

WHAT CAN WITHSTAND THE TEST OF TIME?

Meditations of Pigi Banna and testimony by Jesús Carrascosa
during the Paschal Triduum of Gioventù Studentesca

Rimini, 18th-20th April 2019

Julián Carrón's Greeting

18th April 2019

Dear Friends,

Who among us has not experienced a time that seems like living heaven on earth? At time in which we were so happy, so full. These are irreplaceable, exhilarating moments that we wish could go on forever, because it “seems like we’ve found / the secret key to the world,” (F. Guccini, *Farewell*).

Yet, so often, what seems like moments later, “everything falls apart,” as one of Giorgio Gaber’s songs (*L’illogica allegria [Illogical Joy]*) says.

It is starting from this elementary experience—which we all share—that we feel the full urgency of the question we have before us in these days together: “What can withstand the test of time?”

We cannot respond to this question with our own opinions or instinctive reactions. None of these, in fact, are able to offer a response that lives up to the urgency we all perceive inside us.

Only a fact, only a lived experience, is enough to give an adequate response.

Finding such an experience is not a matter of intelligence or effort; it is a question of attention. Fr. Giussani reminds us of this, saying, “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” (*The Religious Sense*, p. 34).

So, how can we recognize such an experience, without making a mistake?

“What really counts in life,” Kierkegaard writes in his *Diaries*, “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.”¹

Has something like that ever happened to you?

Only those who see it in their own experience will be able to respond to the question you have proposed for the Triduum, which is “the” question in life.

Is there any adventure more fascinating than finding “the” answer?

Best wishes on your adventure!

Happy Easter!

Your friend,

Julián

¹ S. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1, transl. by H. V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 467.

Meditation by Pigi Banna

1. “He loved them to the end” (John 13:1)

WHO IS OUR TRUE FRIEND?

What can withstand the test of time? Does time extinguish everything?

This question will not leave us alone; it is terrifying and heart-wrenching, because it makes us remember the many experiences of failure that life has not spared us. It is the failure of feelings, when enthusiasm quickly falls apart and leaves us prey to disappointment. “Nothing lasts, nothing lasts”—Vasco sang.²

Yet there is a failure that makes this question even more piercing: the failure of our dearest relationships; when our friends, and even our parents sometimes, betray us. So then, who is the true friend that does not betray us? Who is the friend that withstands the test of time?

In front of disappointment and betrayal, we will be tempted to respond that nothing withstands the test of time. The idea creeps in that all the light that has enlightened us has only ever been a brief flash out of the black hole where everything eventually ends up. What use, then, are those happy oases, those places where, now and then, we seek shelter by putting on a mask, even if only for a night, if in the end everything ends up in nothingness? What use is it to wear ourselves out trying to be somebody else in the eyes of others? As one of you wrote: “The adults call it ‘growth’, and instead I call it ‘torture’”. This temptation—to use a more precise word—is called nihilism, which means affirming that ultimately everything is nothing, everything is nothingness, as Montale described in his poem “Maybe One Morning”: “nothing at my back, the void / behind me, with a drunkard’s terror”.³

Nihilism is an option that lies in wait; but how reasonable is it to say that everything is nothing? Deep down, it is a comfortable way of escaping, an easy solution when we do not manage to stand up to betrayal and disappointment. So, we prefer to escape; but to escape from what, deep down?

From ourselves. We escape from the desire for something new to happen again, for something to happen that makes us come alive again even more than when our mother gave birth to us; something from which we can no longer turn back, something greater than our failures, our feelings, greater even than death.

We are together because we don’t want to escape, to be scared of everything, to be afraid of the nothingness.

We are friends in order to defend our truest desire from this nothingness, so that something may happen to us that finally stands the test of time.

Testimony

For several months now, I have felt like I have been carrying a great weight inside me.

One evening, I found out that my mother was having a relationship with another man.

This discovery devastated me, and this was amplified by the fact that my father did not want to know anything about it.

² V. Rossi, “Dannate nuvole [Damned Clouds]”, from the booklet of texts used during the GS Triduum, p. 6; downloadable in pdf format from the CL website. Henceforth *Libretto testi Triduo*.

³ E. Montale, “Forse un mattino [Maybe One Morning]”, in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 5.

I tried to fight the pain I felt, but after a while I began to lay blame and fault; I let everything suffocate me. These verses felt very close to me: “It is so strange to hurt oneself / whilst time extinguishes what you are” (*Caccia militare*, Rovere–2017).

Finally, last week, after years of arguing with my parents to get to go to the Triduum, my father said, “It just seems so dull to me, but if you think it is important for you, go”. In that moment, I instinctively jumped on him and gave him a hug. It was amazing to hear him say that to me.

I have come to the Triduum asking myself: “How can I face this situation?” and “How can I avoid time extinguishing everything?”

MY HEART IS AWAKE, WIDE AWAKE!

Nihilism chooses to deny and to flee from something that resists inside of us. As much as we try to convince ourselves that nothing withstands the test of time, we are never able to eradicate the desire to change, to turn around. As Lady Gaga sings in *Shallow*: “Are you happy in this modern world? Or do you need more? Is there somethin’ else you’re searchin’ for? [...] In all the good times I find myself longin’ for change, and in the bad times I fear myself. Tell me something, boy, aren’t you tired tryin’ to fill that void?”⁴

There is something in us that, even if it’s sometimes uncomfortable, rebels against the hypothesis that all is nothing. “But if nothing stands the test of time,” a girl writes, “why am I so hurt? Why do I suffer every time at the thought of friendships ending? Despite this pain, though, I can’t help but see that ‘something’ cries out in me continually.” This “something” is the heart: the need for happiness, for truth, for justice. Despite all the disappointment, it re-emerges, it never completely resigns itself; it withstands the test of time. This is how the poet Machado describes it: “Has my heart gone to sleep? / Have the beehives of my dreams / stopped working? [...] No, my heart is not asleep. / It is awake, wide awake.”⁵

Our heart has a nature that is infinitely greater than the nothingness in which we would like to escape. Therefore, within every disappointment, we can rediscover the hope for change: that love may return - true love—and that life may be reborn, that something may happen that corresponds to our heart.

Testimony

On an evening that was particularly difficult for various reasons, I found myself alone. I had argued with some friends of mine and I had heaps of things to study. I listened to some music in an attempt to distract myself and stop thinking about things. Yet my uneasiness would not go away, and it seemed that there was no point to anything, that life is boring and monotonous.

At a certain point, though, a kind of internal rebellion began happening within me, a strange sort of impetus. I looked at my watch, and checked the time, and said to myself; “I am here!”. It is not true that things simply happen in vain. I committed to my studies, and my desire for meaning engaged with the authors I was studying, and everything became more impressive.

