

“YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE” (Jn 8:32)

A story that continues

Lesson

of Fabio Colombo

Good morning! Good to see you and welcome! I hope that you all “survived” the introduction yesterday evening and I dare even to hope that it was useful for you, that it began to reawaken reason from its slumber if, for someone, it was a bit sleepy, to reawaken the muscle tone of your freedom, in case it was out of shape, to make the heart beat just as it “needs” to, in case it had become sclerotized, to get scatter a bit of fog from among one’s thoughts and, above all, to give you even more hunger and thirst to immerse yourselves in this Triduum, because today, between this morning meditation and the imposing gesture of the *Way of the Cross* in the afternoon, we will find abundant food and water. Yesterday evening, we were on the sidelines, still among the locker room, the tunnel, the bench and the warm-up exercises, but today, we will go down to the field and play in the big match!

I hope, then, that yesterday evening in the buses and in the hotels, you were able to keep silence, to favor dialogue and the initiative that the Mystery has taken towards each one of you, retaining in your heart the questions and intuitions that arose (that could then be shared this evening in the conversations in the hotels and re-proposed tomorrow morning in the assembly) and, in the end, I hope also that you all have had a good and restful sleep, without texting until midnight, because the nighttime was created by the good Lord to allow us to sleep in holy peace, after having gone through the day and having contemplated the signs of salvation, of His Presence (certain faces encountered, intuitions that you had, your desire for change and for conversion, having received a gratuitous visit, charitable work, having received forgiveness of the Father in the sacrament of Reconciliation, for example); how soothing it is to pray Compline, with the Canticle of Simeon: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles”;¹ and, perhaps, yesterday evening, one of you went to bed joyful, finally joyful, unexpectedly joyful, like a child in the arms of his mother, of the Holy Mother Church, because he recognized that he was part of a people and a Body, of this story that continues today, and embraces you.

This morning, I would like to divide this time, *κρόνος*, into two separate times, *καιρός*, that reflect the two parts of the theme we have chosen for this Triduum retreat.

So, up and at ’em, we are not here to tell each other fairy tales, “Jesus Christ, my child, did not come to tell us tales. / You see he didn’t make this voyage of coming to the earth, / A great voyage between you and me, [...] He didn’t make this voyage of descending to the earth / To come recount anecdotes for us / And little jokes.”² Jesus responded to Pilate, “‘For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.’ Pilate said to him, ‘What is truth?’”³ Pilate was in front of Him, but he was occupied by other “priorities”... »

¹ Cf. Lk 2:29-32.

² Ch. Péguy, *The Portal of the Mystery of Hope*, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996, p. 74.

³ Jn 18:37-38.



First Half – “You Will Know the Truth”

1. The loss of the taste for living

To begin, I would like to reference a poem by Cesare Pavese, a great Italian writer, poet, translator, and critic, who gave us, through his writings, the expression of what he experienced in his life, which means all of the drama that existence did not spare him; for this reason, we perceive that he is very close to us. Immediately after, we will enter into depth into the theme of this Triduum on the *dynamic of knowledge*; therefore on the possibility of being reached and possessed by the truth and in the second half, after three songs, we will consider the “effect” of the truth: *making us free*, rendering us free.

Since we do not have time and since this is neither the place I will offer you in broad brush-strokes, good enough to give you the context. A couple of points about the brief existence (42 years) of Cesare Pavese who was born in 1908 into a wealthy family in Turin: he loses his father early and is a little child during the catastrophic events of the First World War. Two of his friends, young boys just like him, take their own lives. And he himself contemplates suicide from a young age. On August 28, 1950, he too, in fact, would take his own life. But there’s something strange about this because it was the year in which Pavese had been consecrated as a great writer, he had received the Strega Prize, about a month earlier, on the 14th of July. And yet, he says, “Came back from Rome some time ago. In Rome, apotheosis. But now, this is it.”⁴

On the 22nd of March, 1950, just a month before, he had composed the poem, “Death will come and will wear your eyes”:

“Death will come and will wear your eyes—
the death that is with us
from morning to evening, sleepless,
deaf, like an old regret
or an absurd vice. Your eyes [the gaze of those who surround you, of your friends, of your parents, of your professors, of your siblings, of those on the TV, on social media...]
will be a futile word, [as in a silent film, they speak, they move their mouths, but it is as if I was deaf, they are like an ignored background noise, they do not reach us, they are just some empty sound...] a cry kept silent, a silence. [everything moves around us, but nothing is grasped and seen, we avoid the impact, the heft of the real that would provoke a cry is instead spent in silence... instead, everything is silent]

Thus you see them every morning
when alone you stoop over yourself [when you get ready to go out, preparing the external parts of yourself, but within... how is your hearth, what questions abide there? Will it be taken seriously? Will it find repose?]
in the mirror. O dear hope, [a small desire, a glimmer remains... but it is going out]
that day we too will know
that you are life and nothingness. [tragic conclusion!]
Death keeps an eye on each of us.

Death will come and will have your eyes.
It will be like giving up a vice,
like watching a dead face
re-emerge in the mirror,
like listening to closed lips.
We will go down into the vortex mute.”⁵



⁴ C. Pavese, *The Burning Brand: Diaries 1935-1950*, New York: Walker & Company, 1961, p. 364, trans. A.E. Murch.

⁵ C. Pavese, “Death will come and it will wear your eyes”, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, No. 18/2001, p. 124, trans. Davide Wheatley & Marco Sonzogni.

» What we will be speaking about this morning—as you can see—is not a *pour parler*, or the hundredth thing we have “already heard”! Some of you all, in your contributions, spoke about students, classmates or people from your towns who have taken their own lives or who, at least, have thought about it; not too long ago, the news carried a story about a girl who was found after she hanged herself in the bathrooms of a University in Milan. You see that if the questions of yesterday evening did not find a response, did not find something to latch on to, never glimpsing an answer, then man could not be able to live, literally! On the telephone with one of you, it was told to me how a friend was undecided about signing up for the Triduum, because he wanted real responses, timely and concrete, and not “a mess of words”, “keeping the question open”; we are interested in the response just as much as we are interested in the question! Certainly, we don’t care about responses that are tacked onto reality or pre-packaged, just like we have no interest in artificial questions. But if we never had a true response or if we never verified its pertinence and convenience for our life, we would drag ourselves through life already suffocating, perhaps between one joint and another (erroneously, without realizing how serious it is and how much ill it causes for us!), between one drink and another (as if it was a common bad habit that “in the end, isn’t that bad”), between burning through one relationship and another (abusing and using persons as instruments for one’s own use, instead of loving, honoring and respecting), from emotion to emotion (skipping over the passage of reason and the heart, of the judgment on what you go through), in a life that is, in reality, already a slow march through agony. Because, despite the biological instinct to preserve one’s own life, man is that level of nature that becomes aware of itself and of reality and if he does not grasp the meaning, if life is without meaning, there isn’t life, what life would there be??! How is it possible to live while doing away with the great questions that arise from life!? And when reason, being itself the irrepressible need for a response, arrives to block itself in the dynamic of knowing, when it comes down with a sort of auto-immune disease, concluding that “you are life and you are nothing”, that even the eyes of your loved one, of your friend are “nothing”, that words are a “vain word” and that that “hope”, that perhaps arose from those realities, does not fulfill the promise, then everything transforms into resignation, desperation and what else remains? Just remaining mute and going down in silence into the vortex, into that vortex in which, truthfully, you already were. The spiritual malady of these two decades, my dear friends, is precisely the loss of the taste for living, of the meaning of life, as we were saying yesterday, but not because one does not have fun, or go on trips, or play sports, or make money, or go to concerts... but because they do not know the meaning of living and they drag themselves, between one fun thing and another, as an anesthetic to the pain, like a party, at the end of which they return flat and tired... exactly as they were before that nip of “life,” within a slow passing by of an existence without a goal! What kind of a life would it be!?

