



**"WHOEVER IS IN CHRIST
IS A NEW CREATION"**

**EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION**



RIMINI 2011

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English translation by Sheila Beatty

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Vatican City, April 29, 2011

Reverend
Fr. Julián Carrón
President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

On the occasion of the spiritual exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” the Sovereign Pontiff expresses his affectionate regard, and as he hopes that this gathering will kindle renewed missionary ardor in the service of the Gospel, he invokes a bountiful effusion of celestial light and sends you and the participants his apostolic blessing.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State of His Holiness

Friday Evening, April 29

During entrance and exit: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,

Concerto for Piano no. 27 in B Flat Major, K 595

András Schiff, piano

Sándor Vegh - Camerata Academica Salzburg, Decca

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón

At the beginning of this gesture of ours of the Spiritual Exercises, I believe we feel no greater need than that of asking, praying for the openness to conversion. Each of us knows very well how we resist this conversion, how often our heart is hardened, how much we are unwilling deep down to let ourselves be attracted by Him. The more we are aware of this, of this war we are engaged in, and of our fragility and weakness, the more we feel the need to ask the Spirit that He be the One to wash what is soiled, water what is arid, and heal what is wounded.

Come Holy Spirit

Greetings to all of you present and all the friends following by satellite in different countries, and those who will participate with the recorded talks of the Spiritual Exercises in future weeks.

I'll begin by reading the telegram sent by His Holiness:

“On the occasion of the spiritual exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme ‘Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,’ the Sovereign Pontiff expresses his affectionate regard, and as he hopes that this gathering will kindle renewed missionary ardor in the service of the Gospel, he invokes a bountiful effusion of celestial light and sends you and the participants his apostolic blessing.”

“Thus, whoever is in Christ is a new creation,”¹ because Christ is something that is happening to me. Let us try to identify with the disciples after Easter. What prevailed in their hearts, in their eyes, in their self-awareness, if not His living presence? It was so evident for them that they could not rip it away. It was a Presence that overcame any doubt, any shadow: it imposed

¹ 2 Cor 5:17. “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”

itself. Christ was something that was happening to them. He was not a doctrine, a list of things to do, a sentiment. Yes, He was an external presence, different, but one that permeated their life. The Resurrection of Christ, His living presence, introduced a newness that made life finally life, filling it with an intensity they could not generate by themselves. It was so evident that they called it “newness of life.”² And who was living it? A new creature. Newness of life—but we can simply say life in its fullest sense, that reveals itself for the first time with all its intensity—so defined their persons that the Christians were called “the living.”³ What an experience they had, and what an experience the others watched in them, such that they defined them “the living”! This is what Christ introduced into reality forevermore: a possibility of living life at a level previously absolutely unknown for us, a “more,” and Saint Paul found no other way to express this fact than the sentence we have chosen as the title of these Spiritual Exercises.

This is the newness that the Resurrection of Christ introduces. It is not a return to the previous old life; it is a life that implies a leap, an increase of life unknown before. It is so real, but at the same time so beyond any imagining, that the only thing one can do is witness to it in action, communicate it through a radiance of face, an intensity of gaze, the relationship with reality, the way of treating everything. It is not something learned first and then applied: it was unknown before, and it would have been impossible to apply something unknown. It was a surprise. They began to understand why Christ made it happen: the Event made them experience the newness. “And it happened that, while He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him...”⁴ It was Jesus who constantly generated it: “Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?’”⁵ It was something—Christ, Christ risen—that was happening in them, so much so that it made their hearts burn within!

Fr. Giussani says, “The mystery of the Resurrection is the culmination and the peak of intensity of our Christian self-awareness, therefore of the new self-awareness of myself, of the way I look at everyone and everything: the Resurrection is the keystone of the newness of relationship between me

² 2 Rom 6:4. “We were indeed buried with Him through Baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.”

³ Rom 6:11. “Consequently, you too must think of yourselves as [being] dead to sin and living for God in Christ Jesus.”

⁴ Lk 24:30-31.

⁵ Lk 24:32.

and myself, between me and people, between me and things. But this is the thing we most hide from. It is the thing most—so to speak, even respectfully—left aside, respectfully left in its aridity of word perceived intellectually, perceived as idea, precisely because it is the culmination of the challenge of the Mystery to our measure.”⁶ Who of us would not desire such intensity of life? But if we compare what the disciples experienced that week of Easter with what we have lived, we would all acknowledge the distance, the abysmal distance that separates us from the experience they had. This also holds for participation in the Liturgy: for them it was the moment of recognizing Him (their eyes were opened and they recognized Him), and for us it is often reduced to rite.

But this distance in us—this pain that imposes itself—was overcome in the Apostles, and this is the hope for each of us. What we expect and await was a fact in them, has already happened in history. This newness has already been an experience in humanity, in certain people, and can also become ours if we are willing to let ourselves be generated through the modality that has seized us: the charism. In order for this to happen, we must be willing to continue on the road indicated by Fr. Giussani. In order for Christianity to become so “ours” that it overcomes that distance separating us from the experience of the Apostles and fills life with that newness that overcomes all aridity, we must continue the journey we are on, the reasons of which we explained on January 26th, at the presentation of *The Religious Sense*.