I thought of the faces of my friends, even those I had argued with, and of all the struggles I had been experiencing. Life was there, in front of me, just as I was; it was given to me in that moment.

I realised that I existed, without having done anything to deserve it; I realised I needed to seek something that withstood the test of time. I felt wanted, and no longer felt alone.

⁴ L. Gaga–B. Cooper, “Shallow”, in *ibidem*, pp. 7-8.

⁵ A. Machado, “Mi corazón se ha dormido [Has My Heart Gone to Sleep?]”, in *ibidem*, p. 7.

A RADICAL NEWNESS

What lives up to our heart? When our own attempts to put together the pieces of what has fallen apart over time appear fragile and limited, what will be enough to satisfy our great need for a change that truly lasts?

“Something unforeseen / is the only hope:”⁶ the unexpected, a radical newness that is not a product of our abilities, of our thoughts. Something so new must happen that it marks our heart forever; more than just a tattoo on our skin.

Sören Kierkegaard establishes the criterion with which we can recognize this radical newness when it happens: “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.”⁷ Has something like this ever happened to us?

When this newness happens, we can recognize it because it reawakens the hope in our heart, as a young poet writes: “Skilful hands / That draw out of the weeds / A heart / That had been dried up, forgotten.”⁸ Only this radical newness can live up to the expectations of our heart: a preference in front of which we cannot hide ourselves and can finally be ourselves, where all that is negative in us becomes positive. This preference is like saying to yourself: “You are precious in my eyes,”⁹ you, not anyone else; you, now, just as you are, not when you change, when you are different. What a difference from the way we normally think about loving and being loved, reducing love to possession, to mere reciprocal enjoyment, which we leave behind afterward.

This preference is infinite; it does not stop in front of our failure and betrayal: in front of betrayal, He keeps loving you, even more, until the end, until He gives His life for you. This is what Jesus did for his friends: seeing their limits and their betrayal, he “loved them to the end”, which meant giving His life for them.

Beyond our preconceptions and common opinions, Christianity is originally the announcement of this infinite preference, the coming of this radical newness which is beyond our thoughts, as Father Giussani writes: “A radical newness; new at an absolutely new level: it could not be and is here; it could not be because we never would’ve thought of it, we couldn’t imagine it and it’s here. [...] Christianity is a presence within your daily life, a presence that [...] guarantees an unimaginable change, unimaginable.”¹⁰

Faced with the radical newness of this preference that has reached us, we do not have to be a believer already, and nor do we have to pull back because we are not yet a believer.

Testimony

I feel like I have been struggling all my life, for so many different reasons. I grew up in a broken home, and had to grow up ahead of time. Even if I may not show it, inside I am a mess.

It is as if, inside me, there is a black hole, ready to sweep away everything else I have inside me. I have become accustomed to wearing a mask, to avoid showing people what was happening to me.

I have never been able to speak to anyone about this darkness I have inside me, but I have always wanted to find someone to wish to understand me. I found this in GS: I have found friends who are ready to listen to me, and stay close to me. Thanks to GS, I am rediscovering myself; the true me, without any mask.

⁶ E Montale, “Prima del viaggio [Before the trip]”, *ibidem*, p. 8.

⁷ S. Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Vol. 1, transl. by H. V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1967), p. 467.

⁸ L. Bernardi, «Giacinto», in *Libretto Testi Triduo*, p. 9.

⁹ *Isaiah* 43,4.

¹⁰ Julián Carrón, Luigi Giussani, “Alive Means Present!” *Traces*, October 2018, “Page One,” 2. Available at <https://english.clonline.org/traces/page-one/alive-means-present>, p. 11.

Hiding oneself behind a mask, to avoid showing who we are, does nothing. I always did so to avoid showing how much things would tear me to pieces, but I finally understood that this fragility is part of me.

2. Without me you can do nothing (John 15:5)

SOMETHING “FROM WHICH WE DO NOT TURN BACK”

What is the nature of this radical newness, of this preference we are talking about, that even if a year goes by and you don't see it anymore, you still can't take your mind off it, you can never forget it? It's something we can describe with the words of another song by Lady Gaga: “When the sun goes down and the band won't play, I'll always remember us this way. When you look at me and the whole world fades, I'll always remember us this way.”¹¹

Has something like this happened to us? We all have beautiful, enthusiastic, emotional experiences, which come to an end, which are confined to a moment, “like a wave in the sea that, after it has touched to shore, pulls back, and all returns to how it was.”¹² But is there something from which you cannot turn back, so much so that you would describe your life in two parts: *before* that moment and *after* that moment? Or is everything at the mercy of emotions?

Often, to describe things somewhat schematically, what happens in us can be described like this: we have experience A (solitude, confusion, disappointment), then B happens to us; something that moves us (a radical newness: we feel ourselves preferred, treated like a king). Yet a little later, with the passing of time, it looks like B never happened, and we return to A as if nothing has happened, as if nothing has the strength to resist the test of time.

If we pay attention to our experience, though, we realize that what initially struck us about B and made it so special, was not so much an emotion, but a fact. It was a fact that provoked an emotion, something outside of us that moved something inside of us. It is always an encounter with someone, a person or a community, where we perceive a hint of something that is finally new, different, to the point of saying “there is something true here”, because we were preferred, put at the centre of things; it spoke about us, it spoke to us.

This encounter with something outside of our thoughts lights a fire within, reawakens our hope for change. What awakens this impression is not certain words or gestures first of all, which may not have been completely clear; it is, rather, the hope that those gestures and words may happen again in us, to the point of making us say: “Maybe I've found it!” But is this enough to withstand the test of time?

Testimony

I have always been very selective in my friendship choices (“ruthlessly selective”, my mother says). I have always been a bit standoff-ish; happy to stay in my corner, so to speak. I'm not saying I was always happy to be so, but instead of mixing with people of my age, whose lifestyle put me off (alcohol and crazy parties), I indulged my natural reclusiveness.

Yet amongst the people I have found in GS I have noticed a different atmosphere: I noticed it from the very first winter holiday (the first time I met the community from my area). It is not just a strong bond of friendship; it is also a rare openness towards people that they do not know (myself included). It was a kind of care and attention that I had never received from anyone else.

I inevitably began to compare my usual approach to the people around me with theirs. I am not even remotely capable of such openness and availability to those around me, and I greatly admire anyone who is able to welcome people in such a natural manner.

¹¹ L. Gaga, «Always remember us this way», p. 25.

¹² J. Carrón, *What can Withstand the Test of Time?*, Exercises of the Fraternity 2019, p. 18.