One of you writes:

I am in a bit of a strange period right now in life. I have recently suffered from a period of “flatness”, of apathy, in which nothing amazed me and I did not want to be amazed by anything. I didn’t even realize that I was living: getting up in the morning was always a fight, everything at school was monotonous, as was being with my friends; I didn’t feel anything, everything was indifferent and insignificant for me. For a little while, I put everything and everyone on pause, and I found I had less problems and troublesome situations. I knew that what I was doing was wrong, and I admitted it to myself sometimes, but, let’s admit it, it was more comfortable: never getting mad about anything, or feeling bad about things, no sadness, dissatisfaction, etc. In other words, feeling no emotions, I was a robot. Now, for me, it is the opposite. I don’t exactly know what happened, but they helped me to understand that you cannot put your life on hold, it’s not possible, rather, I need to experience it in the most true and lively way that there is and that I am able to. Now, within myself, I feel the necessity to complete something. I live with an expectation. There is an emptiness (the expectation) »

» *that you must complete in continuation, that is infinite; when you think you have filled it, a deeper chasm is created than before, because man, in the end, always wants more. And it keeps growing and growing. The desire grows and almost ruins you. I am waiting for something that I do not know, perhaps a Someone. All of this leaves a sense of incompleteness and emptiness that is transformed into a constant anxiety that follows me.*

And so, what we are about to say, what we are saying, even if in the next few minutes it could appear complex (but you all are grown-ups and we look at you with esteem for your intelligence and your desire to understand, to enter into life evermore, in all of its complexity),⁶ it is most useful, it can serve as a help and a sustain in the path that you are called to walk, because that which interests us (I think it interests you all as well!) is this living and not pretending to live! And so, we must help each other to reflect, to stop a minute, to think, to learn: *intellectus cogitabundus initium est omnis boni*, as Fr. Giussani loved to repeat!⁷

2. The dynamic of knowledge: from real things to more real things (a *realibus ad realiora*)

The dynamic of knowledge is what we are just hinting at, that is, the event of an encounter between the knowing subject and the known object, between the I and reality, between myself and the microphone, between you and your friend; then, you all will work on this a great deal during the course of the year, you will take up again more deeply this chapter of existence in the work on "School of Community–Raggio" on *The Religious Sense*;⁸ there is nothing—according to my humble opinion—nothing more useful than *The Religious Sense*, to place the foundations, to learn the grammar; but the grammar cannot be processed up by other adults and given to you all in a homogenized way. The alphabet must be learned personally, in order to be able to write and read. Now, therefore, we will make reference to it, according to our own goals!

Reality is not flat or mute, but "three-dimensional" and "containing a voice", a vanishing point! It is not nothing, as nihilists say, which would be an aporia! I would begin like this. Reality exists! And it is a sign! Your reason, which sets you apart from the other created beings who belong to the mineral, vegetal, and animal world, our intellect is made to penetrate into reality (*intus-legere*, read within), to research, to investigate up to the point that it leads us (like an investigator who collects clues and reconstructs the scene until the point that they can individuate the perpetrator of the crime; or the doctor who, on the basis of symptoms, formulates a hypothesis of illness and intervention geared at curing the patient); this is the dynamic that we betray, cutting it short, or not taking advantage of it in all of its power; reason is a need for knowledge, comprehension and consciousness of reality in the totality (!) of its factors, knowledge can be described as an encounter between our human energy for knowledge and the reality to be known...⁹ reality is given, like a great, an immense gift, from *One* to communicate to *another*! If there is a glass here, it is because someone put it there; and so, the dynamism of reason carries me to the point of asking myself, "Who put it here?", to being grateful to the one who had the courtesy and the good manners to allow it to be found here. If there is a glass here, evidently someone put it there, therefore, my reason, seeing it, asks itself: who put it there? And, therefore, from the "given" one turns to the "giver", from the gift to the gift-giver.

Listen to Solov'ëv, a Russian philosopher, theologian, poet, and literary critic, "I did »

⁶ "So, at least potentially, education must aim at introducing man into reality as a whole" (L. Giussani, *Introduction to total reality. The Risk of Education*, Notebooks, suppl. to *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, n. 4 (2006), p. 5). "I am not here to make you adopt the ideas I will give you as your own, but to teach you a true method for judging the things I will say" (L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal 2019, p. xxxi, trans. Mariangela Sullivan).

⁷ Cf. L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023, p. 90-91, trans. John Zucchi.

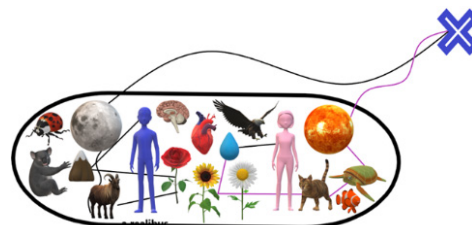
⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023.

⁹ [C. Di Martino, Knowledge is Always an Event, Intervention at Rimini Meeting in 2009.](#)

» not want to believe in this illusory world. Under the rude crust of material being, I have touched the imperishable porphyry and recognized the splendor of divinity. [...] I looked at everything, and everything made up One”.¹⁰ But an equally illuminating gem comes from Pavel Florenskij:

“The fact that in the world there was an *incognito*, an unknown, was not, as I intended it, a transitory condition of my mind that does not yet know everything, but a substantial peculiarity of the world. The unknown is the life of the world. Therefore, it was my desire to get to know the world in the way it is ultimately unknown, without violating its mystery, but spying on it. And the symbol was the way to spy on the mystery. Since by way of symbols, the mystery of the world is not hidden, but, rather, revealed in its true substance, that is, as a mystery. Clothes do not veil but unveil a beautiful body, and they do it, indeed, in a way that is even more splendid, revealing it in chaste modesty. On the contrary, a body shamelessly denuded closes itself to knowledge because it lost the match with its own modesty, which is, in fact, the mysterious profundity of life and the light from the depths. [...] One looks at the phenomenon and becomes aware that it is the husk of a more profound noumenon.”¹¹

