “When you talked about the reduction of the event to ideology, I was reminded of a question that I often wonder about: what is the difference between good people (baptized or not) and those who have encountered Christ?”

Carrón. There is an unmistakable difference, not generated by us. If we are here, it is precisely because we ran up against this difference, like our Indian friend: she found herself in front of words and facts, an impossible human presence, people with an openness of heart and reason, a certain gaze upon themselves and others, a gratuitousness, gladness, fruitfulness, and constructiveness, as we said yesterday afternoon, that are incomparable, with a way of facing life, pain, and death that cannot arise just from “being good.” It would be useful to re-read the *Letter to Diognetus*, but even more so to look around us: there are many examples among us of a way of living even the most difficult circumstances with a fullness and hope that people cannot give themselves. Fr. Giussani called such humanity a “miracle.” If we are here and not elsewhere, it is because this humanity is not found everywhere, and is not the fruit of an effort to be coherent. Each of us must say this starting from his own experience, must respond personally to the question. This is key to the value of our adherence.

Prosperi. The final series of questions concerns companionship.

“In the introduction Friday evening, you told us that ‘this companionship of ours must go deeper, it must touch ourselves, our hearts,’ it must introduce us and move us toward ‘a highly personal relationship with Him.’” What direction can you give us for this task, in particular with reference to the Fraternity groups?”

“I am alone. I live far from the communities of the Movement. How can I live familiarity with Christ? What does this have to do with the concrete questions of every day?”

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 112.

“Our Indian friend is not in our companionship, but she can’t get it off her mind, even after saying ‘no’ many times. What path does this fact indicate for our lives?”

Carrón. The simplest suggestion I can give you is to remain bound to experience, because then what this letter documents can happen (this helps us to answer the previous question as well): “Just a quick note to tell you about my joy and wonder at yesterday’s assembly with our visitor. The assembly was entirely based on experience, and what experiences! It was an explosion of the verification of faith in the life of each person. Experiences of grave illnesses, the death of one’s wife, loss of work, gusto in engaging one’s “I” by getting one’s hands dirty in the life of the town where one lives or in one’s school, economic difficulties due to the arrival of a sixth child, difficulties in families because of the presence of adopted children, wonder at the miracle of openness demonstrated by two friends who hosted a homeless Nigerian. It was truly the demonstration of how faith impacts life and of the hundredfold here below. Within all the drama of the life of each person, it was evident that they were all happy and glad, and this was breathtaking and shocking: a gust of newness and fascination. If Jesus wanted to convince us that it is in our best interests and those of all people to follow Him, yesterday He succeeded!” This is within the reach of anyone. Therefore, my suggestion is that you work from the experiences among you, accompanying each other on the journey. Today, nobody can say he is isolated. There are all sorts of ways to stay in touch, even if you live in the middle of nowhere. There are cell phones, Skype, video connections with the School of Community, *Traces*, the CL site, all sorts of things! How I would have liked to have had all these instruments available when I met the Movement. Therefore, those who want to be accompanied have all they need. Who’s keeping you from using these instruments? Our Indian friend’s lively awareness of the value of the encounter she had, the cognitive value of the encounter, is striking. Such a difference, such a new gaze entered her life that she can never forget it. She shows us what Fr. Giussani described: Christ is not far from her heart, but has penetrated to its depths. Therefore she is not alone because she carries the companionship inside her. She cannot look at anything or enter into relationship with anything without comparing it to the gaze that filled her, that by now constitutes her, and that she continues to experience in her relationship with friends. Even now that she is isolated in the middle of nowhere, she continues to live that relationship as she can. The companionship of Christ defines her and for this reason,

she seeks His face in every face she encounters along the road. If we truly engage in life, full of everything the Mystery has given and gives us, we can say, like Saint Paul to the Christians of Corinth: “You are not lacking in any spiritual gift.”¹⁷⁰

The following questions and answers come from the Sunday, May 6 assembly concluding the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Ávila, Spain, preached by Fr. Julián Carrón.

“Does ‘election’ imply that there are also the ‘not elected’? There are some statements about election that I do not entirely understand. I understand the disproportion between grace and merit, but election seems something unjust, as if it were something that came before freedom and that there are people who are ‘not elected.’”

Julián Carrón. When someone gives you a gift, do you consider it unjust because it precedes the exercise of your freedom?

“No. But are there people to whom God gives nothing?”

Calm down! You can object all you like, but you cannot deny what you just said. It is not unjust for someone to give you something before you exercise your freedom. Actually, it is just what you are waiting for. When someone loves you freely, is he unjust because his love precedes the movement of your freedom? This is the point of departure, an elementary experience we all have, before any reflection. God’s first gesture to enable people to reach the fullness of their destiny is not an explanation: if this were the case, we would get stuck right away. The first gesture is a fact—a choice, a totally free gesture, a coming toward you—and you find it disarming because it happens before you can pigeonhole it in one of your mental boxes or question it. This is striking. If this fact does not define us before anything else, we will always be jammed, imprisoned in our measure. God’s first gesture in the Old Testament was an absolutely free initiative that had no previous explanation in the human person. “It was not because you are more numerous than all the peoples that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you; for you are really the smallest of all peoples.”¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Cf. 1 Cor 1:7.

¹⁷¹ Dt 7:7.

