

## WHAT CAN WITHSTAND THE TEST OF TIME?

### Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation Rimini, April 12, 2019

#### *Notes from the Introduction by Julián Carrón*

Perhaps never before have we arrived here with such an awareness that our own strength cannot make lasting the beautiful things that happen to us in life. And maybe never before, as today, have we been so aware of how deeply we need someone who withstands the test of time, responding to our boundless need for duration.

Therefore, let us ask for the Holy Spirit, the only one able to support and respond to all the desire for fullness that constitutes us.

#### *Come Holy Spirit*

I'll begin by reading the Holy Father's message to us: "On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises that has gathered in Rimini the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, accompanied this year by the significant theme, "What can withstand the test of time?", the Supreme Pontiff sends his cordial greetings, with the prayer that the memory of the sacrifice of Christ and His incarnation in history may be the concrete help offered by God the Father to overcome all the adversity and mediocrity of the present time. Pope Francis invites you to study the signs of the times and to recognize in the many stories of holiness the opportunity for building His dwelling place in the world. He gladly imparts, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary, the apostolic blessing you requested, to you and all those present, their families and the entire Movement. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State for His Holiness."

#### **1. A question that cannot be eliminated**

I was amazed by the interest aroused by the question chosen as the title for these days together—"What withstands the test of time?"—as seen in the number of contributions you have sent: two thousand. I am truly grateful for the help you give me for our common journey. This happened already with the university students, who were truly struck by this question. But for us adults the question takes on greater weight, because we have lived longer and have more experience, and thus more data with which to respond. This is why we have decided to put this question at the center of the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises, so we, too, can do the same verification.

For many of you, receiving the question was a surprise that evoked above all gratitude. "I am filled with immense gratitude," wrote one person. Another wrote, "Allow me to thank you for this question you shared with each of us. It has restored our awareness that each of us is a piece of the charism that has impacted our life and causes us to be here, now, to take your question seriously." And yet another, "With immense gratitude I am waiting for the upcoming Spiritual Exercises. My heart, though often wearied, awaits. Awaits what? To hear Him speak again, because nothing fills my heart so much and nothing challenges my reason so much, that is, nothing exalts my humanity so much! What a grace has befallen me!"

The interest kindled in so many of you is the sign that the question was not perceived as something abstract, but as an existential question that touched a nerve in us, intercepted a crucial question about life that cannot be eluded. The interest demonstrated indicates how much we feel the urgent need for something that lasts. This is all the more amazing, given that we live in a liquid society and should be accustomed to the fact that nothing lasts. In fact, one look at the situations and lifestyles that characterize many of us, young people and adults alike, reveals instability, inconstancy, a continual

dance of contrasting perceptions. Often we are prey to a vortex of affections and feelings in which everything is always hurriedly built and dismantled, and as a result, we are easily the victims of disappointment. Nothing seems to hold: time consumes and empties everything. Things that happened yesterday lose their fascination and their hold on us.

Gaber expressed this years ago in his song, *Illogical Gaiety*: “I know that the world and also the rest / I know that everything falls apart.”<sup>1</sup> He is echoed by Vasco Rossi: “Nothing lasts, nothing lasts / And you know this.”<sup>2</sup>

But if nothing lasts, why don't we settle? Why, instead, do we try to tame or anesthetize the urgent need, taking some kind of drug, like the character in Houellebecq's most recent novel? Serotonin, he wrote, “is a small, oval, white, divisible tablet. It neither creates nor transforms: it interprets. That which was definitive, it makes passing. That which was unavoidable, it makes contingent. It provides a new interpretation of life—less rich, more artificial, and imparts a certain rigidity. It gives no form of happiness, nor true relief. Its action is of a different kind: transforming life into a series of formalities, it makes it possible to scam it. Therefore it helps people to live, or at least not to die, for a while. However, in the end death imposes itself; the molecular armor cracks and the process of undoing resumes its course.”<sup>3</sup>

The question echoing through these Spiritual Exercises cannot be suppressed. It returns in its absolute unavoidability. “This drama [of life] [...]—even though it can be treated as a game, and taken lightly by all kinds of skeptics and happy fools—is *the only one*. You cannot shun it without at the same time abandoning life. The drama is serious, and our life is not a farce, for the simple reason that it is unique, and your own part cannot be exchanged. You can only reject it.”<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Taking the question seriously is the first gesture of friendship

The first gesture of friendship for oneself and among us is not to censure this question, to take it seriously. A sick person's first gesture of friendship for herself is to take her illness seriously. It is simple. If you have a friend who is sick, the first gesture of friendship to her is to invite her to take care of herself. The opposite would be to let oneself go, which demonstrates lack of affection for oneself.