To tie this all together, this is precisely the dynamic of reason: *a realibus, ad realiora!*¹² From real things to those that are even more real! Even more real, not “unreal yet invisible”, but, rather, extremely real! Your desires, even if they are impalpable, odorless, invisible, are extremely real!!! Take Seve or Francesco, describe them in minute detail in every external particular, everything that is quantifiable, measurable, dissect their bodies (excuse my macabre image!), and you will find internal organs, not certainly their desires, intuitions, memories, but can we be sure that we can say that they are not real, that they never existed?... Can you say that you know Seve or Francesco, to have exhausted knowledge of them only because you have lined up their bones and counted their hairs one by one? The most important part is missing! The “I”, the human spirit, is missing! Their self!!! Their desires! Their thoughts—that, mysteriously, travel transported by “electrical circuits”—where are they? They are ungraspable, intangible, and yet, extremely real! Just like love is invisible, and yet extremely real! The human soul is much more real than what neopositivist scientism tends to say, we are more than the mere material out of which we are made! Pope Francis, “Educating in a Christian way means helping young people and children to grow in human values related to all of reality, and one of these realities is transcendence. Today, there is a trend towards neopositivism [...]. And this philosophy does not introduce young people and children into total reality: transcendence is missing. For me, the biggest crisis in education, from a Christian perspective, is this closure to transcendence. We are closed to transcendence.”¹³



3. Knowledge as an event

And now, Fr. Giussani goes up to teach: in his text, “To Live Reason,” speaking with some university students in 1996—now let’s seek to pay attention, because the title of this Tridu-»

¹⁰ V.S. Solov’ëv, *Tre incontri* [Three Meetings], in A. Asnaghi, *L’amante della sofia. Vita e pensiero di Vladimir Sergejevič Solov’ëv* [The lover of wisdom. The life and thought of Vladimir Sergejevič Solov’ëv], CENS, Cernusco sul Naviglio (MI) 1990, pp. 87-91, our translation.

¹¹ Pavel A. Florenskij, *Ai miei figli* [To my children], edited by N. Valenti, L. Zak, Mondadori, Milan 2009, p. 206, our translation.

¹² Vjačeslav I. Ivanov, *A realibus ad realiora, Poesie e testi scelti* [Poems and selected texts], Lipa, Rome 2018, our translation.

¹³ Francesco, *Speech to the participants of the World Congress Promoted by the Congregation for Catholic Education*, November 21, 2015, our translation.

» um retreat stresses the dynamic of knowledge, as it says, you will know the truth—and so, while you all listen to me, follow along and read on the screen:

“Philosophically—that is, from the point of view of reason—what is the position the Movement takes up that is different from all the other groups? What difference of position do we have from the point of view of the eye, of reason, of observation?”¹⁴ For us, the point of the question lies in the fact that “reality becomes transparent in experience.” Giussani continues, “Write this phrase down, because it is capital [...]. The definition he has given is important to me [...] My question [...] wanted to say, above all, ‘My friends, what interests us is reality.’ If something is not real, who gives a damn about it? What does it matter? It cannot be of any use to us. Everything fades away, everything is fleeting. It is reality that matters. Reality! Not: ‘Reality is the truth,’ for this is meaningless, but ‘reality is the ambit where the truth subsists,’ it is the figure with which truth coincides. In short, what is real is true, what is true is real. We can make us of the words reality and truth without philosophizing too much. What do you think? This is the first thing I stress. As far as we are concerned, therefore, ‘truth’ coincides with ‘reality.’ What would happen to someone for whom they didn’t coincide? What would happen is that there could be a truth that is not real. But what does that mean? Where is it? Where does he find it? Among the fumes or up in the air? The truth is real. The word real points to something true, so much so that the words real and true are interchangeable. If it is true, then it is there; if it is not true, it is not there. If it is there, it is true. [...] True and real have a link whereby one is the other, implies the other, or, more simply, is the other. When children ask each other, ‘But is it true? Is it really, really true?’ (this is the formula of skepticism among children, they are asserting and justifying what I’ve hinted at: reality matters, for the truth lies in reality.”¹⁵

With this first point clarified, Fr. Giussani goes on:

“Because, after saying this of reality—reality is truth—we have to go on: how can we know the truth, how can we know reality? How can a scientist know a distant star that the ancients were not able to record? Only modern telescopes can bring it so near that a scientist can read it; he has to bring it nearer. What does it mean to bring nearer this distant star which to the ancient, more serious observers would have been a non-existence? How can they make it existent? How can they speak of it as if it were present? How can they make something far away present to themselves? If this faraway thing enters into experience. What does ‘enter into experience’ mean? It means that I see it as if it were this glass, as if it were a friend, as one of the things I take hold of in the mass of a collectivity of persons and things that comes from who-knows-where and goes who-knows-where, but at a certain point is evident. [...] Reality comes into our sights as a content of our game, of our activity, and is grasped in us in as much as it enters into experience. Thus, truth and reality become recognizable in experience. But what is experience? Let us think of the verb we have used before. ‘Reality becomes evident in experience;’ what is becomes evident in experience. [...] So, what is experience? One could say ‘Experience is the becoming evident of reality’.”¹⁶

Finally, the last passage regards exactly what we care about the most: the possibility of getting to know the good Lord:

“You cannot say, ‘Lord, God of heaven and earth,’ without starting from an experience, from defining factors that fill up your experience. [...] If you have never asked yourself, »

¹⁴ L. Giussani, “To Live Reason,” *Litterae Communionis-Traces*, 1 (2006), p. 2.

¹⁵ L. Giussani, “To Live Reason”, op. cit., p. 2.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 2-3.

» ‘How did reality, all of this, come to be? Who made it?’, if you have never asked yourself this, you are like an innocent child, or like an illiterate before a text to be read. So, this is our method for clarifying the problem of man as religiosity, which is the most profound and totalizing problem of man; we must first of all make the relationship between man and reality—in as much as it is originated—a personal experience. It is reality if it enters experience. But how does God enter your experience?’¹⁷

Knowledge is an event, that is a fact that introduces itself as a factor of novelty into the one who is knowing: first I did not know, now I know! A comeback in a soccer game, the unwritten outcome of a match, a baby who arrives and was not taken for granted by a married couple, unexpected forgiveness, the encounter with the reality of GS, the heavens now above us, the universal law of gravitation that one discovers when a book falls on their little finger or when an airplane flies, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a page to be studied, music to listen to! Reality is something that one cannot make by themselves, self-generating; it is given, it is a gift! An encounter of knowledge happens with that reality called study, friend, sacrament, Triduum, it touches me, and I, if I embrace it, am edified. The encounter has an epistemological weight, it sets in motion the whole dynamic of knowledge!

Therefore, to return to our previous train of thought, there is a dynamic of knowledge that entails the existence of a knowing self who, with his or her own reason, collides with and grasps a reality that enters into the sphere of his or her freedom, that he or she comprehends, etymologically, takes up with themselves, with the self. In the case in which the reality to know is the destiny for which we are made, is that Infinite for which the heart of Pavese and our hearts long... well, what then? How can we pull that off?! Who can grasp it?? How can I come to grasp that?? If, in fact, I need to grasp a microphone or taste some ice-cream, it is “simple”, but the good Lord? Herein lies the only truly unique revolution of history: it is not you who has to stretch out, “elongate yourself” until you reach Him, but exactly the opposite: it is He who became like us, who entered and became part of human experience, becoming flesh! “It is not said to you: Labor in finding a way to come to the truth and life; this is not said to you. Sluggard, arise: the way itself has come to you, and roused you from your sleep; if, however, it has roused you, up and walk.”¹⁸

Great. Having returned to the introduction and clarified that reason has a knowing power that is able to grasp the profundity of reality, we must now fix our gaze on the first instant in which the Eternal entered into time, and on the first moment in which reason encountered the divine within a human phenomenon. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be. What came to be through him was life, and this life was the light of the human race; the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. [...] The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came to be through him, [...] to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man’s decision but of God. And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us [*Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο καὶ ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν, Et Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis*], and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. [...] From his fullness we have all received, grace in place of grace, because while the law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. The only Son, God, who is at the Father’s side, has revealed him.”¹⁹ »

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3-4.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 34,9.

