

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS - 17. "TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE"

Charity opens up a new horizon about what it means to love our friends. Father Giussani wrote, speaking about charity, that one can discover that "precisely because we love them, it is not we who make them happy; and neither the perfect society, the most solid and prudent legal organism, the greatest wealth, the most iron health, nor the most educated civilization will ever make them happy. It is only an Other that can make them happy" (The Meaning of Charitable Work, english.clonline.org, 4).

This disrupts the way we usually conceive even our most precious relationships, where we think that deep down we have earned a friendship, because we've lived up to the expectations of another. Our friend tells us how charitable work, in its essence, helped her to be a true friend.

What do we expect from our friendships? And what does this have to do with the experience of charitable work?

Recently, one of my friends told me about a struggle he was having. It is a struggle that I've never had, and so I always feel useless, as if I were only a friend with whom he could let off steam. I am incapable of giving him advice about what to do, and when it comes to finding the right word to help him understand what would be better for him... I realize that as I am I cannot help him.

I have noticed, though, that something different happens in the experience of charitable work at the Don Orione Home: working with disabled people that do not hear 95% of what I am saying, nothing more is expected from me than just to be there, smiling, dancing with them, showing that I care about them and about what I am doing, and simply following what they desire to do.

I always feel the pressure of not being the friend, the confidant, the student, the daughter that I should be, of being empty and not knowing how to give even half of what I've received to the other person. And instead with "my crazy people" I realize that they don't prefer the person who is nice, sweet, or anything else, because every now and then they forget they've even met you and you start over again. They just look at you for who you are, for how you are looking at them in that moment, or (something amazing that I just realized yesterday) they simply come for you, without you having done anything to "deserve it".

I think the experience at Don Orione is helping me understand something: that I am not the one who decides how to be a friend to others, that maybe nothing more is required than being present, available, and simple.