For this reason, in the very first pages of *In Search of the Human Face*, Fr. Giussani warned us, “The supreme obstacle to our human journey is ‘negligence’ of the ‘I.’” The first point of a human journey is therefore the “opposite of this ‘negligence’,” that is, “interest in your own ‘I,’” in your own person. This interest might seem obvious, “but it isn't at all.” In fact, just look at our normal behavior, and you will see “what great slashes of emptiness open up in the daily fabric of our consciousness and what bewilderment of memory.”<sup>5</sup>

So the first condition to which Fr. Giussani calls us is affection for self, as the first gesture of friendship with ourselves. “If this [...] affection for the human—not affection for the human as an aesthetic object, looked upon and treated poetically, but human affection as attachment full of esteem, compassion, and mercy toward yourself, some of the affection your mother had for you, especially when you were little (but also now that you are big)—if we don't have a bit of this for ourselves, we lack the ground upon which to build.”<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, “the first condition [...] for the Movement as event [...] to be realized [...] is precisely this sentiment of your own humanity: ‘affection for oneself.’”<sup>7</sup> As Etty Hillesum wrote, the very beginning is “to take yourself seriously and to be convinced that it makes sense to find your own

<sup>1</sup> “L'illogica allegria [Illogical Gaiety]”, lyrics by A. Luporini, music by G. Gaber, 1981-1982, © Edizioni CURCI.

<sup>2</sup> “Dannate Nuvole [Damned Clouds]”, words and music by V. Rossi, 2014, © EMI.

<sup>3</sup> M. Houellebecq, *Serotonina [Serotonin]*, La nave di Teseo, Milano 2019, p. 331.

<sup>4</sup> D. de Rougemont, *La persona e l'amore [The Person and Love]*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2018, p. 57.

<sup>5</sup> L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Rizzoli, Milano 1995, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> L. Giussani, *Uomini senza patria (1982-1983) [People without a Homeland]*, Bur, Milano 2008, p. 291.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

shape and form. And something you can do for your fellow man is this: keep turning them back towards themselves, catch and stop them in their flight from themselves and then take them by the hand and lead them back to their own sources.”<sup>8</sup>

Those who do not censure the question, because of their affection for themselves, are the only ones able to ask it of others. Therefore, true friends are those who ask the question, as Fr. Giussani did for us. “What withstands the test of time?”<sup>9</sup> This question forces us to be ourselves and not slide away into nothingness. Many of you have written about this. I’ll read just a few of your contributions. “Thank you for waking me from my torpor by sending me the question: ‘What withstands the test of time?’.” “I thought that the question you asked could be truly a question asked for me and not ‘just for the sake of...’ with the usual thought that, in any case, someone else will answer it.” “Thank you for your question, which has been ‘persecuting’ me since I read it, never giving me peace. Thank you for how you provoke our freedom and how you invite us to get to the bottom of our circumstances.” “Before I say anything, I would like to tell you that this question has dominated my days; it has kept me company when I open my eyes in the morning and close them at night.”

This question is inevitable. All it takes is for a friendship or love relationship to falter or end, and the question emerges, even if it can be formulated in skeptical terms: well, if even this friendship or love collapses, what truly withstands?

*Farewell*, Francesco Guccini’s song about the end of a love story, describes this phenomenon. “It was easy to live then, every hour,” “it seemed to us we had found the key / the secret to the world,” “seeing each other was like being born again. / But every story the same illusion, its conclusion / and the sin was in believing a normal story to be special,” “time that wears us out and crushes us.”<sup>10</sup>

Some of your contributions also documented this experience, for example this one. “Age has hardened me, maybe as a form of self-defense so I won’t suffer from things that happen. The truth is that time consumes us. It is a merciless examiner that shows what has not been conserved, and it causes me deep fear to discover that not enough has been saved. So I lay out layers of forgetfulness, I cover, confuse, even refuse to enjoy the good, so the unconsolated pain will not emerge and open chasms that I will never be able to close again. A sort of languor prevails. I curl up in rites and habits, like the elderly, so parts of my life remain carefully excluded. Even my experience of the Movement, over time, has become an “old aunt” for whom I feel affection. It sadly resembles Linus’ blanket, an anesthetic that over time creates tolerance but then no longer works. I know this is the point: the more I seek control, the more I keep for myself, and the less is saved, the less is resurrected. I know I have to learn to offer precisely the thing that hurts most, that I can’t fix and at best manage to hide, like dirt under a carpet.”