¹⁹ Jn 1:1-5;9-10;12-14.16-18.

» **4. The incarnation, a divine-human method**

Let's listen to the intuition that arose in the heart and the mind of Fr. Giussani as a young man, 15 years old, at Venegono, while he was in the seminary:

"For me, everything happened like the surprise of a 'beautiful day,' when one of my secondary school teachers—I was then 15 years old—read and explained to us the prologue of the Gospel of John. At that time in the seminary, it was obligatory to read that prologue at the end of every Mass. I had therefore heard it thousands of times. But the 'beautiful day' came: everything is grace. [...] Forty years later [...] I understood what had happened to me then, when my teacher explained the first page of the Gospel of John: 'The Word of God, or rather that of which everything was made, was made flesh,' he said. 'And therefore Beauty was made flesh, Goodness was made flesh, Justice was made flesh, Love, Life, **Truth were made flesh**. Being does not exist in a Platonic nowhere; it became flesh, it is one among us."²⁰

But, then, what does it mean that we can know the truth? The Virgin Mary, Peter, John, Andrew, Bartholomew, Judas, Pilate, Zacchaeus, Matthew, the woman with hemorrhages, the centurion, the paralytic, the man born blind... they were all human—as we are!—who got to know Jesus—a man like us—who came to know the Truth, the Beauty, the Justice that that man was, true man and true God! I hope that you all read a page of the Gospel every blessed day! To grasp what you live today, the encounter with GS that you live today, is based on what happened to the first ones who encountered Him!²¹ The dynamic is the same, the (human) reality that reveals Another Reality (one that is divine)! The more they stayed with Him, the more they saw Him in action, the more their reason and their heart perceived the impact of an exceptional reality, of something *more*, of a human superabundance that overflowed elsewhere, as the acknowledgement that what was happening before their eyes exceeded the human horizon of creation, dragging their consistency and origin elsewhere, casting a line Elsewhere, it had its' feet on the earth, but the origin was Heaven! And the dynamic is precisely that of the constant repetition in the Gospel of this expression, as if it were a chorus: "And they believed in Him," therefore, believing is intimately connected with reasoning! It is not a blind fideism! It is not: "I trust blindly," but, rather: "I trust because I see, exactly because I have seen!"

But let's try for a moment to imagine what they would have seen with their own eyes!

Think and let yourself be moved by the Virgin Mary who, without having known man, sees, day after day, the growth of a baby within her, in Her womb which, little by little, month after month, became the tummy that you all have seen your mother with, when she was expecting your little siblings! Every time I see a mother feeding her child, I always think: "*But think about the fact that Jesus—God!—did this, attached to the breast of a woman this way, peacefully and candidly!*" But the reason, the heart, the intelligence of Mary, of the Virgin Mary—who did not know man and remained always a Virgin, before birth, during birth, and after birth—but Her intelligence who knows how much it was moved, shocked, grateful before what was so real to her eyes: perhaps, in an instant, she might have thought, within her: but how is it possible? From the time I was small, my mother Anna and my father Joachim—who lived in Jerusalem, who once they got married could not have children for over twenty years, who, once I was born, sent me to school at the Temple of Jerusalem—therefore, I, who did not know any man, until I met Joseph... but how is it possible that I be expecting? If I have never known man? "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High »

²⁰ L. Giussani, "How a Movement is Born" in *Communion and Liberation: A Movement in the Church*, McGill-Queen's University Press: Montreal, 2000, p. 107-109, trans. Patrick Stevenson and Susan Scott.

²¹ "Then Peter, filled with the holy Spirit, answered them, 'Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is 'the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.' There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved'."(cf. Acts 4:8-12).

» will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. [...] for nothing will be impossible for God. [...] Then the angel departed from her.”²² And her reason was left, must have been left, shocked as she was, completely open and docile to the initiative of the Trinity for whom nothing is impossible, not even that the divine enter into the human, through the availability of a young girl, just like you all are asked, we all are asked, to declare our availability. As it happened to us on the day of our baptism, the Holy Spirit entered into us, the seed of divine life is already in us, and we need to cultivate it!

And then John and Andrew—we will never repeat and reinvoke this enough!—that first instant in which they were going the way they usually went, as often at that time, along the banks of the Jordan River, to listen to that man, that strange man who went by the name of John the Baptist who, at a certain point, looks beyond the crowd of people around him and sees a man walk by and, for an instant, for a fraction of a second, points Him out and exclaims, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”²³ and those two who were there with eyes peeled, with open hearts, with an intelligence that was ready to grasp the signs of the real, who were waiting to find an exhaustive response for their lives, take note of the direction towards which the finger is pointed and begin to follow behind the man and He, at a certain point, realizes, perhaps hearing the sound of their steps, or else the undertones they were speaking in, in any event, he notices them, and, suddenly, turns and they did not know yet that they were before God-made-flesh right in front of their eyes and His eyes... but how must He have looked at them!? Psalm 139 gives us a sketch, provides us with a fresco of how the good Lord is looking at us now, how He looked at those two in that instant: “LORD, you have probed me, you know me: you know when I sit and stand; you understand my thoughts from afar. My travels and my rest you mark; with all my ways you are familiar. Even before a word is on my tongue, LORD, you know it all. [...] You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. [...] my bones were not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, fashioned in the depths of the earth. Your eyes foresaw my actions; in your book all are written down; my days were shaped, before one came to be.”²⁴ He had looked at them, he had looked through them, and they felt transfixed, plumbd, seen and understood like never before, by a gaze that intercepted them and penetrated into their depths, given how magnetic it was! Two human eyes that channeled the divine gaze! With His gaze so simply human and, at the same time, divine, in a disarming manner, he asked them, “What are you looking for?”. Do you understand how “human” God is, what tenderness He has? And they addressed him using the titles and the modalities of the time, “‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’”²⁵ which is to say, “Can we see more of you, we would like to, we want to, stay with You, look, we don’t want to be too much trouble, but could you tell us where you stay, in short, we could get together”... And with the force of His simplicity (Christianity is as simple as this, as an invitation!), Jesus says to them, “Come and see”, come, certainly, and you will see and *you will become seeing, finally, you will see*, as Cardinal Ratzinger taught! “So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.”²⁶ They wanted to meet Him again and follow Him, but within that encounter, that dialogue, sculpted into their hearts, kept in their memory and written down many years later in the Gospel by those who lived it, had within all of the presentiment of the truth, there was all of the expectation of the truth (just like all of you must have felt in choosing to come here: “I think that, in Rimini, there will be something good, something true, beautiful, choiceworthy”) and there was the intuition that that »

²² Lk 1:35.37.38b.

²³ Jn 1:29.

²⁴ Psalm 139 (138):1-4.13.15-16.

²⁵ Jn 1:38.

²⁶ Jn 1:39.