“SOMETHING THAT HAS SOMETHING WITHIN”

A mere first impression of something new is not enough to withstand the test of time; even if we, as if to maintain it, offer definitions: “it is the truth”, “it is God”. It is like when we dare to say “I love you” for the first time to the person we love: it is not sufficient merely to repeat key words or magic formulas to retain the truth of what has happened.

A definition does not suffice, because after the initial enthusiasm, after the perception of the truth, emotion decreases and our companionship shows its limits, because it is made up of fragile and limited people. The amazing community that had welcomed us can now seem an exclusive and suffocating club.

This is a dramatic moment, because before denying everything and saying “None of it was ever true”, treating what happened to us “like any of the things that happen in life that promise so much and then disappoint because they end,”¹³ we should consider and understand what struck us about those people.

It is precisely our experience of the limitations of our companionship, and of sentiment, that can help us understand that what attracted us from the start were not specific people, or their abilities, because they are fragile and limited. Instead, it was something within them, but not dependent on them; greater than their limits. It is something beyond them, something “more”.

This “more” is exceptional; in other words, it corresponds to the needs of the heart. It is not a product of our abilities, or those of others. It appeared “like ‘a beacon in the fog’ but still this fleeting appearance leaves us with the confidence of having discovered “something that has something within.”¹⁴

As the image on this year’s flyer¹⁵ shows, what corresponds to us is not the hand extended towards the apostles, but understanding what is behind it. This is how we can understand what really happened to us, and who we have encountered through those people.

We must discover what is meant by this “something that has something within”, what this “more” is that can withstand the test of time, when enthusiasm wanes and our companions let us down. Who have we encountered through those people?

Testimony

I know that what this movement has given me is essential for my life, but what if the companionship you have always had around you starts to suffocate you? What if the faces that have always accompanied you now suffocate you so much that they make you feel out of place, as if you were an outsider?

WHO ARE YOU?

“Who are you, who attracted me through these faces?” This is the crux of the human heart which does not stop at the crumbling of feelings, or the limitations of people.

We are challenged to “recognize the nature of the encounter that has happened to us, the presence that has bowled us over.”¹⁶ What is this “something that has something within”? Who are You to conceal yourself among us, within us? This is a question which leaves us poised, because it considers the Mystery itself, and any other attempt at a response seems reductive. It is a question which brings us to silence, because silence is the expectancy of a response that is ‘other’; the expectancy for it to show itself, its face, its name. It is

¹³ J. Carrón, *What can Withstand the Test of Time?*, p. 22.

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience* (McGill-Queens University Press, 2006), p. 96.

¹⁵ *Christ and the Apostles. Detail from the Frescoes with Episodes from the Life of Christ*. Church of Santa Margherita (circa 13th Century), Laggio di Cadore (Belluno, Italy).

¹⁶ J. Carrón, *What can Withstand the Test of Time?*, p. 28.

like when one declares his or her love: the wait for the response of the beloved is full of silence, and our attempts to imagine their response will never give us the satisfaction that we will receive from hearing “Yes, I love you too”.

The answer to this question cannot be found by simply reading a book; that would be for intellectuals only. As Julien Green writes, “I want to see Him, I want to touch Him... I want to be near Him, do you understand? Like one is near a living person. And I want to see Him.”¹⁷

Nor is it sufficient to repeat the words and prayer of others like a *mantra*, or to participate passively in religious gestures, to find the answer; like attempting to capture butterflies in a net. Some Christians can even participate in the Christian community, and in prayer, in a somewhat superstitious manner; seeking mere emotion, and hoping to fall into favour with the Mystery. These are all human attempts to understand, expressions of the religious sense which seeks God, attempts to provide one’s own answers to one’s own questions.

Yet this is not “the” answer; it is not the revelation of a presence which imposes itself and responds to our greatest question: “Who are you?”. It remains, rather, an attempt of our own. As we have said, this will not last in time.

Friends—especially the more mature—are those who help us to orientate ourselves towards the Mystery, without the anxious need to respond to our question with answers which will disappoint. So often, we are impatient and in a hurry to provide an answer ourselves, instead of waiting to receive it.

What is needed, then? The Mystery must come forth from the unknown to answer our question: “Who are you?”. It must surprise us, and make us be reborn.

Testimony

Who are you? It is you, but inside you there is a flame that is greater than you.

Can we affirm that this “presence” which we encounter through fragile, limited people will last in time?

How can I be certain of this presence?

How can I recognise this presence?

Who can tell me that it is definitely Him, not some aliens manipulating us from on high?

Who is Christ? I haven’t seen Him, I haven’t perceived him.

What does it mean to see Christ in people?

I have started to perceive that Christ is present now, but I beg you to help me understand who He is! Who is He that makes all of this possible?

I WILL NOT LEAVE YOU ORPHANS (JOHN 14:18)

Only a Presence that loves you and I now, beyond my limits and those of others, can withstand the test of time. It is a living Presence, which will not abandon us, which will never leave us alone; a Presence which will keep finding us, even in ever-changing circumstances, today just as yesterday, today more than yesterday, without losing anything from the past.

This is what withstands the test of time: a Presence that always feels contemporary, because His gaze “follows” you in new and unexpected ways; through ever-changing faces and places, with the same traits, with loyalty, even when you feel at your weakest.

¹⁷ J. Green, «Moirà», in *Libretto testi Triduo*, pp. 28-29.

In time, you will discover that this gaze, this method, is not only loyal to the whole of your life; it has been loyal to the whole of history for 2000 years. Through new friends, it is this Presence which makes you cry like it made Peter cry; it pulls you out of the void of distraction, just as it presented itself to the thief Zacchaeus in his home. It forgives your sins and launches you back into the world, just as it did for the woman caught in adultery who was about to be stoned to death.

The experience of this Presence's loyalty cultivates an ever-greater question: "Who are You who withstand the test of time, who entered history 2000 years ago and have now reached me, are part of my story, are contemporaneous to me?"

The friends who I posed this question to answered me with the response they had heard, which has been repeated for 2000 years:¹⁸ "It is not me, it is Christ among us".

I could never have imagined such a response; this was not the Christ I had imagined. I had envisioned a beautiful man from the past with long hair and a long white cloak, died and buried. Instead, Christ used your face, my face. I could never have imagined Him like this.