This same bitter conclusion is expressed in the poetic genius of Baudelaire. “When I was young I lived a constant storm / Though now and then the brilliant suns shot through, / So in my garden few red fruits were born, / The rain and thunder had so much to do. / Now are the autumn days of thought at hand / And I must use the rake and spade to groom, / Rebuild and cultivate the washed-out land / The water had eroded deep as tombs. / And who knows if the flowers in my mind / In this poor sand, swept like a beach, will find / The food of soul to gain a healthy start? / I cry! I cry! Life feeds the seasons’ maw / And that dark Enemy who gnaws our hearts / Battens on blood that drips into his jaws!”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> E. Hillesum, *Het Werk*, 418; 8 June 1942. Translated in Etty Hillesum as Moral-Philosophical Guide, From Fear to Love’s Givenness and At-Riskness, by William McDonough, in *The Ethics and Religious Philosophy of Etty Hillesum: Proceedings of the Second International Etty Hillesum Congress at Ghent University*, January 2014. Klaas A.D. Smelik, Meins G.S. Coetsier, Jurjen Wiersma, p. 109.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Carrón, L. Giussani, *Alive means present!*, from the *CL Christmas Poster 2018*, available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2018/12/07/christmas-2018-the-poster?hl=christmas%20poster%202018>

<sup>10</sup> “Farewell”, words and music by F. Guccini, 1993, © EMI-BMG.

<sup>11</sup> C. Baudelaire, “The Enemy,” in *The Flowers of Evil*, translated by James M. McGowan, OUP Oxford, 2008, p. 29.

It is the fear that deep down, everything becomes nothingness, everything is a trick and appearance, as Montale says. “Maybe one morning, walking in air / of dry glass, I’ll turn and see the miracle occur—/ nothingness at my shoulders, the void / behind me—with a drunkard’s terror.”<sup>12</sup>

Guccini, Baudelaire and Montale do not allow us to return to our things as they were before, because they set us in front of the urgent need of life: with their skepticism or nihilism they force us to deal with the question even more, because otherwise we live in desperation. As Houellebecq described it: “Lacking both desires and reasons for living [...], I kept the desperation at an acceptable level. You can live, being desperate; deep down most people live this way, maybe every so often you wonder whether you can give way to a breath of hope [...], only to respond in the negative. Even so, they keep on, and it is a touching spectacle.”<sup>13</sup>

But friends are not only those who ask the question, but also those who do not retreat in the face of its import, escaping or seeking distraction, thus not only those who ask the question, but also those who take it seriously. We have come to the Spiritual Exercises for this, to be helped to live in the truth, without having to look aside because everything terrifies us, with the fear of nothingness.

“Who supports me in my weariness and solitude?”, one of you asked. “Who accompanies me in a difficult choice? How can my instant be saved? After thirty years of experience enriched by the gift of faith, over time, all the partial objectives I have set for myself and am setting for myself (I have even achieved some of them) are inexorably leaving space to the fact of asking myself this question. Now, I have no desire even to lift a finger for anything less than this question [without taking this question seriously]. Neither for my family, nor for my work, nor for friends, much less for people I don’t know.”

### 3. Expectancy

Coming here, we want to support each other in the battle each of us has to fight between no longer expecting anything, and being unable to stop the desire to be happy that constitutes each of us, the desire for lasting happiness that does not fade away in a day or a season.

How burning and how widespread is the drama of those who think there is no answer to the human question, and yet cannot eliminate it! As Tolstoy described it, “He looks around, searching for an answer to his question, and finds it not. He finds around him doctrines which answer questions that he never asks; but nowhere in the world around him is there any answer to his own question [...]. And the man recognizes himself alone in the world face to face with these terrible questions which torture his soul.”<sup>14</sup> Alone.