» Face was the “more real reality” that they had found! Look, I’ll read you all a super simple contribution, from a 14 year old boy who just began to get to know GS:

I’m 14 and even if I’ve been involved in GS for a short while, I already feel loved as if I’d known the people who are in GS for my whole life. After a dinner where we spoke and shared our own worries and joys, a question continued to arise in me: what is it that attracts me every day of life to go and be with my friends of GS to study and talk? I haven’t landed on a complete answer just yet, but I am certain that it is something immense and marvelous.

And so John and Andrew in that encounter, so ordinary and extraordinary at the same time, when they found themselves before that Face, they recognized that they were already loved, already awaited, already desired, already known, and therefore it didn’t take very long, a fraction of a second, so that within their heart, within their reason this question arose: but why does This Man here attract me so much? Why do these friends attract me so much? Why does this Master attract me so much that I wanted to ask him for his address, where he lives, where he dwells, when I can see him again? Like that boy from GS, John and Andrew as well had not yet formulated in their heads all of the “theology”, an entirely complete response, but they had kept in their heart a certainty: here within, within this relationship, within this Face, there is a trustworthy promise, there is the promise of something immense and marvelous! They pinned everything in their hearts and in their minds and then they ran to their fishermen friends, to Peter, to the others and their reason, and, meanwhile, they told it to their friends, they tasted it again and expressed a judgment of ever greater correspondence between what they had seen and themselves, between the need for goodness and the evidence of reason and that reality that they had before their eyes, that had entered into the trajectory of their experience, “We have found the Messiah!”²⁷ like this GS kid who, in class, or in the locker room for soccer, would say to a companion, “I met these guys from GS, you could also come and meet them!” Like John and Andrew, who in their hearts, must have said, “If there is One who the people of Israel awaits, it must correspond to this man here, to this Jesus who we met before! It must be He who is the Messiah so long awaited!” We have never found such goodness anywhere else, a gaze so true we have not found elsewhere! And the verbs used in the Holy Gospel of John are extremely common verbs, “The next day John was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, ‘Behold, the Lamb of God.’ The two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’ They said to him, ‘Rabbi’ (which translated means Teacher), ‘where are you staying?’ He said to them, ‘Come, and you will see.’ So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.”²⁸ Do you understand how the Truth made itself present and makes itself present, entered Herself into the orbit of our freedom, making Herself knowable and graspable, in space and time, in spite of everyone! They are verbs that describe our daily life: I met one guy, I had dinner with another, I went to the Assembly with another, in class, my teacher said, in the witness he said, I read the book of Francesca Pedrazzini, they invited me to the Triduum retreat... after two-thousand years, the method of the incarnation does not change, the divine through a human reality! The dynamic of knowledge, from this point of view, does not change! We bump into a human reality that speaks of more than itself, “You have an encounter that you will discover to have a profound and undefined influence on your life. Each person can have the experience of what it means to have an encounter from the point of view of the Spirit. [...] I find myself in the presence of a Mystery, that is, of a reality whose roots reach beyond what is problematic, properly speaking. [...] I cannot put myself realistically outside of it »

²⁷ Jn 1:41.

²⁸ Jn 1:35-39.

» or in front of it. [...] I am involved, taken up in that encounter, in a certain way, I am part of it: it comprehends me, even if I do not comprehend it yet.”²⁹ “Encounters have played an essential role in my life. I have known persons in whom I felt the reality of Christ so alive that I was not able to doubt it.”³⁰

5. The faith, a method of knowledge of reason

A profoundly rational dynamic with which man adheres, little by little, to what reality reveals of itself, up to the point of revealing a You! Let’s acknowledge once and for all that the Catholic faith does not ask us to renounce, to abdicate the exercise and use of reason, but, rather, it requires it, *fides quaerens intellectum*,³¹ the faith flowers in the soil of reason³² (the path of scientific knowledge, in fact, had a surge with Christian scientists, the university was born with Christianity, the very birth of Europe took a decisive turn with monasticism!), faith is a method of knowledge of reason, it is called *knowledge by faith*, (it is based on moral certainty that is just as certain, even if it is different, from scientific certainty) and our intellect is called into play much more, faith calls into play the entirety of our self, to the point of opening us up beyond our limits to adhere and to recognize what the reality says about Itself, or rather that “reality is Christ”, God reveals Himself within reality! But a way of using reason that is crippled, reduced, weakened, “positivist reason which recognizes nothing beyond mere functionality resembles a concrete bunker with no windows, in which we ourselves provide lighting and atmospheric conditions, being no longer willing to obtain either from God’s wide world.”³³ We can continue, instead, to pretend to live because we undergo a sort of “psychological subjection”, since believing seems like something ethereal, vapid, vaporous, undetermined, ultimately irrational but, excuse me: who uses reason more, developing its nature: the one who has the drive to know and recognize reality in the totality of its factors or the one who abandons the pitch, calling the game early, precluding such a possibility or declaring it impossible? The one who decides to adventure beyond the Pillars of Hercules or the one who gives up on the possibility of crossing them?! I was struck a great deal hearing, on the telephone with some of you, “But, you invited a classmate, but you invited your friends from dance, but have you invited your teammates from soccer to come to the Triduum?” “No, you know, Fr. Fabio, they are not religious... they don’t belong to the Church”... but reason is the same, the heart is the same, they are awaiting an encounter with Jesus! Jesus is not reducible to a *hobby* that some practice and others do not! The difference, therefore, lies in the way in which we conceive of reason and not censoring the »

²⁹ G. Marcel, *Position et approches concrètes du mystère ontologique*, Nauwelaerts 1967, p. 60-61, our translation.

³⁰ G. Marcel, quoted in R. Latourelle, “Le témoignage chrétien,” *Bulletin de Liason du Centre Pedro Arrupe*, vol X, n. 4, December 2005, p. 16, our translation.

³¹ “[...] The fundamental harmony between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of philosophy is once again affirmed. Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents.” (John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio. On the relationship of Faith and reason*, September 14, 1998, 42).

³² “Whereas positivism and scientism ‘refuse to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences’, the Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence. Faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since ‘the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God’ and cannot contradict each other. [...] Evangelization is attentive to scientific advances and wishes to shed on them the light of faith and the natural law so that they will remain respectful of the centrality and supreme value of the human person at every stage of life. All of society can be enriched thanks to this dialogue, which opens up new horizons for thought and expands the possibilities of reason. This too is a path of harmony and peace. [...] Whenever the sciences—rigorously focused on their specific field of inquiry—arrive at a conclusion which reason cannot refute, faith does not contradict it. Neither can believers claim that a scientific opinion which is attractive but not sufficiently verified has the same weight as a dogma of faith. At times some scientists have exceeded the limits of their scientific competence by making certain statements or claims. But here the problem is not with reason itself, but with the promotion of a particular ideology which blocks the path to authentic, serene and productive dialogue.” (Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 242-243).

³³ Benedict XVI, *Speech to the Federal Parliament in Berlin*, September 22, 2011.

» questions that are present in the heart! Ask your adults to tell you the story of the exchange of words between Fr. Giussani and the philosophy teacher during passing time at Berchet High School, all about the idea of reason!