This answer is not mere feeling, nor simply a logical deduction—like saying "I am able to identify "Christ"—rather, it is an answer that another person gives me. I adhere reasonably to this answer, because I acknowledge that there is something at work in that individual which is not him or her; "because there is a factor within, a factor that decides about this companionship, certain outcomes of this companionship, certain resonances of this companionship, a factor so surprising that if I don't affirm something else I don't give reason to the experience."¹⁹

Faith is the recognition of this Presence; it is not imagination, feeling, or an act of reason. It is the recognition of a Presence of which you tell me the name; a Presence which is the origin of an experience which continues to overwhelm me. This Presence withstands the test of time, and it comes to find me again and again.

Faith consists in recognising a Presence which exists beyond the limits of my reason, because I cannot see Christ in the same way I see you, apart from maybe in extraordinary mystic visions. I do not see Him, yet I cannot help but acknowledge that it is truthful and reasonable to adhere to what is proposed to me, in order to understand what I am living.

We must seek simplicity: I do not see Christ, I see you and all your shortcomings, but what interests me about you is this fire inside you, which transcends you. You tell me it is Christ; so, because of this fire I see and cannot explain, I trust you and stay with you because I acknowledge Him present in you.

Testimony

I was born in Africa, and have lived in Italy for nearly three years. I desired to come here a great deal, particularly because it meant meeting my father; but when I arrived, I felt very alone and confused.

Two years ago, however, a woman who I call "grandmother" brought me to the Rimini Meeting, and introduced me to some GS students. I did not yet speak Italian, but I felt happy with them.

Unfortunately, my dad did not allow me to spend any more time with them, but I did not forget them. A year later I came back to the Meeting, where I knew I would meet them again. It happened!

¹⁸ L. Giussani, *Time and the Temple; God and Man*, in *Libretto testi Triduo*, pp. 26-27: "Those two, John and Andrew, and the other twelve, Simon and the others, told their wives [...], and they told their other friends too [...]. The other friends told their friends, and then others, and then others again [...]. And so on, like a flow that carried them away, a great river that swept them away. This reached my mother—my mum. My mum told me when I was little, and I say: "Master, I do not understand what you say, but if we leave you, where will we go? Only you say things that correspond to our hearts" (Cf. John 6:68 "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words of eternal life").

¹⁹ L. Giussani, *Is it Possible to Live This Way: Volume 2: Hope* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), p.104, in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 31.

Now I continue to spend time with them, and even went to their winter holiday. It was my first holiday. I came back to my “grandmother” and I told her I had been treated like a king; I really had been.

With the help of School of Community, I now understand what I am living, and also many things I had previously experienced in Africa, which I did not then know how to judge.

I think that what withstands the test of time is my need to not be alone, and the possibility of encountering this friendship anew.

YOUR GRIEF WILL BECOME JOY (JOHN 16: 20)

Each person is called to recognise this Presence, and to assume a position regarding the nature of the love he or she has experienced. As Kierkegaard wrote, this is the most serious “you must” question in history: “If Christianity has been announced to you, you must take a position in front of Christ”.²⁰ Who is Christ? A mass illusion? A charlatan? A great wizard who saved many but not himself, or an invention of priests? Or the identity of this love, this preference, which has reached us?

Seeing the fragility of our feelings, which vanish into nothingness, seeing the smallness of the people we have met, seeing the defeat of Christ on the cross, each of us is called to give an answer. It is not enough to repeat other people’s answers blindly and uncritically; be it our friend, our leader or your parents.

We are in an era in which everything seems so fragile and fluid that we have no use for a “small-minded Christianity comprising of compromises and disappointments, in which we confuse ourselves with own devices.”²¹ If Christianity ends with GS and the fleeting emotions of certain special moments, then we may as well not kid ourselves. Yet Christianity is not just a happy oasis in a lost world. Christianity is the hand—the contemporary presence—of One among us, who will not abandon you even if everyone else does.

Nowadays, we have reached the point at which one can only be Christian if one recognises that Christ is present, triumphs over history, and allows us to “challenge every darkness, doubt, fear, and insecurity,”²² and enjoy life. This is how we can be anywhere, even a country where we do not know anyone, or a new university, enlightened by the recognition of this Presence which will never abandon us. With Him, even sadness becomes an opportunity for joy. As the abbot says to Miguel Mañara: “Why are you afraid of losing what has managed to find you?”²³

“Who do you say that I am?” (Mark 8:29). Christ awaits our answer as free men, and can wait for the whole of your life for you to recognise what He has done for you. This is God’s method of loving us, which withstands the test of time: He could wait for you for thirty years, even your whole life. He will wait even when you deny Him, you spit in His face, you insult Him, you blaspheme Him. He waits, awaits your freedom, to the extent that He allowed Himself to be crucified for this freedom, because He wishes to be loved freely; by free men, not slaves.²⁴

This is true love; a love which does not bind you to it by force, but tirelessly awaits your freedom, as Tagore imagines in one of his poems: “By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world / But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs / and thou keepest me free./ Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone / But day passes by after day and thou art not seen / If I call not thee in

²⁰ S. Kierkegaard, *Diary*, in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 32.

²¹ E. Mounier, *Letters and Diaries*, in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 32.

²² J Carrón, *What Can Withstand the Test of Time*, p. 34.

²³ O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara*, commentary by Luigi Giussani, transl. Edo Mörlin Visconti, (HAB,2016) p. 19

²⁴ “To that liberty [...] I have sacrificed everything, God says, /To that taste I have for being loved by free men, / Freely” Ch. Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*, transl. Pansy Pakenham, (Wipf & Stock, 2017), p.121.

my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart./ thy love for me still waits for my love.”²⁵ This is so different from those relationships which, instead, measure the level of reciprocal possession, constantly expecting a *performance!* In contrast, Christ waits patiently; thus, every person can freely decide their position towards Him.

This is what withstands the test of time: the presence of Christ which tirelessly continues to await our heart’s recognition of Him, in our irreducible need which we can never get rid of. Christ who begs for man’s heart, and man’s heart that begs for Christ.²⁶

Testimony

Next year, my family and I will move abroad due to my father’s work. This situation has made the following question all the more urgent: “what will last despite time and distance?”.

Where I am going, GS does not exist. The easiest thing to do would be to close this chapter of my life and start again, leaving behind everything I have encountered and seen, letting it become a melancholy memory to pine over.

Yet I am realising, more and more, that in these days in which I am still in Italy, it would not make any sense to continue following GS if everything were to end because of distance. I would feel cheated.

I desire a friendship like this forever, not only in certain circumstances. My friends from GS are—either physically or mentally—far away, and daily life gives me my schoolmates instead.

It just so happened that one of these new classmates, who I had never really spoken to previously, was very struck when I told him about my move. This prompted us to begin speaking about many things, and proved to be the first time I was honest with myself and someone else, after several very difficult weeks.