At times even in our friends we sense the fear of certain questions, as a person wrote me. “Notwithstanding everything I have lived, felt and seen, now that you are asking me the question, I try to distract myself in order not to despair, because life weighs too much, above all the fear that things are not eternal, that they slip away, that time passes and nothing remains. When I talk about these things with my friends they look at me as if I were a Martian, someone who ‘beats himself up about the meaning of life and is afraid of death.’ So I step back and keep to myself; it seems nothing can withstand the test of time.”

But precisely this soul-tormenting question leads Borges to search ceaselessly for what can answer it. “The black beard grazes his chest. / His face is not the one seen in engravings. / It is severe, Jewish. I do not see it. / and I will keep on searching for it / until my last step on earth,”<sup>15</sup> in this way committing to remaining loyal to himself, all the way.

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<sup>12</sup> E. Montale, “Maybe one morning”, in *Cuttlefish Bones*, translated by William Arrowsmith, WW Norton & Col, reissue edition (1 Aug. 1993) p. 67

<sup>13</sup> M. Houellebecq, *Serotonina [Serotonin]*, op. cit., p. 221.

<sup>14</sup> L. Tolstoy, *On Life*. White Crow Books, Guildford, London, 2009, pp. 41-42.

<sup>15</sup> J.L. Borges, “Christ on the Cross”, translated by Alexander Coleman, in *Selected Poems*, edit. Alexander Coleman, Penguin Books, New York, 1999, p. 471.

At times it may even seem crazy to ask this question. And yet the urgent need we are talking about is so integrally a part of our nature that in spite of all apparent good sense, a person who is loyal to herself cannot fail to ask it. Therefore Camus rebelled and affirmed, cried out, the truth of this unavoidable urgent need, through his Caligula. “I’m not mad; in fact I’ve never felt so lucid. What happened to me is quite simple; I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible. That’s all. [...] Things as they are, in my opinion, are far from satisfactory. [...] Really, this world of ours, the scheme of things as they call it, is quite intolerable. That’s why I want the moon, or happiness, or eternal life—something, in fact, that may sound crazy, but which isn’t of this world.”<sup>16</sup>

The difficulty in finding an answer leads us to wonder whether we are seeking a dream. The Spanish poet Antonio Machado not only had the audacity to ask himself this question in all seriousness, but indicated the condition for being able to grasp the signs, should they arrive, of an answer: a heart that is alert and awake, that watches and listens. He wrote, “Has my heart gone to sleep? / Beehives in my dreams, / have you stopped working? Is the waterwheel / of thought dry, / its buckets empty, / spinning and filled with shadow? / No, my heart is not asleep, / It is awake. Awake. / Not asleep or dreaming, it looks / with open bright eyes / at far signals and listens / on the shores of a great silence.”<sup>17</sup>

When it is taken seriously, life takes us there, on the shores of the great silence, or in other words the Mystery, in front of whom we can only remain with our open eyes bright and clear, waiting for some signal from the Mystery itself, listening for some sign. Only those in this position of original openness can grasp the irruption of an answer to the desire of the heart when it happens, can recognize the signs of its manifestation. Asking the question, allowing it to be unleashed, makes us attentive to grasping any crumb of an answer, wherever it may be.

This is expressed well in a poem by Patrizio Barbaro. “The eye looks. [...] It alone can become aware of beauty [...] beauty is seen because it is alive and thus real. To put it better, it can happen that one sees it. [...] The problem is to have eyes and not see, not look at the things that happen. [...] Eyes closed. Eyes that no longer see. That are no longer curious. That no longer expect anything to happen. Perhaps because they do not believe that beauty exists. But in the desert of our roads She passes, breaking the finite boundary and filling our eyes with infinite desire.”<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The unforeseen

Beauty passes, happens, without asking our permission, challenging all skepticism and nihilism. If you are attentive, you can perceive it. Therefore, all that is asked of us is to be attentive to discovering it when it passes. In fact, as Camus wrote in his *Notebooks*, “It is not with scruples that a man grows tall. Like a beautiful day, height is given according to God’s will.”<sup>19</sup> A. Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, translated by Ryan Bloom, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2008, p. 26

Our whole life is gambled on perceiving the moment when beauty passes in front of our eyes. How can I recognize that I’ve perceived it? I see it in the fact that suddenly it opens my eyes wide, reawakening my desire.

What is the most necessary beauty? It is the happening of a preference, the ultimate preference all of us wait to experience. Preference is the method of every reawakening, every redemption, every generation of the human, of the “I.”