The same thing happened when Jesus went to the home of Zacchaeus. He did not go there because Zacchaeus was good; He knew full well that he was a sinner. The Gospel says that Zacchaeus “received Him with joy.”¹⁷² This is the first experience, something absolutely elementary: amazement. However, staying in this initial position is difficult, or at least not durable; a moment later we are already confused. We also note this in the reaction of those who saw Jesus enter the home of Zacchaeus. “What, He’s going to eat in the house of a sinner? But that fellow doesn’t deserve it! How is it possible?”¹⁷³ They considered it unjust. This is the scandal of Christianity.

“I have learned in my life to recognize that God’s love exceeds our measure and that human justice is of a different order. In addition, I realize that when I measure in human terms, in the end I am sad and alone. For that matter, the parable of the day workers talks about equal love for everyone: the owner gives as much to the last hired as he gives to the first, and if you have a simple heart you will be happy for the last arrival. Instead, when you talk about election, it seems that it implies that someone is not chosen.”

I am glad you are struggling with the term “election” because usually we take it for granted. The fact of not taking election for granted is a gift you have received today; it is a gift that something in you rebels against and makes you say “This isn’t fair!” But you are not alone: a lot of people think the word “election” should be expunged from the Bible because it refers to something unjust.

“It’s always been like that for me.”

It is important to realize this: it seems unjust to us because choosing one means excluding others. We reason this way because we do not understand the meaning of God’s action, the reason He makes a choice. What is God’s method? You just have to read a couple of lines from the Bible to see that when God chooses, He is excluding no one. The first: God “wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth”;¹⁷⁴ that is, God’s design concerns everyone, embraces everyone. The second: “But God proves His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.”¹⁷⁵ He died for everyone, no one excluded.

So then, what is the method God used? He did not choose some to exclude others, but to reach the others through them. If we were end terminals in a big data processing center, the data—in this case salvation—would

¹⁷² Lk 19:6.

¹⁷³ Cf. Lk 19:7.

¹⁷⁴ 1 Tm 2:4.

¹⁷⁵ Rom 5:8.

reach everyone automatically and simultaneously, and everything would seem more direct. But human freedom would be skipped. Instead, God wanted us to be free, and respects our freedom precisely by calling some to respond freely, and through them calling others to respond with equal freedom. This is fundamental for understanding this method, so that you can understand both the grace you have received and the fact that you have not received it just for yourself, but so that it can reach others through you. Jesus did not choose the twelve just for their benefit, so only they could enjoy Him, but in order to send them throughout the world to bear witness to what Christ means for life. In fact, what is the most serious objection to the Christian announcement? My students in Madrid used to say, “What the Gospel says is very beautiful, but it doesn’t exist anymore. It is no longer something you can touch with your hand.” How does God respond to this objection? By having people today meet someone—a real person in flesh and blood like you—so that they can see happen in that person what we hear about in the Gospel, that is, see the original event happen again. Only in this way will people today begin to be interested in Christ: they do not yet understand the origin of your differentness, but the encounter with you, with a real person, provokes their reason and freedom. According to a design that is not ours, God continues to call you, and you can answer “yes” or “no.” If you accept, He changes your life, filling it with joy and fruitfulness, showing others His presence through this change in you. This is the same thing He did with Zacchaeus and the disciples: He chose them so that through them others could encounter in the flesh—not in their thoughts, not in a virtual way, not as in a dream—someone who challenged their reason and freedom.

Is all this real? Yes it is, and you have seen it. This is why God’s method is not unfair: through this method God concretely, really, historically, bending down to the human modality of comprehension—which is carnal, historical—dialogues with the reason and freedom of each of us. If we mean that “election” involves the exclusion of others, it is understandable that you would find it unjust. On the contrary, if we conceive of it as it is, a road for reaching others, then election does not exclude anyone. This is God’s method, a method that respects the freedom of the human person.

“What does it mean that freedom happens contemporaneously with the fact of being freed? The proof that we know God is that we are free, and we are not free if He does not continuously free us, but at the same time He needs our freedom to be recognized. I need to understand this unity in daily life, and how it happens in you, Julián.”

As we have seen, we understand the true meaning of words through experience. For example, we understand what it means to love when we feel loved, as our friend who lived in India told us. Nobody had looked at her the way those university companions in Madrid did; she had not imagined being loved with such gratuitousness, and when her mother abandoned her and said she no longer wanted to see her, it became evident that in order to understand what it means to love, and in order to be able to love, you need to be loved. The same thing happens with freedom: we understand what freedom is through experience. For this reason, Fr. Giussani's pedagogical method for explaining freedom was to have us start not from the noun, that is, the definition (which would lead to infinite discussions) but from the adjective, and thus from experience: *When do you feel "free"?* Since people can only understand things in this way, through experience, in His unique tenderness, God bends over us in our need.

So that the people of Israel can comprehend what freedom is, God has them experience liberation: He leads them out of Egypt, freeing them from slavery. The Israelites were created free, and thus freedom belonged to their nature. But in Egypt they were not free, they were slaves. We, too, are free by nature, but at the same time do not feel free in our circumstances, and they suffocate us. When the people of Israel were liberated from Egypt, they lived an experience of liberation and freedom, and began to trust God. They were free and began to breathe; the suffocation of their forced labor was over. But right away, this experience of liberation was followed by many rebellions. As we have seen, the people of Israel repeatedly yielded to the presumption of being able to obtain freedom by themselves, which resulted in more slavery. This happens with us, too. In order to be free, you have to accept the condition that makes a real experience of freedom possible: being liberated. Thus we, who are free by nature (we are not subject to the mechanisms of instinct), suffocate in the circumstances and cannot deep down say "I." We are not free. I often ask: how many people do you know who are free? Free in reality, not in their imaginations. You have to realize that we are all free by nature, but few people are truly free in reality, not in their room, in the virtual world, in their dreams, but in daily life, in their work, at home, with their friends, in their circumstances. At this level we can grasp the difference that God's gesture makes by acknowledging that freedom happens at the same time as the fact of being liberated.