Yet this happened because living like this, spending time together like this, does not only happen among us. If it proves possible to live like this and look at others with this affection anywhere, then even moving abroad, among foreigners who speak a different language, can be beautiful.

Even there, I can rediscover what I have encountered in my past; with my parents, with GS, with my friends. Reality slowly becomes 100% beautiful.

²⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Free Love*, in English at <https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/free-love>. Also in Italian in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 33.

²⁶ L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), p. 12.

3. If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain (1Cor 15:14)

WHERE CAN WE RESTART FROM? THE CONTEMPORANEOUSNESS OF A PRESENCE

Some mornings, just after getting up, one can be immediately overcome by negativity, as if nothing that has happened had actually marked us, changed us, because distraction and sadness have returned. Can the encounter we have experienced become history, “the” history that marks our lives, the dawn of a new day? Or will it forever be at the whim of our emotions and thoughts, which convince us less and less the more we repeat them?

How can we avoid reducing what we have encountered to just another experience among many? Otherwise, Nietzsche is right when he affirms that God is dead, because He stayed in that tomb 2000 years ago, and in the ‘tomb’ of specific locations and specific religious gestures: “what after all are these churches now if they are not the tombs and sepulchres of God?”²⁷

Nietzsche also stated: “I should only believe in a God that would know how to dance;”²⁸ in other words, a God that can withstand the test of time and space and find me now, just as the line from Sunday Morning Prayer says—“Return, O Lord, to our path / Your words set ablaze in our hearts.”²⁹

A God that can dance, a Mystery that can surprise us here and now, in the midst of the fog, that can save us from our sadness, our confusion and our sins and reawaken us. This can only be a risen God, one who did not remain in the sepulchre, but rewrites history, withstands time and marks it with His Presence, bringing eternity in time.

This is the announcement of the resurrection: there is a fact that continues to occur independently from us, thanks to His initiative 2000 years ago; we might abandon Him, but He will never abandon us.

If Christ is risen, our question must change. I should not seek to keep my thoughts and emotions alive, as if trying to bring a corpse back to life. As Heschel writes: “injecting good manners or rules of conduct will not solve the problem.”³⁰ If Christ is risen, it will be He who surprises us when we are about to drown in our own sadness. This is what he did with the disciples at Emmaus: he joined them on their road of disappointment and said to them “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all the prophets spoke!”³¹ Thus, their hearts began to burn again.³² The experience of these first few has become history only because He is risen: He returned and helped them to their feet again. It is not us who reanimate the corpses of our feelings, those are dead; it is Christ who is Risen. He who we thought was dead now appears alive before us; He dances, runs, to surprise us on our journey.

If one recognises that the presence of Christ has touched his or her heart, at least once, then one can be calm: He will return to save us, He will show whether He is Risen or remains in the sepulchre. The challenge concerns God, not human capacity. We have done nothing to deserve the encounter we have experienced, so it will yet again be Him who shows that He is greater than our shortcomings.

THE VICTORY THAT CONQUERS THE WORLD IS OUR FAITH (1 JOHN 5:4)

A God that can dance through history is more interesting than the sepulchre of our own emotions: this is the

²⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufmann. (Random House, 1974), p. 182. Also in Italian in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 71.

²⁸ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, transl. Thomas Common, ed. Bill Chapko, (Feedbooks, 2010), p. 37. Also in Italian in *ibidem*, p. 72.

²⁹ “Hymn”, Morning Prayer, Sunday Hours, in *Book of Hours*, (Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2009), p. 41.

³⁰ A.J. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays*, (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), p. 76.

³¹ Luke 24:25.

³² “Were not our hearts burning (within us) while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

true 'hundredfold'. We have a psychological image of the 'hundredfold', as if it were the improvement of what we already desire, as if we had a Fiat Punto and we desire a Fiat Tipo: the same thing, but just a bit better, a bit more beautiful. Instead, the true 'hundredfold' is God putting a Ferrari in your garage: a whole other level of idea. We will never change like we imagine we will, because the 'hundredfold' is always different, always greater than we can imagine.

The true 'hundredfold', in fact, is faith; the recognition of a Presence that withstands time, which is faithful, which changes you and will never abandon you. Faith is what wins us over, and the world; not our own attempts, as don Giussani writes in this year's Easter flyer: "I remain the same poor beggar, but with Christ I am certain, I am rich [...] it is only in a companionship with Him that a person loves himself. Only a person who carried this message can claim an affection for himself, can love himself and therefore love others."³³ It is only this Presence that enables us to change, to love and be loved, and to experience the 'hundredfold'.

Christ selected a very simple method to remain in history. Christians do not think that Christ made a book fall from the sky to remain in history, because only intellectuals would have understood this; nor did he teach magic abilities, because then only wizards would have shared His power. Instead, He chose the simplest of methods, the Church; people one can spend time with, study with in the afternoon, go to an event once a week, or undertake a gesture of charity.

Christ has withstood the test of time for 2000 years, fighting and begging for our freedom. This is why, to avoid everything ending up in the sepulchre of our emotions and thoughts, it is sufficient to remain faithful; faithful to those small signs, that hand that He extends to us, inviting us to get to know Him. Behind that hand there is Someone: different faces can come and go, but the Presence behind these faces does not. We must simply be faithful to the signs that Christ has chosen to be with us, until the end of the world.³⁴

³³ Communion and Liberation, Easter Poster 2019.

³⁴ Matthew 28:20.

Testimony by Jesús Carrascosa

Peter Paul and Mary in the early in the morning
Barco negro
Favola

Alberto Bonfanti. Good morning everyone! This morning we are offering you a testimony from a man whose name deserves its own introduction: Jesús. At eighty years of age, he has such an enthusiasm for the ideal, a love of life in all its aspects, a simplicity in recognising true friends, that he can help each of us find the path to rediscovery, and the answer to the question: “what withstands the test of time?”. How, in your experience, have you identified that ultimate truth that Carrón spoke about in the message he sent us? In other words: how did you encounter the movement? What enabled this event in your life?

Jesús Carrascosa. The first thing I want to say is that I am honestly, genuinely honestly, moved to be here, for a specific reason: if I am here today, it is because in 1954, in a Milan high school, don Giussani gave life to an experience with a group of young people such as yourselves—just like yourselves!—which they followed, and this experience reached me in Spain. It was young people like yourselves who began this experience. Seeing a group of high school students, one might say: “they are just kids, this cannot be particularly important for life”. Yet don Giussani began everything there, with young people who understood the meaning of a drawing he made on the whiteboard. It was a horizontal arrow with smaller arrows that pointed upwards towards an X, without reaching it, and an arrow that descended from that X and reached the horizontal line. That X—don Giussani explained—is the Mystery, the meaning of everything; and every human who is truly human has within him or her a question about the meaning of life. Anyone who does not have this question is not human; they are alienated, living outside of themselves, because they have not discovered the aim of life. So, I am very grateful to be invited here, and it has made me understand the importance of each one of you for me. Giussani began everything with that group of GS students; once they graduated, he began the experience of the CLU with them, the university part of CL. The movement, this movement now present in 90 countries, was born with those young people, who remained friends with don Giussani. So how can I not be emotional and grateful to be here with you now? I have discovered what withstands the test of time, and I am grateful and hugely hopeful seeing you all here, because this experience will continue thanks to young people such as yourselves, who will grow with this ideal.

