



# FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE

associazione di diritto pontificio civilmente riconosciuta

Uffici: Via De Notaris, 50 - 20128 Milano - Tel. 02/66595088 - Fax 02/66594670 - e-mail: clfrat@comunioneliberazione.org

Rimini, April 6, 2023

## **Greeting by Davide Prosperi at the beginning of the Easter Triduum of GS**

Hello friends! It is curious to use this word—friends—when so many years of life, so many lived experiences separate us. You could be my children, and indeed two of my daughters are among you. Yet we can say it, it is right to say it. And these days you will also find out why. Your older friends who will lead you in the gesture of the Easter Triduum have asked me to come and greet you. I do so very gladly. In fact, I thought I would experience this gesture together with you. It is not a usual thing for me, but this is a special year: the Covid pandemic has prevented you all from gathering here together for so many years, and so we must resume it together, so as not to lose the memory of it.

I realize that each of you at this time will have your own, very personal feelings and expectations. I want to give you one piece of advice, however, that concerns each of you, and I allow myself to give it to you from the experience I have gained over all these years: being older has to be useful for something! It is important that you have decided to come here, it is important that you have chosen to be here, whatever your state of mind before you arrived and also have now that you are here. My piece of advice is this: be available, available to everything, really to everything that will come your way. You will not understand everything right away, but let yourself be seized by what is proposed: you are here, you have nothing to lose. I think back to when, so many years ago, I was there in your place—a little uncertain that I was where I wanted to be—and one day, God willing, some of you will be in mine. Remember these days.

As I said, for most of you, this is the first time you are participating in a gesture like this. And so I understand that you will be filled with curiosity about what lies ahead. That is right: curiosity is the most favorable condition to be able to see and hear what the heart is waiting for. Therefore, I give you two indications on the format of the gesture. Fr. Fabio—whom you see here by my side—will lead the whole gesture, giving the lessons on which we will be asked to meditate. Fr. Fabio is a priest from the diocese of Milan; he has always been involved in the education of children, in both schools and the parish; he was a close friend of Fr. Giorgio Pontiggia, a priest who was very close to Fr. Giussani, who led GS for many, many years and was Rector of Sacro Cuore in Milan. Fr. Fabio has great experience of the movement and is an important help for us. You will also have an assembly and the gesture of the Stations of the Cross. Along with Fr. Fabio, this Triduum will be led by Matteo Severgnini, known to many as Seve (if you call him Matteo I do not know if he turns around...) and Francesco Barberis. Seve belongs to Memores Domini, and spent 10 years in Uganda where, together with our friend Rose, he led our school in Kampala, named after Fr. Luigi Giussani. I asked him the sacrifice of returning to Italy precisely to help us in leading the experience of GS and CLE. Francesco, whom many of you already know and needs no introduction, will give you all the guidance on the gesture, as early as this evening at the end of the introduction.

Now, before I leave the floor to Fr. Fabio, I would like to share with you what is in my heart at the beginning of this journey together. And I begin with a question, which I address to you and also a bit to myself. Do you know what you are doing? Did those who invited you tell you? You have gathered together in this Triduum before Easter to meditate and relive together the passion and resurrection of



Jesus. And you may have at times wondered what these events that happened two thousand years ago have to do with your life today. Is it a simple devotional memory or is there more to it than that? Who is Jesus? And what does he have to do with you and your life? Fr. Fabio will help you answer this question. I take the liberty of instigating a thought that we sometimes forget about, and when we forget about it it makes this story seem very distant and abstract, almost a fairy tale, when in fact it is all so true when you see things up close in their concreteness. This is the greatest gift that Fr. Gius has given us, along with our friendship. And so I will let you in on a little secret, which in truth is really no secret at all because—perhaps without knowing it—it is why you are here today. This secret is called faith. The connection between the events that happened two thousand years ago and your everyday life is called faith. So many times you may have heard that faith is a gift (some call it grace), and that is true.

But what is the gift? The gift of what?

Fr. Giussani taught us that *faith is a method of knowledge*: a particular method, we might say indirect, in the sense that to know the object of faith requires mediation, the mediation of a witness. This is why we talk among ourselves about the importance of witnessing, because if these witnesses were not encountered, faith would die with those who received it. Faith is a gift: it is a gift because none of us did anything to deserve receiving the proclamation that brought us this new knowledge, and not everyone received it: it just happened. Some of you received it from your parents, others perhaps encountered it through a professor or a friend. After all, this is the contingent reason why you came here. But, as is often the case, when you receive an undeserved gift, you also become responsible for it: if we have been so undeservedly favored, it is because He who, through these witnesses, has favored us wants us to cooperate in His work, to become witnesses of it ourselves, otherwise it would be an injustice to those who have not had this privilege.