One of us recounted, “A year ago we hired a young woman to teach in the elementary school. She shares the same condition of confusion of many young people, in particular the anguish generated by

<sup>16</sup> A. Camus, “Caligula”, act I, scene IV, in *Caligula and Other Plays*, translated by Stuart Gilbert, Penguin Books, London, 2006, pp. 39-40

<sup>17</sup> A. Machado, “Has my heart gone to sleep?”, in *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, translated by Willis Barnstone, Copper Canyon Press, Port Townsend, Washington, 2004, p. 89.

<sup>18</sup> P. Barbaro, “*Ah uno sguardo*—dedicata a Pasolini [Ah, a gaze—dedicated to Pasolini,]” in “Una domanda a cui non so rispondere [A Question I Don’t Know How to Answer],” edited by F. Pierangeli, *30Giorni*, n. 11, 2000.

<sup>19</sup> A. Camus, *Notebooks 1951-1959*, translated by Ryan Bloom, Ivan R. Dee, Chicago, 2008, p. 26.

never being up to the circumstances. The other day she came to me and said that since she started at school she has gotten worse than before, because many questions and wounds are opening up. I told her this means she is in the best time of her life, because questions and wounds open up when there is something that to some degree already offers us hope. She said no, the wounds were very painful, and that before she at least had armor, while at school she had lost it. At that point she told me her story, with all the anguish she had suffered. Then for a brief period she went to the Newman School, where she also worked two days. When she returned, she told me, “At the Newman School something happened to me but I don’t know what. People notice it and tell me so, saying I’m happier and calmer. Friends and family tell me this. I, too, see that something has happened to me. What? Don’t tell me it’s God, because I can’t accept that.” I told her not to worry about God, just to be loyal deep down to her experience. She asked me, “Why did this thing happen to me? Here there are many who do not believe, and to whom nothing has happened. Maybe it’s because of the need I have, because of the open wound I have?”

So you see, the beauty that passes in the desert of our streets is perceived by those who are truly in need, by those who have this wound and this purity.

How easy it is to recognize beauty—that is, the evidence of a preference that reawakens our “I”—when it happens! This being chosen makes us become ourselves. As it says in a poem by Pedro Salinas, “When you chose me—/ love chose—/ I came out of the great anonymity / from everyone, from nothing [when you appear it is as if you pull me out of the void] [...] / But when you said: *you*, / to me, yes, to me singled out, / I was higher than stars, / deeper than coral [you bring me to the stars]. / And my joy / began to spin, caught / in your being, in your pulse. / You gave me possession of myself / when you gave your self to me. / I lived. I live. How long? [...] / I’ll be one more—like the rest— / when you are lost”<sup>20</sup> so crucial are you in order for me to become myself.

So then, my friends, the great question in front of us is whether there is something, whether something has happened in our life that stands out from all that fails to last and loses its hold on us. As Kierkegaard wrote in his diary, “What really counts in life is that at some time one has seen something, felt something, which is so great, so matchless, that everything else is nothing by comparison, that even if he forgot everything he would never forget this.”<sup>21</sup>

So it is a matter of looking at everything that has happened to us to see whether something has shown itself able to last, to withstand the emptying caused by the passage of time. Has something or someone that happened in our life shown itself able to bear the test of time? Has there been something able to moor our life stably? This is the great question each of us must face, looking at our own personal experience, if we do not want to see everything fall apart.

This “something” of which we speak is called “the unforeseen” by Montale. “Something unforeseen / is the only hope.” But many hold that “it is foolishness to say so,”<sup>22</sup> and at times we think so too.

However, nothing can keep something new from appearing before our eyes, because, as the great Shakespeare put it, “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy”<sup>23</sup>—something that “could not be and is here,” Fr. Giussani said in 1968, something that “could not be because we never would’ve thought of it, we couldn’t imagine it [not even think of it] and it’s here.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup> P. Salinas, 62, in *Love Poems by Pedro Salinas: My Voice Because of You, and Poems to Katherine*, translated by Willis Barnstone, University of Chicago Press, 2010, pp. 113-114.

<sup>21</sup> S. Kierkegaard, note 1068, in *Soren Kierkegaard’s Journals and Papers, Volume 1, A-E*, edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1967.

<sup>22</sup> E. Montale, “Prima del viaggio [Before the Journey]”, vv. 22-27, in Id., *Tutte le poesie [All His Poems]*, op. cit., p. 390.

<sup>23</sup> “There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy” (W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act I, scene V).