To understand whether we are free, we just have to observe ourselves in reality, in our concrete circumstances, to see whether we breathe where we live. If we discover that we are always intent on complaining because there

is always something that is not going well, this means that freedom is actually a pure fiction for us. This is how each of us can ascertain—beyond our words, interpretations, or discussions—whether we are truly free, and who or what frees us. The sign that I embrace what I receive instant by instant from God as a gift is my liberation. On the contrary, when I claim to possess my freedom, when I conceive of it as autonomous freedom, when I no longer feel needy, and when I separate myself from the origin that gives me freedom, it disappears and I begin to suffocate. Therefore, we always need to receive liberation and embrace it. For this reason, our Indian friend said that “there is a small point that depends on me”—recognizing everything that had happened to her.

There is no freedom unless I embrace the liberation He wants to give me. In order to liberate me, God needs me to allow myself to be liberated. In fact, God does not want to enter our lives like an elephant in a china shop, like a tank that razes our freedom to the ground, without asking permission. God respects our freedom so deeply that He gives us everything, but to enter He waits and begs for our “yes,” our freedom: “Will you accept Me? Does anyone want to come after Me and follow this experience?” God also offers us an infallible method for understanding whether we are following His invitation: the experience of the hundredfold. “Those who follow Me will have the hundredfold.”¹⁷⁶ This is not a matter of discussions or interpretations that do not serve us. You can know whether you are embracing what the Lord gives you by verifying in reality whether your life is a hundred times more human and truer, whether your life breathes fully. This is how I live: I do not have any other experience to tell you about. When you follow, you breathe, and when you do not follow, you suffocate. Freedom is always given to us in a relationship, and this is what we have learned from the entire history that has preceded us. At a certain point we can think that since we “already know,” since we have already received, we can stop receiving, embracing, and following God’s gift. Instead, no, this is not a stage we pass through; there is not a moment in which I no longer need to receive and embrace it. There is only a greater awareness of my need to embrace it. The more I understand what this is about, the more I understand that the experience of freedom is given to me, the more I understand that the one chance to be truly free, to experience liberation, is to receive it from the only One who can give it to me and make it possible. This is a decision that we cannot delegate to anyone.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Mt 19:29.

“I would like to understand better the role of the companionship on this journey. You spoke of ‘companionship’ as a help against ‘demoralization.’ Also you said that ‘this companionship of ours must go deeper, it must touch ourselves, our hearts [...] must introduce us and move us to “a highly personal relationship with Him,” with Christ.’ This really interests me because what I’ve gone through this year has shown me the need for a companionship like this. I recognize that certain faces are the companionship for me but I also see that we are very embarrassed, beginning with me. I feel the need for us to be a true help for each other. What does it mean to belong to a place, to belong to this companionship, beyond formalism? In the introduction you said, ‘But, Giussani clarified, having reached this level, the level of my acknowledgement of You, O Christ, the level of the heart, that you cannot delegate to others an answer that only you can give.’ Then you quoted Giussani: ‘The heart is the only thing in which we are not partners.’ I recognize that this not having partners is the most important sign of my greatness. I cannot take this for granted as I undertake a journey to know Christ. At times we think that dissatisfaction, sadness, the fact that things don’t work out, disappointments, etc., are aspects of life to be controlled, pared away, elided. Instead, they are an echo of the heart of which you speak, the place of God’s greatest preference for me, of the greatest companionship. The heart, which has no collaborators, is my greatest collaborator. However, many times I perceive that in the adult world we lack the courage to start from this collaborator that is the heart. Can you help us on this point?”

I’ll start with the first question. If we are attentive to how you described things, the Mystery always provides us with some traces. What trace does the Mystery give you so you can understand what the companionship is? You recognize in your experience that certain faces offer this companionship. Maybe not all of them, but some you clearly recognize as the faces of a companionship. Our Indian friend said much the same thing: “Christ must have been like you, a person who helped others to understand themselves, to look deep into their hearts,” to know their true depths, “and understand who they were.” The same thing happened to John and Andrew: they began to understand who they were because they encountered a person, Jesus. They began to understand by following that person. This is the modality, the method of God, from Abraham to today. Therefore, you can understand by following those faces and being attentive to how what you desire for yourself happens in them. Therefore, the first issue is attention. It is not primarily a problem of intelligence. Someone might say, “I am more intelligent and that fellow is ignorant, so how can he tell me anything interesting?” It is true, that fellow may be a wretch, but the Lord uses him, wretch that he is, to call you.

So then, the first concern is to be attentive, and also to be open to following the way in which the Mystery calls you: through those faces. This is how you discover what a true companionship to your life is. You discover it and you recognize it, but you do not decide its content. At times you would prefer others whom you like more, with whom you get along better, but you do not decide who truly helps you. Your job is just to recognize it: being with certain people, you return home and something remains with you, and the next day you see that you relate in a different way with yourself and reality, that you look at things in another way. So then you begin to realize that the companionship makes you more yourself, makes you go more deeply into everything.