Reading your contributions, I was very struck by those of you who recounted difficulties and struggles caused by parents in crisis, or who are separated. This creates great uncertainty. I remembered my own experience, because I come from a family with an exceptional mother, and a catastrophic, alcoholic father; a family that I was greatly ashamed of (it was useful, however: I like to drink, but it is impossible for me to get drunk because I seem to have a sort of *chip* which tells me when to stop!). It is immensely sad to see someone who cannot reason about anything, who talks rubbish and vomits: it really is terrible! When I was reading your questions, I recalled how lucky I was to meet two twins. When I met them, I did not know they were twins; I was speaking with one, and did not know there was another identical twin. I began to argue with one of them, it got physical, and I won. The second twin immediately appeared and they began to attack me together; they soon felt bad,

though, because two against one is not very fair, and so we oddly became friends. These two twins were the children of a man and a woman who became almost parents to me. There was always a place for me at their house. I would eat at my house and then immediately go to theirs. In that family, I learnt what I had not learnt from mine: how a man should treat a woman, and vice versa; the respect and immense love between them. Instead of crying because I could not see this in my parents, I learnt from the place where I saw a reality that corresponded to my desires. When I got married myself, I realised that the way I treated my wife, the way I respected her and spent time with her, had a lot to do with what I had seen in that family. In life, there are people from whom we can learn how to behave, and there are others—who are not less important—from whom we can learn how not to behave. I learnt, many years later, that the latter were far more important than I had thought. I remember an old student of mine who was an orphan. Whenever the theme of love would come up in class, he would always raise his hand and say: “I lost my parents, so that makes me wretched”. Finally, one day, I said to him: “Esteban, you must understand one thing: in life, some people spend their time looking at the past. They get neck pain and it is not very interesting. Yet there are others who look to the future. You must choose: neck pain or looking ahead, and pushing on”. From then on, he stopped objecting; he eventually got married and had children.

So, I am very happy to be here with you all. You are not only a sign of hope, you are a reality. The same thing happened with my students: in Spain, the movement was born through young people like yourselves. Don Pepe, who is sat at the front here, was at school like you, only three years older.

The fundamental question in life is desire. One could say: “tell me what you desire, and I will tell you who you are”. If you have a small capacity for desire, you are a small person; if you have a big capacity for desire, you are a ‘big’ person. Desire constitutes us, so much so that it is impossible to obtain something that we do not desire. Up until the age of twelve, I was a very “difficult” child. (I had to repeat school years twice). When my father died, seeing my mother sowing by night to pay for my schooling, I woke up and said to myself, “this year, I will win a scholarship”. I have always had a great desire within me, and I slowly realised that this desire was for everything; one cannot live for less than everything, because we are made for everything. Each of us can identify ‘everything’ with one specific thing or another, but he or she will always seek ‘everything’. This was how it was for me; a desire for everything, for these needs of the heart, this question that I have, to be never abandoned or ignored. I remember one Sunday evening I was sad, even if my team, Gijón, had won; I had even spent time with friends, and not even that was enough for me. I said to myself: “tomorrow is Monday, tomorrow I have to go to school, and I have not studied at all!”

The second thing I want to tell you about is this. I went to a Jesuit school for nine years, the best in my country, with some good teachers and some bad. I did not study, and I fell two years behind. When my father died, as I said, seeing my mother’s sacrifice for me, I began to study. However, because I had a terrible reputation, everything bad that happened were blamed on me, “Carras”, and I remained very unhappy. I had a particular teacher, though (who influenced me later, too, when I became a teacher) who loved me, even though I was a very difficult student. We would arrive at school at eight in the morning, and leave at eight in the evening. One day, seeing me struggling with a problem, he said to me: “You’re doing well! Keep going”. I solved the problem, and he said to me: “See? You can do it”. He gave me the responsibility of looking after the sporting equipment. I would misbehave with all the teachers that did not care about me, but I could not do that with him. With that teacher, I learnt that the person able to embrace the most wins. Who person who wins out is he who is able to embrace! With my students, I have always tried to be very sensitive, particularly with the most difficult, because I was once difficult; I identified with them, and thought: “he who can embrace wins out, so I must embrace this student”. It was an experience which I have looked back on, and—with God’s help—saved my life. This desire is the secret of life: with anything less than everything, we cannot be happy, it is impossible to be happy. With less than everything, time will defeat us, time will become an obstacle and an impediment, and we grow to hate it.

In my youth, I did not get to the point of loving Jesus, because I thought He had come and then gone away again. I did not have the thought that He had lived on (I only discovered this many years later). There is a poem by León Felipe, a Spanish poet who was forced to flee to Mexico after the civil war. It says: “Because He, Christ, came and gave us our task, and left”. I thought: “it would have been better for Him not to have come at all, because I’ve already got so much to think about!”. In other words, despite going to a Catholic school, I had not reached a certainty about my faith.

In Spain, Francisco Franco’s dictatorship lasted for forty years, until 1975. There was no freedom; meeting in a group larger than twenty was a crime, and one could not speak freely for risk of prison. At that time, I met a group of intellectuals who were fighting for freedom, and had lost their positions in universities because of their opposition to Franco. They made a living giving private lessons to children; even though they were very distinguished professors who had taught mathematics to dozens of students, they could not even teach in high schools. Through them, I discovered anarchy, and the love of freedom. In *The Religious Sense*, don Giussani says that anarchism is the desire for freedom, but that the anarchist “affirms himself to an infinite degree.”³⁵

I thought: “if what I desire is true, it must be possible to experience it now”. This is different from what the communists would think: “we must fight so that others can experience what we never can”. It seems much more human to me to seek an experience which says: “if what we are living is true, we must be able to see it today”. I lived a beautiful experience of community: we lived together, and each person put half his or her salary towards the communal income. A publishing house was eventually set up to disseminate culture, because anarchy loves culture, and it was a way to travel around Spain, giving courses on politics and unionism. I met exceptionally interesting people, who desired everything. It was incredibly idealistic; we even rotated leadership in the publishing house, to avoid temptations of power. I thus also became director for a while.