John and Andrew and the other disciples were before a man, concrete, visible, encounterable, who testified something Else from himself! And then, the other persons, the future faithful, who knew—only St. Peter? No, through him, Jesus. And who knew St. Francis of Assisi? Through him, Jesus! And those who saw Mother Teresa, the same! And us?!? Us too!!! This afternoon, you will hear in a reduced form this phrase of St. John Paul II which Fr. Giussani wanted to put in the Booklet of the *Way of the Cross* of the Triduum and that helps us to understand the dynamic of knowledge and of encounter with the Christian fact today, “Perhaps we must add a word on Thomas. The Gospel of John we read today speaks to us of Thomas, an enigmatic figure since, when the others saw the Risen Jesus, he did not see him and says: if I do not see, I will not believe, if I do not touch him, I will not believe. We know very well this category, this type of person, even young ones. These empiricists, fascinated by science, we know them, they are many and they are precious, because they want to touch, want to see. All of this says the seriousness with which they treat reality, knowledge of reality. And these persons are ready, if once Jesus comes and presents Himself to them, if He shows them His wounds, His hands, His side, then they are ready to say, ‘My Lord and my God!’ (Jn 20:28). I think that there are many of your friends, of people your age, who have this empirical mentality or scientific mentality; but if, even once, they could touch Jesus, if they see Him in you, they will say, ‘My Lord and my God!’.”³⁴ Within a human reality that is you, His Divine Presence!!! What great responsibility is entrusted to us by the good Lord! “I am with you every day,” he told us!³⁵

There is an expression used by the Gospel, when the disciples of Emmaus who, thinking back to the encounter with the Risen Lord, exclaim, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way?”³⁶ The heart, which, for the Bible, is the synthetic center of man taken as a whole (of reason, of the will and of the affections) registers a correspondence, something that—from *respondeo*—responds, that is at the level of the questions of our heart, of the *needs* and *evidences* of our heart, as Fr. Giussani says! And such a correspondence, when it happens, is an exceptional event, so much so that, when it happens, you take notice, “The way Jesus treats women, it corresponds to me! The way He treats children also corresponds! The way He treats the people He encounters, it corresponds to me! The way He treats children, it corresponds to me! The way He treats the people He meets, it corresponds to me! I want to stay with my friends the way that He stayed with them!” In the disciples who, day after day, saw how He loved, prayed, healed, in the reason of the disciples was a steadily growing question in their intelligence, in their hearts, “But who is this man? Who is this man to whom even the sea obeys? Who is this man who casts out demons? Who is this man who raised the paralytic? Who is this man who gives sight back to the man born blind? But who is this man?”³⁷... and we, this afternoon, will contemplate Him with our reason and with the affection of our hearts, growing our faith, asking ourselves, “But Who is this man who, unjustly, was crucified, but who are You who, for love of us, even though you are the Son of God, you take upon Yourself our sin, You let Yourself be nailed to the wood of the cross?”. And one can follow uninterruptedly, putting their reason into motion, asking himself: but how is it that this adult who I have next to me, with a family and children, accompanied me to the Triduum? How does my teacher who belongs to *Memoires Domini* live in virginity for eighty years of their life, without a woman or a man, putting their salary in common, giving up any money? What Life sustains their life? The more they stayed with Him, and the more »

³⁴ John Paul II, *Speech to the young people of the Diocese of Rome*, March 24, 1994, 6, our translation.

³⁵ Matt 28:20.

³⁶ Lk 24:32.

³⁷ Cf. Mk 4:41.

» they realized they were entering, they were becoming immersed in real life, because He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life!

Now, with the songs we will hear, let's think back on the steps we have taken up to this point: John and Andrew (and we with them) saw that they were recognized by Jesus, seen by Him like no one had even seen them ("You burst within my heart"). Before, they were still like the blind, but after the surprising Grace of the encounter with Christ, they began to see the profundity of the real, in fact, He had told them: "Come and see" (*Amazing Grace*)!³⁸ You will see the beginning of Another world, already in this world! You will longer see in "two dimensions", but the profundity, the origin, the You who is at the bottom, the origin and the fulfillment of the human race, center of the cosmos and of history, Whom we can call by name, as we speak to a Friend!³⁹

Second Half

Are you tired? A bit! Now we need to enter into the other half of the phrase "the truth will set you free."⁴⁰ But before describing this dynamic, it would be good to be more precise about what it means that we encounter the truth: are we the owners? Pope Benedict XVI *docet*, "No one can say: I have the truth—this is the objection raised—and, rightly so, no one can have the truth. [There are superior realities that 'engulf' inferior ones, it is the Truth that takes possession of us, not we who possess it!] It is the truth that possesses us, it is a living thing! We do not possess it but are held by it. Only if we allow ourselves to be guided and moved by the truth, do we remain in it. Only if we are, with it and in it, pilgrims of truth, then it is in us and for us. I think that we need to learn anew about 'not-having-the-truth.' Just as no one can say: I have children—they are not our possession, they are a gift, and as a gift from God, they are given to us as a responsibility—so we cannot say, I have the truth, but the truth came to us and impels us. We must learn to be moved and led by it. And then it will shine again: if the truth itself leads us and penetrates us."⁴¹ But when did His possession of us take place? The day of your Baptism: 15 or 16 years ago, listen to what happened to you: "'It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal 2:20). I live, but I am no longer I. The 'I,' the essential identity of man—of this man, Paul—has been changed. He still exists, and he no longer exists. He has passed through a 'not' and he now finds himself continually in this 'not': I, but no longer I. [...] This phrase is an expression of what happened at Baptism. My 'I' is taken away from me and is incorporated into a new and greater subject."⁴² The divine nature already united itself with our human nature, this dynamic happened already for every baptized person: the Holy Spirit entered into you, we are possessed by the Truth, but we hold it within ourselves—excuse the image—like a "closed bottle" that we keep conserved without opening it or even forgetting that it is in our cellar! Without begging for Him, without perceiving Him as the Life of our life, without asking Him to take our whole being! What does it mean that the Truth possesses us, more existentially? Listen to how Pope Francis described the change of life of St. Paul. Notice how St. Paul found himself in our same situation: he did not know Jesus like Peter or the other apostles who lived with Him for three years, but he met Him through Stephen the Protomartyr and then in his own personal dialogue with Him, and then in relationship with St. Peter, with whom he bickered a bit, that »

³⁸ Jn 1:39.

³⁹ "A smile, a simple gesture, and not reciting words that do not reach the heart. As I said, talk to Jesus as a friend talks to another friend. It is a grace we must ask for one another: to see Jesus as our friend, as our greatest friend, our faithful friend, who does not blackmail, above all who never abandons us, even when we turn away from him. He remains at the door of our heart. 'No, with you I don't want to know anything,' we say. And he remains silent. He remains close at hand, at heart's reach because he is always faithful" (Pope Francis, *General Audience*, September 28, 2022).

⁴⁰ Jn 8:32.

⁴¹ Benedict XVI, *Homily*, September 2, 2012.

⁴² Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Easter Vigil*, April 15, 2006.