This is why we said yesterday that the companionship is the place generated by Christ that helps us become aware of what we are. What is the greatest help it gives you? What is the greatest help that Jesus gave His disciples? What companionship did He give them? He drew them out of their reductions, reawakened their hearts, and generated a subject capable of looking at all of reality, all the way to its origin. What did Jesus do when He joined the disciples as their companion on the road to Emmaus? They were mulling over a whole list of Jesus's miracles and deeds, yet they were full of skepticism as they walked. That stranger approached and asked what they were talking about, and they said to Him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"¹⁷⁷ Jesus certainly knew what had happened... and yet what did He do? What companionship did He give them? He said, "Is your heart benumbed? Are you so foolish that you don't understand what happened?"¹⁷⁸ Jesus provoked them to broaden the horizon of their gaze, to re-open their hearts and reason. In fact, when they then recognized Him in the breaking of the bread, they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"¹⁷⁹ What was the greatest help Jesus gave them? He generated in them an "I" capable of recognizing Him. The more our hearts are re-awakened, the more we understand that they can only be satisfied by Him who created them, the only One in whom they find fulfillment. Christ is the only one who saves desire, who makes it emerge in all its power, in its infinite nature, and responds to it. The more I discover the nature of my "I," its irreducibility and uniqueness, the more it becomes clear that my responsibility cannot be substituted for: I

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Lk 24:18.

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Lk 24:25.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Lk 24:32.

cannot delegate to anyone the responsibility of saying “I” and “yes” to Him who reawakens me and asks to be allowed to save me.

Giussani told us things that we begin to understand only when they happen in us, only when we experience them. Like when he told us that the “I” is “a direct, exclusive relationship with God.”¹⁸⁰ It is “my” “I” and “my” personal relationship with the Mystery: I cannot delegate it to anyone. You, me, each of us is unique. We are not one among many in the flock, a little piece of a global mechanism. No. The Mystery wants to establish with each of us a unique relationship, a unique intimacy. You are called, in the first person, and you will be the one to say “yes” or “no.” This answer cannot be delegated. I have always been struck by the itinerary Fr. Giussani had us follow through the books of the *PerCorso*. In the beginning, in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*, he helped us recognize that we have the criterion for discerning and perceiving what our hearts need. Then he developed the entire itinerary, presenting the Christian claim, the event of Christ, the journey of the disciples, and then the Church as the place of Christ’s dwelling in history, and therefore also the place of our journey. And at the end of this whole itinerary, he said, “To what does Christ entrust all that He has done in front of you? What is the ultimate criterion for judging? Your heart.” Christ does not want us to adhere to Him mechanically. He wants us to adhere to Him because we recognize Him as the answer to the need of our hearts; otherwise He would remain outside us. Do you understand why our “yes” cannot be delegated to anyone else? Giussani said that nobody can cheat: Christ does not cheat with us, but we cannot cheat with Him, either. This is what makes life truly dramatic. In this sense, the heart has no partner. “The love that God directs at me makes me what I am in truth and definitiveness: it establishes the “I” that God wants to see in front of Himself and have for Himself, directed at Him,” said Balthasar. His preference for you is the only one that can fully correspond to your heart. The others, to the degree to which they themselves live this relationship, help me not settle for less than this, but go to the heart of my human need.

Therefore, God’s whole design is for us to encounter the only One who responds to us. If each of us does not have an answer for ourselves, then we will not have an answer for others, either. The world will remain without an answer. If we do not experience Christ firsthand as the answer to the infinite expectancy of our hearts, we will not be able to communicate it to others as a good for them. Only those who make this journey and live this experience

¹⁸⁰ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 85.

can propose it to others with the certainty that it is what they, too, mysteriously seek, groping their way through life. This is the greatest adventure of life: verifying every day more and more that what happened to us in the encounter with Christ is the one thing able to respond fully to the needs of the heart. The verification that this familiarity with Christ has become the central factor of our lives lies in the fact that we are free in the midst of circumstances. Only in this way will we be able to offer a real contribution to the longing for freedom present in everyone. This is why the following affirmation by Balthasar has always interested me. “As long as ‘Christian’ means first of all tradition and institution, the movements of freedom of modern times”—which today we call “populist”—“will have an easy go of it” because we will not challenge them: we will not represent any challenge for them. “The true comparison of views will only happen when Christians engage [...] in showing that God’s self-opening in Jesus Christ is the invitation to enter into the space of absolute freedom, the only place where human freedom can unfold.”¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ See above, pp. 21, 62.

HOLY MASS

Readings: Acts 9:26–31; Ps 21; Jn 3:18–24; Jn 15:1–8

HOMILY BY FR. JULIÁN CARRÓN

Not a day passes without the liturgy setting before our eyes God’s continual initiative toward us. Today it does so with the story of the conversion of Saul, the most unthinkable person, the persecutor of the early Christians. But nothing is impossible for God. Here we truly see God’s freedom at work: He chooses someone like Paul to show that He always takes the initiative. “You are precious in My eyes.”¹⁸² Aware of this preference, Paul will later say in his letters: “I know Him in whom I have believed.”¹⁸³ Nobody understood what had happened to him on the road to Damascus, but it was immediately clear that something important must have happened, because he began to stay with those he had persecuted. Obviously, the Christians of Damascus, seeing him in their midst, were afraid of him, being unable to believe that he had become a disciple of Jesus. But he continued to stay with them and the Acts report that “he moved about freely with them in Jerusalem, and spoke out boldly in the name of the Lord.” That something had happened to him was made palpable, touchable, in his earnest activities and shared life with that new company of friends.