But what announcement are we talking about? What is it about? And how did it reach us?

It is a long story, but the part of the story that concerns us most at this moment begins when two fishermen who were keeping a boat near Capernaum on the great Lake Tiberias in ancient Roman Galilee began to spend part of their free time listening to the invectives of a man of great charisma, dressed in rags. That man in the desert, on the banks of the Jordan River, was announcing the coming of a new world. They called him John the Baptist. One of the two, also named John—one of the sons of Zebedee—was a 15-year-old boy, just like you; while the other, older, was named Andrew, the son of Jonah, and was the brother of the leader of the fleet, Simon. On that day, John and Andrew were in Bethany, across the Jordan River, and noticing that the Baptist had pointed to a man a little younger than himself, they heard him say, “Behold the lamb of God, the one who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one of whom I said, ‘A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’ I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel” (Jn. 1:29-31). They were used to hearing him say strange things, but that time, with those absurd words, he had surpassed all strangeness! Could it be that this young man, looking in all respects like any other man, was the very one everyone was waiting for, the one the scriptures spoke of and who was supposed to come to save the people of Israel from the bondage that had always oppressed them? They decided it was worth trying to follow him and, upon reaching him, asked him where he was from. The answer that the man, a Nazarene named Jesus, gave them established the method of the Christian proclamation that would span all times, the same proclamation that reaches us here today: “Come and see” (Jn. 1:39). What they saw by following him to his home must have represented something truly exceptional, for it was the beginning of a new world, the proclamation of that fact would reach the ends of the earth throughout the centuries. And so it was



## FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE

that Andrew told his brother, Simon, who, after meeting him, also set out to follow him. And then that Man chose others, and there were twelve. The twelve were always with Him, following Him, listening to Him, seeing Him do extraordinary things: miracles! The blind regained their sight, the crippled walked again, demons were cast out...even the dead were raised! And as they stood with Him, behind Him, they noticed that an impossible friendship was being born between them as well: some of them already knew each other from before (Simon Peter's fishermen, for example); yet, since they had begun to spend time with that man, they treated each other differently when they went out in their boat, as they treated each other when they were with Him. Others, however, used to hate each other: Matthew, for example, the Roman tax collector, had always been seen by the others as the plague before they all gathered with Jesus. Something had changed in them and they would never be the same again. They were beginning to realize this. They were poor, but they would not have traded what they had found for all of Herod's gold nor for all of Caesar's power; for they had found themselves truer, more human, better friends, and that made them richer and more powerful than Herod and Caesar. They now loved each other. They could not even explain it to themselves, but they loved each other, they would give their lives for each other! The event of His presence began to translate into the event of a friendship with Him and with each other, a friendship for destiny, because Destiny was with them, was in their companionship. And so this friendship began to expand, by infection, and they were 100, then 200, then a thousand ... but at a certain point the time came to move on without His physical presence among them anymore. His enemies took Him, and condemned Him, and crucified Him on top of the place called the Skull. In the eyes of the world it would have all seemed like a deception, a hoax, a big lie. Instead they, His own, remembered that He had told them that He would always be with them. On that evening –which we also remember here tonight during the Mass–they had asked Him how it could be possible, since after what they had experienced they certainly could not have been satisfied with words spoken just to say: if He did not remain with them it would all be over. Then He had that stroke of genius, as He had continually, and told them that He would tie His final, eternal stay to their Communion: “Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” The effective sign of this would be the bread broken at their table, there He Himself would be physically present: “This is my body, [...] do this in memory of me” (Lk 22:19).