During that time, though, I fell into a profound crisis, because I said to myself: “I am giving my life for something that has not asked itself the most fundamental of questions: why does evil exist?”. My wife was very concerned. In this situation, José Miguel Oriol, who managed the publications from our publishing house, went to a book fair in Frankfurt, and saw a stand there belonging to an Italian publishing house—which was called, and still is called, Jaca Book. Its publications were very interesting. After we had got to know them, the directors of Jaca Book said to him: “you must come to Milan to meet the old man”. The old man was Giussani. They called him “the old man” affectionately, because he was only fifty years old! Oriol went. When he returned to Spain, I said to him, “I also want to meet this man”. So, we went to Milan; Giussani awaited us with a few others in a nice restaurant (I still remember the road). That evening, I discovered his love for reason and freedom, which won me over. Don Giussani offered to host two Spanish people in Milan. I spoke about it with Jone (my wife), who had studied nursing, worked in a big hospital, and was a month away from a full-time position. She saw that I was in such crisis that she said, “let’s go to Milan!”. So, we went to Milan.

In Milan, Giussani introduced us to the family of an architect, Enrico Magistretti. Having arrived in Milan on Thursday, they called us on Saturday: “Spaniards, what are you doing this weekend?”. “This weekend? We’ve just arrived, we will go and see Milan”. “Why don’t you come with us?”. “What are you doing?”. “We are going to a house in the countryside. Come with us?”. “OK, we will come with you. We have plenty of time to get to know Milan”. We went and found a group of Italians, recently married with very small children. They were friends; some went to do the shopping, others cooked, others prepared drinks. We had lunch on the grass. The children played, and we ate, drank, chatted enthusiastically; but our conversations did not divide us, they unified us. At the end of lunch we went home, and my wife said to me: “the Italians in this movement (she knew nothing more than “this movement”) are better friends to us than our Spanish friends”. This was the key to everything. They used a book of prayers, and my wife said “I am going to buy it. We should begin to pray

³⁵ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), p. 9.

too”. This is how we started; following those people, because we saw something different in them. We saw the things Giussani had said to us made flesh in that group of people: they were friends because they lived for something greater than them, together; something far greater than them, that was *for* them. We saw communion among them, but also liberation, and the desire to change society, to communicate Christ to the world. This was our first experience.

After two years, when we took our leave of Giussani, he said to us—I will never forget it —: “I am very happy I have met you, and I wish you all the best”; he did not ask us: “will you set up the movement in Spain?”. No, there was not associative request, only “happy to have met you”. I remember saying to him: “when will we see each other again?”. He was surprised by this, and everything changed. “When you wish. The 26^a December is a holiday in Italy, so on the 27^a I will be in Madrid”. He came to Madrid to see only a few of us; Oriol and his wife, Jone and I. Just for the four of us. We came back so determined to start the movement in Spain, but I began to struggle again; so much so that I had a further crisis (crises are very interesting, the challenge is to stay alive to recount them; something greater always arises from crises, if one knows how to confront them). In any case, I was very unhappy. In those days Giussani called me: “They have invited me to Barcelona. Should I accept?”. Imagine; he called me, and asked: “Should I accept or not?”. “Accept. Will they pay for your travel?”—we had no money—“Yes”. “So I will see you in Barcelona, and then you can come to Madrid”.

In Barcelona, I had one of the most important experiences of my life. I was profoundly unhappy because I had thus far proved unable to commence an experience of the movement in Spain. That day, there was awful fog. The airport was closed, and you could hardly see the purple lights of the runway; the planes that had landed the night before could take off, but no one was landing. I was telling Giussani how I was feeling: “I should change my plan for the movement in Spain. I can’t manage, nothing is happening”. He said to me: “But it is sunny”. What was he talking about? There was terrible fog! The more I shared my struggles with him, the more he said to me: “Yet it is sunny”. “What is he trying to say to me?” We got onto the plane, surrounded by fog. We took off, and after ten seconds, the sun appeared; Giussani looked at me and said “it is sunny”. This moment has remained with me for the rest of my life! When the fog is closing in, I think “yet it is sunny”. If one has seen the sun, even only once in one’s life, one cannot doubt that it is there. “Carras, the sun is there”. I replied: “So?”. Listen to what he said to me: “Carras, I have one thing to say to you. If you wish to do what I have done, why do you not do what I do?”. “What do you do?”. “I went to teach in a school”. I was thirty-seven years old (the last fifteen-year-old person I had interacted with was myself! In fact, as soon as one turns sixteen, one does not consider the fifteen years old). I replied, “OK, I will start to teach”. I began looking for a job, I found a school, and started.

In the meantime, Oriol founded a publishing house (le Ediciones Encuentro), which proved very useful, because some of its books found their way to don Carrón (in the late 70s he was a young priest who had founded an inter-parish group with other priests, focused on young people). He became interested in Encuentro’s programme, because there were a number of books that his group wished to publish. I invited him for dinner at my house. “Great. Can I bring a friend?”. “Sure.” “How can I get there?”. “I won’t give you the address, because it is almost impossible to find it”. We lived in an almost-slum, of only thirty-two square metres, on a street with no pavement, in an area with 12,000 families; super proletarian. We were there for an ideal, we could have a home—we both worked, but we still wanted to follow the anarchism of the past, so we lived there, happily. Carron came to dinner, and we stayed together until midnight. That is how our relationship with him began.

Teaching at school, I met the first few young people. I remember we were singing *Favola*, by Claudio Chieffo: “There is someone with you, who will never leave you alone...”. That song sustained me; as I went to school I so often thought: “None of these people stay. I invited them all to this event, and only a few have come”. So, I told myself: “there is someone with you, who will never leave you alone”. I would travel by motorbike and sing that song: “There is someone with you...”. If He is there, He will never leave you; this is

how the movement was born at school.

In terms of the rest of my story, at a certain point Giussani named me the international leader of CL; I went to Milan every Monday, I stayed for a couple of days, and then I came back to Madrid. Then he asked the leaders of the movement in Spain if anyone was prepared to move to Italy, to open the International Centre of Communion and Liberation in Rome, on the occasion of the Jubilee in 2000. Jone had found physiotherapy during our first stint in Italy; she had studied physiotherapy and then opened a studio in Madrid, with six physiotherapists. It seemed crazy to leave everything! But my wife said something unforgettable to me: “Carras, I am praying Moses’ prayer”. “What is Moses’ prayer?”. “Moses says to Yahweh: “If you are not going yourself, do not make us go up from here.”³⁶ I was left speechless, and then said: “This is beautiful. I have an amazing wife!”. When the time came, we looked at each other and said, “He is with us”, and we left for Rome.