Here is the challenge for each of us in every moment: “And His commandment is this: we should believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as He commanded us,” as Saint Paul did. But how can this attitude last? No Gospel passage better summarizes what we have said in these days than the one to which we have just listened. There is no chance of life separated from Him. With the image of the vine and branches, Jesus says how absolutely crucial it is that we remain bound to Him. Separated from Him, we dry up and bear no fruit. This morning we hear again the same verb we used yesterday: “remain.” If we want to bear fruit, one thing alone is necessary: to remain attached to the vine. Jesus told His disciples: “Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me.” This is because “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in Me and I in him will bear much fruit.” Therefore, if you want to bear fruit, here we have a simple indication within the grasp of everyone. Jesus does not ask us to make any particular effort or to undertake some ascetic practice. He sets

¹⁸² Is 43:4.

¹⁸³ Cf. 2 Tim 1:12.

only one condition: to remain attached to Him, the vine. The verification of whether we are attached to the vine or not is the fruit we bear: the hundredfold, a new way of being in reality. This is what bears witness to Him. “If you remain in Me” you will bear fruit. “By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit.” Through the fruit, which others can see as well, His glory will continue to shine in reality, in the history of women and men, because this glory is the splendor of the truth.

Everything we have said to each other from Friday evening to this morning is for the manifestation of this glory. We must not separate ourselves from the vine because through the fruit in us that comes from Him alone, His glory can shine upon the face of the earth. This can happen in the midst of all our limitations and errors because the fruit—an otherwise impossible change in our humanity—is His work in us. If we let Him enter, if we let ourselves be seized by Him, nothing will stop the manifestation of God’s glory through the fruit that He will bring forth in front of our wondering eyes, in our life. “Without Me you can do nothing,” said Jesus. If we do not learn this, we will become withered branches to be thrown in the fire and burned.

Let each of us pray that we will be together, as Saint Paul was with his new friends, only for this: to recognize Him, to remain attached to Him, the vine, and to live a bond that ceaselessly rejuvenates us, so that we may testify to all our fellow women and men who Christ is, and that the Father of Jesus is the origin of everything.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Julián Carrón

Common fund

Last year we sent a letter to those who have not made any sign of participation in the gestures of the Fraternity for years and another to those who had not donated even one euro to the common fund in the previous year. It was surprising to see the answers from thousands of people who responded positively to this initiative—which was a gesture of friendship—some making known situations of difficulty in which it was possible to intervene in various ways. I'll read you a few of these responses.

One person wrote: "I'm writing to answer your letter reminding me that I don't participate in the Spiritual Exercises or donate to the common fund. It's true, in these years my relationship with the Movement has frayed and I have grown somewhat distant. Your letter reminded me of many beautiful things I've experienced in the Movement. Now I'm following a bit more and I have sent 60 euros to the common fund (it's all I can afford) in order to feel part of the Movement."

One of you said: "I'm infinitely grateful for having received a call to the sacrifice of the common fund. For years I was unable to give even the tiny amount that my husband and I had promised to donate. We have been and still are going through a difficult period with not a few problems. I asked my husband whether we could send a bank transfer to pay off at least part of our 'debt' with the common fund, but still had the question, 'Can we manage?' What a surprise his answer was! 'Certainly, absolutely, go ahead.' His answer was a consolation for me and allowed me to judge with my heart alone."

Here is the testimony of a family: "My husband and I haven't paid into the common fund for two years since he lost his job again. I work part-time. Last September I found a second job for a year; the pay was small but sufficient for meeting the basic needs of our family. For 2018, I'd like to resume paying the pledge, reducing it to five euros a month for both of us. I'm very sorry, but in this period we can't do otherwise. However, I'd like to resume donating to the common fund because I don't want to forget the meaning of this gesture. I've already waited too long, and it's as if something is missing!"

Another friend wrote: "I was very struck by the part in the letter you sent me that says 'In the relationship with Christ there is no measure, only the heart: either I love Him or I don't love Him.' About thirty years ago, some friends in the Movement and I were fantasizing about what we desired for the future: one hoped to win a million in the lottery, another wanted to par-

ticipate in the Olympics, and when it was my turn I blurted out: ‘Be ever more seized by Christ,’ an answer that surprised everyone, myself included. Since then I’ve been through many vicissitudes, including being let go from work. I had to drastically reduce my pledge. I wanted to be faithful but then I didn’t send in my contribution anymore. In September your letter was like a wake-up call, and so, further lowering the amount, I’ve managed to catch up with the late payments and today, after getting paid for some projects, I can increase the pledge a little bit. I know that it’s hardly anything, but today this is how it is, and tomorrow we’ll see. Thank you for your paternity. I pray for you every day.”

As you see, sending these letters was an opportunity for resuming a relationship with the life of the Fraternity. Some, instead, have told us that they have begun another road.

The decision to write the two letters was motivated by a passion for anyone who intends to travel the road of the Fraternity, so that they can be accompanied with all possible seriousness. In the book *Una strana compagnia* (A strange companionship) we read that during the first Spiritual Exercises, Fr. Giussani spoke of the common fund as a help to living poverty: “Poverty does not mean not having anything to administrate: poverty is administrating, having as our supreme purpose that everything be to further the Kingdom of God, to further the Church.”¹⁸⁴ We want to help each other to live in function of the Church. In this sense, I was truly impressed by the testimony of some Venezuelan friends: notwithstanding the dramatic situation of general impoverishment (caused by high inflation, which we have all heard about), Venezuela is absolutely the most faithful nation in paying the common fund in terms of percentages! It was moving that they wrote to communicate how sorry they were to have reduced their pledge to the common fund in 2017: “The Euro/Bolivar exchange rate has varied a great deal between the first half and the end of the year without a corresponding change in people’s wages. However, notwithstanding the crisis, many have remained faithful to the gesture of the common fund.” Faithfulness of this kind cannot help but make us reflect on ourselves!