<sup>24</sup> J. Carrón, L. Giussani, *Alive means present!*, from the CL Christmas Poster 2018, available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2018/12/07/christmas-2018-the-poster?hl=christmas%20poster%202018>

If we have come to Rimini, it is because at least once, at least at a certain moment, this “unforeseen something” happened to us. It caught and moored our life to the point of making us participate in a gesture like this. If we have come here it is because we are still open to the possibility of encountering that “you” that caused us to emerge from anonymity and has made each of us truly ourselves, unique. Many of us are waiting for the renewal of this encounter.

At least once, at least in a certain moment, something happened to us that we miss. One of you described it this way. “I’ve been thinking about the question we were sent, ‘What withstands the test of time?’” Good question! Family situations that never change, or rather, seem like they are slowly digging a bigger hole to fall into. Relationships and structures that seem consolidated, but actually can provide no security. Nobody can guarantee that he will not hurt someone so badly that he will be refused forgiveness or, in the natural course of things, even the deepest friendships sooner or later wound or disappoint or abandon us. There is no structure that our violence or that of others cannot rip to pieces, according to one’s own idea of revolution or justice. Basing everything on your own human energy or goodness verges on the ridiculous. Honestly, every so often I look at my life and see it as one immense sepulcher. Lately, there are entire days I feel this way. It seems equally ridiculous to hear “Ah, how nice. Now I’ll go to the Spiritual Exercises and they’ll tell me what withstands the test of time, and then I’ll come back home and everything will be different.” Well, then, why do I come? I believe I come for the one thing I think I can define as a constant: the ultimate indestructible attraction of something that lives in the Movement and from which I can’t detach myself. I come to search for the one thing I truly miss.”

For this reason, friends, let’s pray that each of us, whatever our situation, will be reached again by the Lord’s gaze, by that preference that caused us to be reborn, so that we can experience how precious our life is, and know that it is not condemned to slip into the void.

Therefore let us pray to be enveloped once again by that ultimate preference that our being awaits. “You are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”<sup>25</sup> You, not another, not someone different from you. You now, just as you are, not when you change in the future. Now! You are not condemned to slip into the void! You are so precious in His eyes.

The instrument of the commitment we ask of each other in these days is silence. Therefore, let’s help each other with our seriousness, first of all by respecting the silence. In fact, Fr. Giussani said, “We have practically a day or little more together for a moment of greater truth of our life. We have made a lot of sacrifices, a great many among you have made big sacrifices to come. Let’s try to get as much as we can out of this time together, the joy of a moment of familiarity with the Lord that is so complete that not even the best days in our year can compare. It’s a commitment [...] that we must make to ensure a truly good outcome [...]. The instrument for this commitment is silence. [...] In fact, silence is not nothingness. [...] It’s prayer, the awareness of being in front of God, [...] an entreaty.” For this reason, “even the books that are proposed can be bought in silence,”<sup>26</sup> as a way to support each other. “We encourage silence especially during transit to and from the hall. Absolute silence should be kept as you enter the hall, where memory will be supported by the music we will hear and the images we will see. In this way we will be disposed to look at, listen to, and hear with our mind and heart what the Lord in some way will propose to us.” Because “what we do together in this day and a half is nothing other than an aspect of the great loving gesture with which the Lord—in any way you perceive it—moves your life [and mine] toward that Destiny that is Himself.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Is 43:4.

<sup>26</sup> L. Giussani, *La convenienza umana della fede [The Human Advantageousness of Faith]*, Bur, Milano 2018, pp. 211-213.

<sup>27</sup> L. Giussani, *Dare la vita per l’opera di un Altro*, Esercizi Spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione [*Giving your life for the work of an Other*, Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Rimini 8-10 May 1992, suppl. to *CL-Litterae Communionis*, June 1992, p. 5.

Silence, therefore, serves for looking at these things well. If you have a stomach ulcer, you do not cure it by ignoring it. You still have it. Not facing the problem just makes life harder and more unbearable.

We have the opportunity to be together, to look at everything without fear, like the publicans who went to Jesus because they could be themselves with Him. They did not need to be good enough. They were embraced just as they were.

At least once a year, let silence penetrate us down to the marrow of our bones! Silence, prayer, songs, and the directions we will give are not formalities, but suggestions so that all of us can live this gesture with the seriousness it demands.

We can live life brilliantly, friends, but to do so, you must want to.