



FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE

associazione di diritto pontificio civilmente riconosciuta

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Dear friends,

Though the authorities have still not given any instructions regarding the month of April, the current public health emergency and problems related to the organization of our gestures require us to cancel our regularly scheduled events for this time of year: the Fraternity Exercises, the Exercises for workers, the GS Easter Triduum, the CLU events for Holy Week, the Way of the Cross and Fr. Carrón's School of Community with video connection on April 1.

This decision, imposed by the health emergency, does not eliminate the insidious presence of Coronavirus among us, nor does it lessen its capacity to provoke us, nor give us permission to look away, as if it does not affect us. Like it or not, it is a concern for all of us. Our question is the same as for all people: how can we face this circumstance as men and women?

On such occasions—which the Mystery does not spare us—we can grasp even more clearly what a grace the charism that has taken hold of us is, verifying its capacity to help us face all that happens. “The only condition for being truly and faithfully religious [...] is to live always the real intensely” (*The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 1997, p. 108), as Fr. Giussani told us. With this conception of religiosity, we recognize every circumstance in the context of vocation. “Living life as vocation means tending toward the Mystery in the circumstances through which the Lord has us pass, by responding to them. [...] Vocation is going toward destiny, embracing all the circumstances through which destiny has us pass” (*Realtà e giovinezza. La sfida [Reality and Youth: The Challenge]*, Rizzoli, Milan 2018, p. 65). Fr. Giussani was well aware of the dizzying effect this has on our life: “Man, the human being's rational life, would have to be suspended on the instant, suspended in every moment upon these signs, apparently so fickle, so haphazard, [which are] the circumstances through which the unknown 'lord' drags me, provokes me toward his design. I would have to say 'yes' at every instant without seeing anything, simply adhering to the pressures of the occasions. It is a dizzying position” (*The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 135).

It is hard to find a better description of the situation in which we find ourselves when we truly face all that happens in life: a dizzying experience of being suspended “in every moment upon these signs, apparently so fickle, so haphazard, [which are our] circumstances.” Yet this is the only reasonable position, because it is through our circumstances that the presence of the Mystery, of that “unknown 'Lord,’” challenges us and goads us on to His design, to our life's fulfillment.



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“Reason,” however, “is impatient. It cannot bear to adhere to the single unique sign that is the means for following the Unknown. This sign, which is the chain of circumstances, is so obtuse, so dark, so opaque, so apparently random that to pursue it is like placing yourself at the mercy of a river’s currents that toss you here and there” (*The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 135). In the coming weeks, each of us can see which attitude prevails in us: the willingness to adhere to the signs of the Mystery, to follow the provocations of reality, or letting ourselves be tossed about by any and every “solution,” proposal or explanation that can distract us from that provocation and avoid the resulting dizzying position. Each of us, then, can verify the true solidity of the “solutions” in which we seek shelter.

How can we accompany each other in all this? What kind of companionship do we really need? So often, we seek an answer, emptying out the event that reached us, reducing it to a web of relationships that protects us from the impact of things, that spares us the challenge circumstances pose instead of spurring us to embrace it! A companionship like that, however, cannot respond to our need: in moments like the one we are living, when the urgency of life appears in all its unavoidable power, this is as evident as ever.

A young friend of mine just graduated college and started his new life. Consequently, we cannot see each other as often as when he was at the university. Recently, he was complaining to me about that, so I reminded him of a scene from the Gospel. One day, the disciples were in a boat with Jesus and realized they had forgotten to bring the bread. Despite the fact they had witnessed two gigantic miracles—two multiplications of loaves as had never been seen in history—they began to argue because they had forgotten the bread. I pointed out to my friend that Jesus was there, beside them, in the boat! But they kept complaining! The problem was not that they were alone, because Jesus was with them, but that it was, for them, *as if He was not there*. So they argued about the fact they did not have bread! To help them see the real problem, Jesus did not perform another miracle. What good would it have done to perform another one, after all they had already seen? So, what contribution does Jesus give? He asks them three questions. First, “When I broke the loaves the first time, how much was left over?” Then, “And the second time?” And, finally, “Do you still not understand?” (cf. Mk 8:19-21). How invaluable, this contribution Jesus offers his friends by not sparing them the questions! He does not continue to explain, or perform other miracles, but rather solicits them, within their own experience, to make full use of their reason, that they might be able to recognize *who it was* they had encountered (they had the lord of the “bakery” with them!). If they did not understand, pay attention, it was not because they were alone or did not have the elements they needed; it was because they still were not using their reason well. Jesus had revealed Himself to them, through the many signs they had seen, as an exceptional response, one that finally corresponded to the heart, to the needs they and other men and women had, on many occasions, including in dramatic ways, but they had still not recognized who He was, with that recognition called faith that, “flourishes on the extreme boundary of the rational dynamic as a flower of grace to which man adheres with his freedom” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2010, p. 24).