Traces

I’d like to share with you something new that I think can be a further prompt for reflecting on the contents of these days. You will remember

¹⁸⁴ L. Giussani, *Una strana compagnia* (Milan: Bur-Rizzoli, 2017), 106. This quotation is available in English in Luigi Giussani, *The Work of the Movement: The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, (Milan: Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2005), 118.

that last year at the time of the Spiritual Exercises we inaugurated the new website and social media for the Movement because the changes in the internet pushed in this direction. This has had an evident repercussion on the way we do *Traces*. Now the new *Traces*, completely revised in its form and contents, is available to everyone.

Why continue doing *Traces*? Why change? Fr. Giussani's words in this regard are illuminating: "Communication is a consequence [...] [of] two dimensions: a critical and systematic consciousness of one's own life, and a new humanity. But these two dimensions cannot subsist if a third is lacking, that is, a passion for communicating to others that principle of life, that reality of life, that unity among us, that event that has freed us."¹⁸⁵ And again: the press-back then there was not digital anything—"is the main instrument for increasing our self-awareness and for communicating with others."¹⁸⁶

Within this horizon, we wanted to adapt to the enormous and fast-moving changes we have been observing for years and that have called us to a necessary change: the revolution in digital communication, the challenges that everyone is facing in the field of publishing, and the change of habits of all people, ourselves included.

Thus the attempt to renew the magazine, keeping all this in mind. The new *Traces* thus completes and complements communication that happens through the internet, responding above all to the need for more in-depth inquiry, allowing us to choose various themes and issues to discuss and to give them all sufficient space to create a work of understanding, reflection and dialogue. With the new *Traces* we are saying: "In the great agitation of our days, weeks, and months, take a break, stop!" Maybe it is worth our while. *Traces* is this attempt—and we always have to remember that it is an attempt—to call attention to a theme, a person, an experience, or a situation that we think is truly significant for the journey we are making.

The website and social media will continue to follow the rhythm of day by day, fact after fact, judgment following judgment, promptly providing the essential texts, starting with the School of Community, to accompany everyone's journey.

We hunger for everything that can help us broaden reason, deepen the charism, and verify the faith. At the same time, we desire to communicate

¹⁸⁵ Luigi Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza* (1975–1978) [From utopia to presence (1975–1978)], (Milan: Bur, 2006), 39.

¹⁸⁶ Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation, Audiovisual documentation, "Meeting with CL Priests Of Northern Italy," Idice San Lazzaro di Savena, May 20, 1985.

with others, to be interested in them, to walk a piece of the road together with them, as happened, for example, in the entire series of meetings beginning with the presentations in Italy and abroad of *The Life of Fr. Giussani* and *Disarming Beauty*.

This passion and hunger that constitute us are the reason we still produce *Traces* and wanted to change it, accentuating its reason for being as an opportunity for education and encounter. It is difficult to go more deeply into the journey without serious commitment and attention. Without this, we will end up being prisoners of the mentality of everyone.

How can we be more active protagonists in this attempt? Our concern is, and must be, educative. I make mine the words of Fr. Giussani: "Please do not take this as advertising for *Litterae* [today's *Traces*], but as a statement of the urgent need for our communion."¹⁸⁷ Again, Fr. Giussani told us that the magazine "is part of the project of life, an instrument of the project,"¹⁸⁸ "reflecting the vitality of the Movement. This entails creative participation."¹⁸⁹ Therefore, write us to suggest themes, facts, and people for discussion, because our magazine "is a space freely accessible to all those who have a life to communicate."¹⁹⁰

Creative participation in this gesture is the first way we can participate in the communication of the Movement. This is something everyone can do, not just writing about facts and people, but also identifying and suggesting those who may be talented in photography or the creation of videos or in social media, etc. Surely in your communities there are capable young people who can do this.

Another way of participating is by sharing *Traces* with a friend. If it is useful to me, it can be useful for him or her. Giving a subscription or copy can be an opportunity for encounter, testimony, and mission. Just think, many bishops and nuncios throughout the world, even in places where the Movement is not present, write to thank us for the opportunity to read Fr. Giussani's texts and stay in contact with the life of the Movement. So, I invite you to share the magazine, taking advantage of its new graphics and layout, in a personal way and also in a communal way, as Rose's women in

¹⁸⁷ Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation, Audiovisual documentation, "Meeting of CL Priests," Bologna, March 6, 1978.

¹⁸⁸ Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation, Audiovisual documentation, "Diocesan Diaconia CL," Milan, June 16, 1980.

¹⁸⁹ Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation, Audiovisual documentation, "Meeting of CL Priests," Imola, February 2, 1987.

¹⁹⁰ Fraternity Of Communion And Liberation, Audiovisual documentation, "CL Closing Day," Milan, June 3, 1989.

Kampala do—just think!—for whom the arrival of each new issue of *Traces* is an event. Would that we were so excited at the arrival of each issue!