My response to the question of the Triduum—“what withstands the test of time?”—is this: what I have encountered withstands time. God has worked miracles, and our lives are fulfilled. Imagine: as anarchists, in order to be free to be part of the revolution, we did not want to have children. When we met Giussani, we said to ourselves: “if we were prepared to sacrifice so much for anarchism, what will we do for Christ?”. We experienced the fulfilment of virginity, because virginity brings more children to the world than flesh. Imagine: some of my ex-students are closer to me than many children are with their parents. The same happens to Jone. Over the years, we have experienced a greater sense of paternity and maternity, so true that it manifests itself in faces, emails, phone calls, a constant companionship. We have found the unifying factor in life, the only thing that can withstand the test of time. Finding the unifying factor of everything is fundamental. A watchmaker can know each component inside out, but if he does not possess the unifying piece, he cannot fix a broken watch. It is the same for a doctor: health depends on a unifying principle, that each organ contributes to the whole; illness occurs when an organ fails to contribute to the whole. The function of a car is similarly defined by a unifying factor; when a piece no longer works as it should, the car breaks down. Life is much more than a watch, health, or a car. Finding the unifying factor of life makes one look at reality with reasonableness, with intelligence, and with a hope that would be otherwise impossible. I discovered this unifying factor by encountering don Giussani.

I will tell you about something else that happened. It was July, in Milan: incredibly hot. It was the first time Carrón had accompanied me to an international event of the movement. We went to Giussani’s house. On the table, there was a bottle of water with lots of condensation on it, because it had just been taken out of the fridge, and was very cold. Seeing it, Giussani said to us: “for me, Christ is as present as this object”. As he said this, he stroked the bottle, and the condensation dripped onto the table. I watched his hand as it touched the bottle, and said to myself: “I want Christ to one day be as present for me as it is for him”. It was an unforgettable memory. Giussani said that faith is the recognition of a Presence; in other words, it does not merely concern someone who came and went, like I thought when I was a boy. He also said that to pray is to engage in memory of this Presence, which is the answer to all our questions. I have understood all of this thanks to don Giussani, and to young people like yourselves who followed him. I have discovered that the unifying factor is this You: the You of Christ is the unifying factor, which gives us this capacity for friendship which we call communion: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,”³⁷ “and behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age,”³⁸ “I pray [...] that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe.”³⁹ This being at one together, thanks to Him, is the key happiness in life, because we are not made to live alone; we are not made to say, “Brilliant, no

³⁶ Exodus 33:15.

³⁷ Matthew 18:20.

³⁸ Matthew 28:20.

³⁹ John 17:21.

one wants me!’”. I have never found anyone who claimed this; rather, I have encountered so many people who cried because they believed no one loved them.

So, what withstands the test of time? What will last, in time? It is this You that becomes the unifying factor of everything, an inexorable, inevitable Presence, which manifests itself in the way one looks at one’s wife, friends, job. With this unifying factor, which is His Presence, going to work becomes beautiful. Giussani told us that true sin is not the stupid things we might do; true sin—which we never confess, because we do not know it is true sin—is distraction and forgetfulness, which mean that we engage with reality without perceiving the new dawn that awaits us. This is what mission is. Missionary work is not to speak about Jesus to people who have asked you nothing; mission is living with this Presence. If I do not fall into distraction and forgetfulness, and I recognise that He is present, then I go to work in a different way, I study in a different way, I follow a lesson in a different way. I engage with reality in a different manner, and a new dawn breaks. The issue is not to speak or explain to others, because reality speaks of Him. It is other-worldly to go to work or school like this. Someone who is in love does not need to write in his or her diary “Call him or her...” (I never write in my diary, “call Jone;” I do not need to write it down, because I do it instinctively. I cannot help but phone her!). The same goes for Christ: I do not need to write down in my diary that I need to pray, because there will come a moment where I cannot forget to pray. Thanks to this, we have discovered what is it to be married, and what the value of the movement is. I once heard don Giussani say that, when two people love each other, if they do not love Him together—with a capital, meaning Christ, He who lasts—then their love will not last. This is the power of life, of marriage and of the relationship with one’s friends. I have been away from Madrid for twenty-two years—my students who have followed the movement got married, and some of their sons and daughters got married amongst themselves; it is a beautiful story—but I have not lost a single friend, because Christ triumphs over time and distance. The secret is that they, in Madrid, continue to live the same experience as I do in Rome. When we live the same experience, when we live His presence as the unifying factor of everything, friendship does not end. In May, I am seeing twelve, maybe fifteen friends who are coming to Rome from Madrid for a dinner. They have done so for many years; they arrive at eight in the evening, and leave at nine o’clock the next morning.

My experience is this: He triumphs, because He is the secret of everything, and this manifests itself in gladness. I will end by sharing one thing that has helped me a lot in my life. Many of your questions concern bad things that have happened to you. Many of you ask: “what has God got to do with the bad things that happen?”. He has got a lot to do with them. How? God is not responsible for the bad things that happen. He had offered man a world in which pain, suffering and death did not exist. Yet after man commits original sin, He says to the woman: “You will give birth to children in pain”; this means that in the world God had created, pain did not exist. He also says, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your bread, until you return to the ground.”⁴⁰ Suffering, pain and death are consequences of man’s freedom, because God created us free. Otherwise God would be evil; instead, He is perfection and goodness. We pay for the consequences of descending from the first two humans, but He has not abandoned us, and one day—we recalled this yesterday—He took all of the sin and suffering of the world onto Himself, when He died on the cross. Remembering this has helped me a great deal throughout my life.

I owe all of this to Giussani, who enabled me to discover it, and I owe it to young people like you who followed him, who said yes to his proposal. Thanks to that ‘yes’, the movement exists, and it will continue to exist because of that ‘yes’. The fact that you are the youngest among us does not mean you are the least important. You are incredibly important, and if you let yourselves be led by God, He will enact miracles in you. Thank you.

⁴⁰ Genesis 3:19

Pigi Banna. Thank you, Carras, for looking at those younger than you like this (these people could be your grandchildren); this gives us hope that what we have perceived in these days can become history for each one of us, like a new dawn. It gives us hope that it can become “the” history which defines our life; that, as Kierkegaard says, we will never forget.

Christ is risen, and continues to be faithful to our lives.

For this reason, we will sing *Cristo risusciti* together.⁴¹

Cristo risusciti

⁴¹ G. Stefani–Anonymous, «Cristo risusciti», in *Libretto testi Triduo*, p. 73.