These thousand set out and went into all the world, proclaiming what they had seen and taking this different, more human, more hopeful and life-giving way of doing the things that everyone was doing, everywhere. And many were won over by it. And so they came to Rome, the capital of the empire that covered all the known world. Rome, the center of power. But power does not like freedom, and so they were persecuted, even more than they had been by the Pharisees in their homeland. After all, it was still about power. But this time the power was fiercer: Christianity stood as the subject of a new, untamable freedom, irreducible to any power of this world. And power decided that such freedom was too dangerous: they had to be exterminated, wiped off the face of the earth forever. Christians were fed to the beasts in the Colosseum and had to hide for a time in the catacombs. Some were taken and suffered martyrdom. But instead of shrieking like the other captives of the subjugated peoples and like the criminals and evildoers who were imprisoned, the Christians sang, glad to offer their lives as a sacrifice for the sake of their Lord, empathizing with His own sacrifice of the cross. And those who saw them die in this way were deeply impressed, and many were converted. Sometimes, some did not have enough courage and succumbed to apostasy from the faith in order to have their lives saved. That is right, they were denying the faith. But what can you do, how can you blame them... just imagine what it is like to be mauled by lions or nailed to a cross with broken legs!



## FRATERNITÀ DI COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE

I mean, humanity has its frailties. But apostasy was considered by Christians to be the gravest immorality, because in addition to betraying the Lord, one often ended up denouncing one's brethren, who were then caught, imprisoned and killed. But by then the Church was one body, and such was the consciousness that the early Christians already had of being one body, that when a Christian betrayed, the terrible stain of sin was washed away by the blood of the martyred brethren. After all, that is what the Lord had done by going up on the cross for us. It is a bit like you at the end of a meal in a fancy restaurant realizing you have no money in your pocket and going to the manager full of shame to be told, "See that gentleman at the table over there? He has already paid for everything – what a relief, what gratitude!" My friends, much more than that has happened: the redemption of our salvation from the sin that has plagued us since the beginning of time has come at a price, and this price has been paid with the innocent blood of the Lamb of God.

In other words, *a new humanity* spread throughout the world, a humanity never seen before. I am not making this up, it is history! In a letter written in Greek to Diognetus, an anonymous person in the second half of the second century, probably one of the preceptors of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, reports: "For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. [...] They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death, and restored to life. They are poor, yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things, and yet abound in all; they are dishonoured, and yet in their very dishonour are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified; they are reviled, and bless; they are insulted, and repay the insult with honour; they do good, yet are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. To sum up all in one word—what the soul is in the body, that are Christians in the world." (Epistle to Diognetus, Ch. 5).

Empires ended and worlds passed, but these new people breathed new life into Europe, which was unravelling after the collapse of the dream of Rome; the monks brought forth a new world in the name of God. Think of all European culture, the cathedrals you go to visit, the art, literature, history you study... and think of the stories of the saints who have marked the various eras, St. Benedict, St. Francis... all the way to the saints of our own day, Mother Teresa, Pope Wojtyła, and young people like you, like Blessed Charles Acutis who is buried in Assisi together with St. Francis: a story of boundless love and charity... think of how greatly that event that happened in those dusty paths of an insignificant place on the world map two thousand years ago determined the fate of time and space! What would have become of humanity without that fact? What would have been if it had not happened? But it did happen!

This announcement crossed the oceans reaching every corner of the Earth, where Western man had arrived. At that point it was no longer only Westerners who had come to know the new life given by



FRATERNITÀ DI  
COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE

Christ: just like that woman at the well in Samaria, who had experienced that the Son of God had come not only for the Jews, but for everyone. Go read the testimony of our friend Ingrid from Guatemala in the April issue of *Tracce*, who is the only person from the movement in her country, but who is all but alone in her friendship with us. Poor enough not to have the money to come to Rome to the meeting with the Pope, but full of life she turns to Jesus: “I have nothing, I have only You, O Christ. I thought of Fr. Giussani, how his witness and his infinite thirst for Christ reached me, to infect me with this constant desire for the certainty of Christ.” Or listen to what Alejandro—our friend who lives in Cuba (can you imagine? There are some of us in Cuba!)—says, who in order to be able to come to São Paulo to participate in the meeting of South American leaders had to remain locked in a tiny room under observation in the Mexico City airport for 22 hours because of his country’s restrictions: “We can live because His companionship redeems from atrocity, through the light of certain faces. And He makes possible an enthusiasm for our country as everyone leaves. We experience a present sorrow, but at the bottom there is a gladness that we share together with friends.”

Today the same announcement has reached you. To you, who were not thinking about all this until twenty minutes ago. Today, we are the ultimate terminal of this extraordinary story, a story of saints and martyrs, the story of salvation: well, we belong to this history, we are of the same stock. Like those first two, and then all the others up to us here: we are chosen. This great friendship that went through history has become our friendship here, now. Our faith is founded on this solid rock.

Happy Triduum!

**David Prospero**  
President

*David Prospero*