Finally, I ask you to consider subscribing as a concrete way of supporting all the efforts of developing the communication of the Movement—from the website to social media to the magazine—something that depends on the attention of each of us. Subscribing to *Traces* is the way we can guarantee this support to all our instruments of communication. Thank you.

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest ones,

Once again the Lord offers you who are gathered together for the Spiritual Exercises the opportunity for a renewal of awareness. It consists in the gift of the rediscovery that Jesus is the destiny of the human person and therefore is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

This year again, in many circumstances of human existence and through the relationships that by grace each of you has with others, He makes of us “a new thing.”

In this Easter season, the liturgy calls us to no longer know anything according to the flesh, not even Jesus Himself. In fact, if we are in Christ, we are a new creature.

Why is it that every year the person leading the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation feels the duty to recall all members to these elements that are the substance of Christian existence? It seems to me that the reason is found in the risk encapsulated in the question, “Do you not perceive it?” Distraction and obliviousness fill daily life and thus one loses sight of the one thing needed: the love of Christ that moves us.

Therefore, let us ask the Father to grant that we may pass from native human fragility to a new existence in the Risen Christ.

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

Dearest Fr. Julián Carrón,

I send you and all our friends of the Movement my greetings and prayers for the good outcome of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

The theme of these Exercises, “See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?” (*Is* 43:19) proposes the newness and the beauty of what happened to us in the encounter with Christ through the experience of the charism as a fact that does not happen occasionally, but rather is a stable event in a history of grace, in a people in whom the mercy of the Lord has been shown.

This newness echoes in what Pope Francis indicates to us with authority in his most recent Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exultate*, where,

together with pointing out the “holiness found in our next-door neighbours” (n. 7), he proposes to us the message of the beatitudes as the specific journey of a lay experience in the Church and in the world.

In front of the uncertainty of the present, with the absence of a government in Italy and the persistent, long wave of the economic crisis, the Pope invites us to a holiness that is also audacious, “*parrhesia*”: “Jesus Himself comes and tells us once more, serenely yet firmly: ‘Do not be afraid,’” showing us “the freedom of a life open to God and to others” (n. 129).

In this call, which unites audacity with trust, we hear the words of the Lord that Fr. Giussani often repeated to us: “Even the hairs of your head have all been counted. Do not be afraid” (*Lk* 12:7), and the heart is warmed, comforted by the great presence that makes all things new and sends us on mission.

Full of trust, I also ask for myself and the whole Movement the gift of the Spirit and the openness to respond to the Lord’s mandate following the steps that you indicate to us.

I greet you warmly and invoke upon all of you the blessing of the Lord and the protection of the Mother of God.

His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto

Dearest Fr. Julián,

How beautiful is the title of these Spiritual Exercises, “See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?” (Isaiah). The words of the prophet reach the people in exile, as the announcement of a good that blossoms in the desolation and sadness of a world that has collapsed with the destruction of the temple. God always surprises us, as Pope Francis loves to say, making “a new thing,” bringing a new life, a new presence among us and in history, today as yesterday.

I am far away physically, but united in prayer and affection with the entire great companionship of the Fraternity, and ask through the intercession of the Servant of God Luigi Giussani, that the Holy Spirit of the Lord may make us capable of recognizing the signs of this “newness” that nothing can impede or stop.

His Eminence Corrado Sanguineti
Bishop of Pavia

TELEGRAMS SENT

His Holiness Pope Francis

Your Holiness,

We would like to thank you for your invitation to a living experience of Christ present, contemplating His face that remakes our humanity. To this we have dedicated the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, which has gathered 21,000 people in Rimini and thousands of others by live satellite link-up in 13 nations. Beginning with Isaiah, “See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?” we have asked ourselves why we find it difficult to recognize the presence of Christ in history. *Lumen Fidei* has shown the path toward the answer: “Our culture has lost its sense of God’s tangible presence and activity in our world.”

For this reason, we explored the method chosen by God to reveal Himself, reliving the steps of Biblical history up to its fulfillment in Christ, who continues to reach our life in the Church with a winning attraction. “People rediscover themselves in a living encounter” (Fr. Giussani).

In these days we have asked that we return to being like children so that we can recognize the signs of God and participate in the newness that Christ has brought into history. Raising our gaze from ourselves to Him, allowing His presence to penetrate into our hearts, enables us to “pass on the flame” of the beginning, as you instructed us in Saint Peter’s Square. We have experienced the joy that is the sign of familiarity with Christ, which makes us sing: *Fac ut ardeat cor meum in amando Christum Deum ut sibi complaceam.*

We are returning to our homes more certain that the presence of Christ defines our face in the world and indicates the deep reason for our every gesture of presence. Seeing how you go about every day, we are aware that only an original presence—because centered in Christ—can move today’s women and men.

Continuing in daily prayer in support of your Petrine ministry, we wish to express all our affection as children.