Jesus takes advantage of every circumstance to show His disciples His way of facing all that happens, every unexpected, even painful ones, that they might experience the relevance of His presence, of the relationship with Him—of faith—to life’s needs. “The content of faith—God made man, Jesus Christ who died and is risen—that emerges in an encounter, at a point of history, embraces all its moments and aspects, which are brought as if by a whirlpool into that encounter, and must be faced from its standpoint, according to the love that springs from it, according to the possibility of its usefulness for one’s own destiny and for the destiny of man it points to” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 20). If the encounter we had does not become like a whirlpool that draws in every moment and aspect of life, we will find ourselves lost in front of every unexpected, every narrow door we face.



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It is in the continual experience of an unexpected ‘advantage’ in one circumstance after another that “the encounter we have had, which is all-encompassing by its very nature, in time [let us underline that: in time] becomes the true shape of every relationship, the true form by which I look at nature, at myself, at others, and at things. When an encounter is all-embracing, it becomes the shape, not only the sphere, of relationships. It not only establishes a companionship as the place where relationships exist but it is the form by which they are conceived of and lived out” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 20).

It is at this level—the recognition of the all-embracing nature of the encounter, which becomes the true shape of every relationship—that presences who are truly “friends” come to our aid, bearing witness to the road that will allow us to live through a situation like today’s. Presences that we do not plan, so exceptional—though found in the same circumstances as everyone—that they leave us speechless, in silence. “I was suddenly thrown into the trenches. It feels like being at war. My daily work and family life changed overnight. As a doctor, a mother, a wife, I found myself sleeping isolated from my husband, not seeing my children for two weeks, and not being able to have direct contact with patients. Between me and each sick person is a mask, a face shield and their protective suit. Often, they are elderly people who are living all this alone. They are afraid. They die alone. Their relatives, isolated in their homes, cannot help their loved ones; they receive calls from me in the middle of the night to communicate the death of their family member: the phone stands between me and them. What can I do for them, at a human level, as a Christian? I go back to the ward; I look for the smile and hug from a nurse who is a friend: during this time of isolation I also need to physically feel togetherness. They are the only ones I can hug. In the face of all this, I am strengthened by rereading Carrón’s letter to *Corriere della Sera* (“This is how we learn to conquer fear in times of difficulty,” March 1, 2020, p. 32) every day, which helps me to return to an attitude of openness, of asking myself what holds up in the end. I am called to recognize what is essential, what is true. Then, there’s the path I’ve walked in the work of School of Community: trials are the way faith can grow, if our freedom is put into play in the face of that Preference that ask everything of us. This is dizzying. We have to entrust ourselves and accept the risk. The certainty that sustains our life is a bond, and there is a journey to make before we arrive at that affective certainty. Circumstances are given to us to help us become more attached to the One who calls us in a mysterious way. Faith is trusting that He is calling us. ‘It is only when a well-founded hope prevails that we are able to face our circumstances without running away.’ We are called, now more than ever, to respond to Him who calls us in a mysterious way. This is the certainty I can give to my patients, to their families, in addition to medical care.”

This is the challenge we all have to face. At this time, in which nothingness is rampant, our recognition of Christ and “yes” to Him, including in the isolation each of us might be forced to maintain, is already our contribution to the salvation of every man and woman today, before any legitimate attempts to accompany one another, which should be pursued within the allowed limits. Nothing is more urgent than that self-awareness.

Even though we will not be able to have the Fraternity Exercises, nothing can keep us from proceeding on our journey to continue to increase our certainty, that “well-founded hope” which we absolutely need to keep living through these circumstances. I am sending, therefore, the question that I had intended to use as preparation for the Exercises, which has never been as relevant as it is right now: **“What saves us from nothingness?”**



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We all saw how useful the question we sent last year was in helping us be attentive to our experience. This year, it could make an even bigger difference. I, therefore, invite anyone who would like, to send his or her contribution to comunicazionifrat@comunioneliberazione.org.

We will, then, later consider together how to make the path we walk in the weeks awaiting us into a treasure for us all, and the most suitable way to respond to any questions that emerge. With openness to the unexpected.

It is an unprecedented and dramatic time. One in which those gestures so dear to us, like the *Angelus* in the morning, at noon and in the evening, the *Memorare* before going to bed, our daily work on the School of Community individually and with our family, the short prayer *Veni Sancte Spiritus* when we first wake up and in every moment in which circumstances become so challenging that we need to cry out to be able to face them, take on even greater significance!

I urge you to remember fraternal charity, paying attention to the needs that emerge amongst us, staying in contact as much as you can and making the best use of all the tools technology offers us.

Finally, following Pope Francis's invitation, "we continue to pray for all who are ill, for healthcare workers, the many people suffering due to this pandemic."

I embrace each one of you during this time of Lent, so decisive in our conversion to Christ, victorious over death.

Let us accompany one another, letting ourselves be challenged by the times in which we live, so as not to miss out on the opportunity the Mystery has prepared for us!

Yours,

Fr. Julián Carrón