» is, he got to know Jesus through His Body, that is the Church, "In Paul's case, what changed him is not a simple idea or a conviction: it was the encounter with the risen Lord. Do not forget this: it is the encounter with the Lord that changes a life. It was Saul's encounter with the risen Lord that transformed his entire being. Paul's humanity, his passion for God and his glory was not annihilated, but transformed, 'converted' by the Holy Spirit. The only one who can change our hearts is the Holy Spirit. And it was so for every aspect of his life. Just as occurs in the Eucharist: the bread and wine do not disappear, but become the Body and Blood of Christ. Paul's zeal remains, but it becomes the zeal of Christ. It changes direction, but the zeal is the same. The Lord is served with our humanity, with our prerogatives and our characteristics, but what changes everything is not an idea, but rather life itself, as Paul himself says, 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (2Cor 5:17). The encounter with Jesus Christ changes you from within, it makes you another person. If one is in Christ, he or she is a new creation, this is the meaning of being a new creation. To become Christian is not to apply make-up that changes your face, no! If you are Christian, your heart changes, but if you are Christian [only] in appearance, this will not do... made-up Christians will not do. True change is of the heart. And this happened to Paul."⁴³

What happened to St. Paul in the encounter with the Risen Lord? How was he freed? And for us what does it mean, then, to live with this kind of freedom? Then, it will take our entire lives together to discover it but, for the meanwhile, let's hint at it now!

There are many declinations of this liberation but we cannot describe them all: we could dwell on becoming free from the judgment of others that so often enslaves or blocks us; or on freedom from the current fashion of clothes, music or TV series; freedom from fear: go and learn about the life of Blessed Judge Rosario Livatino about whom there was an amazing exhibit last year at the Meeting;⁴⁴ freedom from enemies: read the life of Fr. Pino Puglisi or watch the film about him, who was also killed by the mafia, free from whoever was currently in power for the mafia, so much so that he did not hate anyone, not even his murderers; free to use our time gratuitously: already you all experience this going to Charitable Work every week. Freedom from the performance, which today is academic and tomorrow will be your work: a taste and a passion for knowledge, for building yourself up, for discovering the connections within reality, rather than for making someone happy or for an ephemeral result, much more fascinating is discovering the relationship between the particular and the Whole! Free from instinct and from sentimentalism with which we treat friends and affections: such that the relationship be a washing of each other's feet, more than a self-consumption within a claim or an instinct... ask the adults about two gems from the life of Fr. Giussani about the couple on the street and also the "episode" in which he went with a small group of friends who went to dance, with him present!

But the first "liberation" is becoming free from our images of God. Christian revelation "operates a religious criticism of religions", as my Seminary professors told me. Many of our grandparents grew up with the stories told to them by their parents about this "imaginary" lady who, emigrating, reached America and lived there: at the time, photographs were not as common and communication was difficult... and, therefore, who knows how this old American lady was in real life! The grandkids, therefore, who continually heard about her, went wild trying to imagine her and describe her: "for me, she is this tall, for me she is chubby, for me she is slender, for me she has green eyes, in my mind she has black hair"... each person would have tried to describe her in a certain way and then, finally, at Christmas, the aunt made the long journey from America and came in person to the house and in this way, all of the attempts, mine or of my cousins or of my siblings, to describe her were called into question, »

⁴³ Francis, *General Audience*, March 29, 2023.

⁴⁴ Cf. *Sub Tutela Dei. Il Giudice Rosario Livatino* [The Judge Rosario Livatino], edited by G. Facciolo, M. Filippi, R. Masotto, S. Taormina, C. Torti, C. Tremolada, P. Tosoni, Itaca, Castel Bolognese-Bo 2022.

» into correction, to make way for how the aunt was in real life ("Nice to meet you, this is me! Stop imagining me!"), making the images that we had had of her vanish⁴⁵! I thought that God was in the heights of Heaven, instead, he became a Child and His Body is the Church; I believed He was a great "puppet master", a "director/cinematographer" who had already written the script of my life and that I needed only to recite the part already assigned to me, instead God is already in you⁴⁶ and is a protagonist alongside of you in the story that you write in communion, responding to your vocation; I believed that it was the Father to send His Son to the cross, instead the Father was with the Son, sustaining Him during His trials, such was the communion with the Father and with the Holy Spirit that held up the Son on the cross and during His descent into Hell. I had reduced Him to a series of rules to respect, instead, He came to be a collaborator in my Joy, so that it might be complete! I believed that He was insurance for my life, instead he became a travel companion, sustaining me as I carry my cross. Presenting Him just as He is purifies our images of Him!

But I would like to dwell more, given that it is the Triduum and given what we will participate in this afternoon, on becoming free from sin and from the consequences of sin, that is, death. Once one realizes this and becomes aware of it, moved, of the work done by the Trinity, here he builds the certainty of his own life. I, by myself, (as we saw yesterday evening) how could I ever free myself from sin and from its consequences, that is, from the condition of death? I, who am only a limited creature, finite, how could I last forever, give myself infinitude by myself? "Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span?"⁴⁷ If I am weak, if I sin, how can I get myself out of that swamp? Therefore, let's go over the Catechism from elementary school: God is life. The Communion of man with God is life. What is mortal sin? The rupture of communion with God.⁴⁸ Therefore, the one who commits mortal sin, breaking the relationship and separating Himself from God who is Life, finds Himself already in a situation of death, already undergoing the consequences of sin. "For God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him. But by the envy of the devil, death entered the world, and they who are in his possession experience it."⁴⁹ In fact, the devil, jealous of God and of His Love for His creatures, seeks in every way to separate us from Him, to distance us from Him, to lead us to break our relationship with Him; furthermore, those who commit a mortal sin are already experiencing death, because they separate themselves from the Life that is God. Therefore, we can see that everything is on its head: there can be living biological organisms who are "already dead" and others who are dead biologically who, instead, are as alive as can be because they are in communion with God (the saints, our relatives already in the Heavenly Church). And so, to win over death and sin, our Lord Jesus Christ, what did he see fit to do? Pay close attention: Christ, who is God, and does not know sin, took our sins upon us, he loaded our sin upon Himself to free us, to free me! It's as if I had a sickness and my father told me, "I'll become sick for you, I'll take »

⁴⁵ "The God of the philosophers is totally different from how the philosophers themselves imagined Him, without, however, ceasing to be what they had discovered; they came to understand that one understands Him only when he realizes that He is the authentic truth and the foundation of all being, inextricably the God of faith, the God of men" (J. Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004, p. 126).

⁴⁶ "What follows this new experience of God is the experience of the Spirit, of the presence of God in us, in our intimacy. This Spirit can be identified neither with the Father, nor with the Son, but neither does He form a third between God and us: He is, instead, the modality with which God Himself gives Himself to us, in which He enters into us, so that He is in man, while remaining always, even in this inhabitation, infinitely beyond" (*ibidem*, p. 142).

⁴⁷ Matt 6:26-27.

⁴⁸ Cf. "Mortal sin is a radical possibility of human freedom, as is love itself. It results in the loss of charity and the privation of sanctifying grace, that is, of the state of grace. If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell, for our freedom has the power to make choices for ever, with no turning back. However, although we can judge that an act is in itself a grave offense, we must entrust judgment of persons to the justice and mercy of God." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1861). "For a sin to be mortal, three conditions must together be met: 'Mortal sin is sin whose object is grave matter and which is also committed with full knowledge and deliberate consent.'" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1857).

⁴⁹ Wis 2:24.