Fr. Julián Carrón

His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

Holy Father,

“See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?” Isaiah has accompanied us in these Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on a journey of the knowledge of Christ so that enthusiasm for Him may mobilize our freedom, determining our human face. We ask you to pray that we may become like children in order to recognize the new workings of God in the world and follow them with all the energy of our freedom. We ask, through the intercession of Fr. Giussani, that the Father may always give you peace and gladness of heart.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Cardinal Gualtiero Bassetti
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Dearest Eminence,

At the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, which gathered 21,000 people in Rimini, we have meditated on the words of Isaiah, “See, I am doing something new: Do you not perceive it?” Desiring to be like children again in order to know Christ and grow in the familiarity with Him that defines our face in the world, according to the teaching of Fr. Giussani and following Pope Francis, we confirm our commitment to be instruments of the presence of the Church in Italy.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Angelo Scola
Archbishop Emeritus of Milan*

Dearest Angelo,

Conscious of the risk of distraction and obliviousness of which you spoke in your message, we have looked again at the great lesson of Balthasar, who invited us to become like children in order to know Christ present, the one reason for our hope. May you live an ever-greater familiarity with Christ, the one thing necessary for us, allowing you and us—following Fr. Giussani and the Pope—to be instruments for advancing the newness of Christ that renews the face of the earth, beginning with our own lives.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Archbishop Filippo Santoro
Metropolitan Bishop of Taranto*

Dearest Filippo,

Grateful for your letter, the experience of these days has been a step toward familiarity with Christ that fills us with enthusiasm for Him and the desire to be like children so that we can follow the Lord, who wants to reach the uncertain hearts of our fellow women and men.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence Bishop Corrado Sanguineti
Bishop of Pavia*

Dearest Corrado,

At the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity the event that has seized our lives happened in us as a new thing, and has made Jesus more familiar in us and among us. Grateful for your prayers, we are more open to recognizing the signs of His work in the world.

Fr. Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici and Nadia Righi

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

Few artists have recounted sacred history as a continual re-happening of the Event today as did Caravaggio. The use of models taken from daily life suggests that experiencing Christ present is an opportunity offered to all of us no matter our condition. The intuition of this possibility drives the artist, moved by the desire to comprehend the profound meaning of reality, to often depict himself as an actor in or spectator to the drama of the story of God made man.

The Sacrifice of Isaac—Florence, Uffizi

Annunciation—Nancy, Musée des Beaux Arts

Holy Family with Young Saint John the Baptist—Private Collection (New York, Metropolitan Museum)

Madonna and Child with Saint Anne, of the Confraternity of the Papal Grooms—Rome, Galleria Borghese

Adoration of the Shepherds—Messina, Regional Museum

Rest on the Flight into Egypt—Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphili

The Calling of Saint Matthew—Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi

Martha and Mary Magdalene—Detroit, Detroit Institute of Arts

The Taking of Christ—Dublin, National Gallery of Ireland

The Entombment of Christ—Vatican City, Pinacoteca Vaticana

The Supper at Emmaus—London, National Gallery

The Supper at Emmaus—Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera

The Incredulity of Saint Thomas–Potsdam, Sanssouci

The Death of the Virgin–Paris, Louvre

The Crucifixion of Saint Peter–Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo

The Conversion of Saul–Rome, Santa Maria del Popolo

The Inspiration of Saint Matthew (Saint Matthew and the Angel)–Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi

The Martyrdom of Saint Matthew–Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi

Burial of Saint Lucy–Syracuse, Santa Lucia al Sepolcro

The Martyrdom of Saint Ursula–Naples, Banca Intesa Collection

The Seven Works of Mercy–Naples, Pio Monte della Misericordia

The Madonna of Loreto or Pilgrim's Madonna–Rome, Sant'Agostino

FR. GIUSSANI'S COMMENTS ON THE MUSICAL PASSAGES PLAYED DURING ENTRANCE

These texts are taken from the jacket notes from the *Spirto Gentil* CD series.

A compilation of all the *Spirto Gentil* texts in Italian is available in the book *Spirto Gentil: Un invito all'ascolto della grande musica guidati da Luigi Giussani* [*Spirto Gentil: an invitation to listen to great music, guided by Luigi Giussani*], edited by S. Chierici and S. Giampaolo, Bur, Milano 2011.

Friday, April 27, evening—A. Dvořák, *Stabat Mater* op. 58

“Make my heart aware of this mysterious and real strength which makes everything thrill, which brings everything to new birth. Make my heart aware of the Mystery that gives life and that has called me, a human Presence that has involved me and involves itself with me.”

Saturday, April 28, morning—W.A. Mozart, *Great Mass in C minor, K 427*

“God communicated Himself to man in His mortal flesh, in His inhabited time and space, in His life as inhabited time and space, as a lived relationship. The Mystery shows Himself in experience, in something we suffer, desire, mistake, do right, in something we experience: in human experience, just as it is, all of it.

Would that we too, like Mozart, could contemplate with the same simplicity and intensity the beginning in the world of history of mercy and pardon, and drink from the wellspring that is Mary's ‘Yes!’”

Saturday, April 28, afternoon—A. Dvořák, *Trio n. 4 op. 90, “Dumky”*

“Listening to this music by Dvořák, brief, but intense and pure like the rare mountain air, one cannot avoid going back to being a child. Dvořák embodies the heart of a child.

What is needed in order to enjoy this music is to be little like this, in other words to be simple of heart or poor in spirit. A poor man is one who recognizes that he does not have anything: I am not anything, You—Mystery who make all things—are. The expression of one's own poverty is called entreaty.”

Sunday, April 29, morning—L. van Beethoven, *Symphony n. 9*

“We are like a symphony, small in the face of what it should be, a bit petty, a little frightened, a little intimidated. And yet, compared to the *Ninth Symphony* [...], our cathedral, not built of notes, is made to fill history. We draw near to this destiny by obeying a task, by adhering with our freedom to the task entrusted to us. What task is this? The task of life is fatherhood and motherhood—i.e., achieving the ripening of love. The task of life is to imitate the Father by continuing Jesus’ song in history.”

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