» the illness and suffer it myself, suffer its consequences”, to nail sin to the wood of the cross⁵⁰ and to suffer even the consequences of sin, that is, death, to go down into Hell and defeat death on its own turf,⁵¹ and rise again from there! The devil already “had a taste” of victory over Him, of having destroyed Him on the cross, of having buried Him in the waste bin of the scrapheap of the dead... instead, tomorrow, we will see the power of the Risen One!⁵² Instead, we are here today, after 2023 years, children of His resurrection!!! Exactly from this victory over sin and death, a story of Another world was generated in this world, a companionship not only with the 3600 present, but with all the Saints, with the Church Triumphant: in my study or in my bedroom, you will find many little statues and holy cards, they are not a devotionism or antiques, but they are the faces of persons alive in Christ to contemplate and from whose communion I draw strength, in that they are friends and companions of a path they have already walked: St. Pampuri, St. Rita, St. John Paul II, St. Augustine, St. Thomas, St. John the Apostle, Blessed Rolando Rivi, Fr. Pino Puglisi, St. Agatha, St. Omobono, the martyrs of the persecution in Albania and in Bosnia & Herzegovina, of Romania, St. Giuseppe Moscati, a saint who was a doctor, and who wrote a phrase that is perfect for this Triduum when he said: “Love the truth, appear as you are, and without affectation and without fear and without human respect. Even if the truth costs you persecution, accept it; and if it means anguish, endure it. And if for the sake of truth you should have to sacrifice yourself and your life, then be strong in your sacrifice.”⁵³ How would Jesus face that circumstance? How would St. Gianna Beretta Molla face it? How did Moscati live out his work? How did the parents of St. Therese of Lisieux live their paternity and maternity? Fr. Giussani loved to repeat, “Search every day for the faces of the saints and find rest in their words;”⁵⁴ “As for the saints in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight” (Psalm 15)! “Not the divo, but the Saint is the happy man, the true man”.⁵⁵ How many saints there are among our friends, let’s help each other to find out! The divo is boringly unsatisfied with his own fame and achievements (when he has them!), the Saint is surprised, joyful, and grateful to be, without deserving, an instrument of salvation for others, “I am nothing but the little pencil in the hands of God. It is He who writes. It is He who thinks. It is He who decides. I repeat: I am nothing but a little pencil” as Mother Teresa of Calcutta used to say about herself. Let’s understand, therefore, that this history of communion with the truth and with freedom, that continues, this encounter, introduces us into a Communion that, at the same time, is temporal and superhistorical! Through Communion, Liberation. And so, let’s see what happens to »

⁵⁰ Cf. “Consequently, St. Peter can formulate the apostolic faith in the divine plan of salvation in this way: ‘You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers [...] with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake’ (1Pt 1:18-20). Man’s sins, following on original sin, are punishable by death. By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God ‘made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2Cor 5:21).” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 602). “Jesus did not experience reprobation as if he himself had sinned. But in the redeeming love that always united him to the Father, he assumed us in the state of our waywardness of sin, to the point that he could say in our name from the cross: ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’ (Mk 15:34). Having thus established him in solidarity with us sinners, God ‘did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all’ (Rom 8:32), so that we might be ‘reconciled to God by the death of his Son’ (Rom 5:10).” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 603).

⁵¹ “Now since the children share in blood and flesh, he likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14).

⁵² “The descent into hell brings the Gospel message of salvation to complete fulfillment. This is the last phase of Jesus’ messianic mission, a phase which is condensed in time but vast in its real significance: the spread of Christ’s redemptive work to all men of all times and all places, for all who are saved have been made sharers in the redemption.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 634). “Christ went down into the depths of death so that ‘the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God (Jn 5:25), and those who hear will live.’ Jesus, ‘the Author of life,’ by dying destroyed ‘him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and [delivered] all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage’ (Heb 2:14-15). Henceforth the risen Christ holds ‘the keys of Death and Hades’ (Rev 1:18), so that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth’ (Phil 2:10). ‘He has gone to search for Adam, our first father, as for a lost sheep. Greatly desiring to visit those who live in darkness and in the shadow of death [...] I order you, O sleeper, to awake. I did not create you to be a prisoner in hell. Rise from the dead, for I am the life of the dead’.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 635).

⁵³ Note written by Giuseppe Moscati on October 17, 1922.

⁵⁴ *Didaché* IV, 2.

⁵⁵ Cf. Chapter 2 of L. Giussani, “Religious Awareness in Modern Man,” *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 1 (1998), p. 108-117.

» those who experience the encounter and the knowledge of Christ that frees us from sin and from the consequences of sin, that is, death and the fear of death, thanks to the testimony of a girl who speaks to us about illness and about the birth into Heaven of her mother:

In this last month, an infinitude of miracles has happened that have brought me to the certainty to belong to Another; to the certainty that my life and my heart are made, created, moved and wanted by God. The principal miracle that filled me with this certainty was the death of my mother. She had, for many years, been affected by an autoimmune disorder in her liver; and had been waiting for a transplant for a year. At the beginning of the year; she suffered a first failed transplant, and then a second, which initially worked but, in the end, brought about complications that could not be resolved until the moment when she finally embraced Christ. In these days of passion, He was always present and clear. Beginning from the first day of the transplant. When I heard that it had not worked, as soon as I got back from school, I felt the need to run into a church and there to become desperate and to shout out all the evil that was seizing my heart: I wanted my mother alive or else, if that was not possible, I did not want to be left alone. And I was listened to, I was never alone. The same afternoon, a few friends from Rimini came to my house, the evening for a rosary there were 300 people on a video connection and in the successive days, a companionship came together around us, true and alive, that stopped me from denying the existence of God. God became flesh for me in those faces. After three days of sedation, they woke my mamma, and she, once she was informed about the situation, made the second great miracle happen: she remembered to belong to Another; and she entrusted her life into His hands. In an audio recording she said: whether I live or whether I die, I am His, I belong to Christ. "I accept to do His will, which is pretty big, but He went on the cross for me and I have to also concede this. This is the granitic certainty of my life." Those days, which should have been the most painful of my life, in reality, were the most beautiful because I knew that she was in the hands of One who knows what He is doing and that whatever happened, He was going to win over evil and would embrace my cry like the first day. When my mom died, everything became even more clear. In my human desperation, I was called, and I couldn't help smiling, being grateful, loving my life and her death. Let me be clear; however, that this certainty is not a once and for all thing, because as soon as I returned to daily life, school and my new duties, I fell back into anger and sadness. In three seconds, I put my own destiny on my back and tried to do everything by myself. But my heart cried out, and He responded yet again, and again, He reminded me that I had nothing in my hands, saving me through the only thing that I had not prepared myself, an unexpected encounter. I hunger for Christ, for the fullness that only He can give me, and I always have hunger, in every instant of my existence, sive vivo, sive morior. This certainty is not comparable or interchangeable for anything in the world, not even my mother, and I desire to have her forever.

I do not think that there is much to add: Christ, encountered, known because He is present in the reality of His People and His Body that is the Church, by way of baptism, frees us from sin, from death, from fear, already now in this life He makes us participants in His Resurrection.

Today, in the afternoon, then, may your eyes be wide open and your hearts and freedom dilated, so that in the *Way of the Cross* we might contemplate all of the dynamics I've described up to now, all of the work of salvation: from His incarnation within the history of the people of Israel, to His passion, to His crucifixion and to His descent into Hell. I'll recall your attention, then, yet again, to silence, above all, in the walk between one station and another, keep safe in your heart what the Holy Spirit moves in it, provoked by listening to the songs, to the readings and to the meditations.

Thank you all so much for your attention!