Indicative of the problem that blocks us is the question that often, in many ways, is coming out, and that becomes fiercer as we do School of Community: Why do we insist that Christ came to awaken and educate us to the religious sense, that the nature of the Christian experience is seen by the fact that it is able to awaken the sense of mystery in the “I,” to awaken the human question? Would it not be easier to speak of Christ without all this dogged attention to the awakening of the “I,” all this insistence on what we have discovered in ourselves? You have repeatedly asked me, “Where do you want to bring us? Isn’t this road Fr. Giussani has us following a complication?”

It seems I am hearing today the same identical question Fr. Giussani was asked by a student. He himself recounts it: “Now people no longer perceive the correspondence between the Christian proposal in its originality, the Christian event, and everyday life. When you try hard to make it

⁶ Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity with Christ]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, 2008, pp. 71-72.

understood, they say, ‘But you’re so complicated, you’re so complicated!’ In high school, when I dictated what you study in School of Community, I had in class the son of Manzù, who had a priest he always went to. This priest stirred him up against what he read in the notes from my lessons, and told him, ‘See, this complicates, while, instead, religion is simple.’ In other words, ‘the reasons complicate’—and how many would say the same!—‘the search for the reasons complicates.’ Instead, it illuminates! This mindset is the reason Christ is no longer an authority, but a sentimental object, and God is a boogeyman and not a friend.”⁷

Fr. Giussani knew very well where this apparently less complicated modality of living the faith could lead: “At first sight, Italy in the 1950s seemed to enjoy an ideal situation for the spreading of Catholic thought and ethics: the parishes were efficiently run and offered catechism courses ‘for all seasons;’ religion courses were required in all grades; tradition was kept alive—at least formally—in the values transmitted by the family; there was still a reluctance about accepting an indiscriminate criticism of religion or irreligious information; there was still a fair attendance at Sunday Mass [now, 60 years later, everything has changed greatly] and so on. And yet, an observer would have been struck by at least three factors in his first contact with Italian high school students. First, there was no profound motivation for belief. [...] Second, faith was irrelevant to social behavior in general and to behavior in the school in particular, and its irrelevance was taken for granted. Third, there was a general climate that favored skepticism...”⁸

For this reason, the Jewish thinker Heschel is right: “It is customary to blame secular science and anti-religious philosophy for the eclipse of religion in modern society, but it would be more honest to blame religion for its own defeats. Religion declined not because it was confuted, but because it became irrelevant, monotonous, oppressive, and insipid.”⁹ This irrelevance, this insipidness of faith can also be found in a situation like that described before by Fr. Giussani, in which religiosity was omnipresent, or in that imagined by Nietzsche, where religion was widespread, but was incapable of awakening the “I.” “Nietzsche has warned us a long time ago that God’s *death* is perfectly compatible with ‘*bourgeois religiosity*’ [...]. He did not think for a moment that religion was finished. What he questioned was

⁷ L. Giussani, “*Tu*” (*o dell’amicizia*) [“*You*” (*or, On Friendship*)], Bur, Milan, 1997, pp. 40-41.

⁸ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2001, pp. 31-32.

⁹ A.J. Heschel, *To Grow in Wisdom: An Anthology of Abraham Joshua Heschel*. 1990, Madison Books, by Joshua Heschel, Jacob Neusner, and Noam M.M. Neusner. [Translated from Italian into English by *Traces*.]

whether religion can move a person and open up one's mind [...]. Religion has become a consumer's good, a form of entertainment among others, a source of comfort for the weak [...] or an emotional service station, meant to satisfy certain irrational needs that it can address better than anything else. One-sided as it may sound, Nietzsche's opinion is right on."¹⁰

A Christianity incapable of moving the person, of kindling the human, has caused disinterest in Christianity itself, making it become irrelevant. In many cases, it was not a rebellion against the Christian proposal; in most cases, Christianity simply lost its interest, became irrelevant. This shows that the awakening of the "I" that is the religious sense is not just a useful step leading to faith: it is decisive in every moment. It is the true verification of faith. Do we think that we will act differently from the others without this verification? Or will we end up like everyone else? Won't we, too, end up disinterested in the Christian proposal if we do not travel the road Fr. Giussani proposes to us?

In a concise line, Giussani summarizes the challenge we have before us: "I came to believe deeply that only a faith arising from life experience and confirmed by it (and, therefore, relevant to life's needs) could be sufficiently strong to survive in a world where *everything* pointed in the opposite direction..."¹¹ Here is the decisive point: the need to focus on an experience that can hold up. For this reason, in the passage I have just quoted, Fr. Giussani offers us a triple key for understanding whether we are on the right road: that faith is a present experience (not the story of facts you subsequently stick something on to), a judged experience, not a repetition of formulas or sentences or comments; that faith find confirmation of its usefulness for life in present experience, in experience itself (otherwise we will always need a supplement of certainty "from outside"); and that faith is able to hold up in a world where everything says the opposite.

Only if we realize what a battle we are engaged in can we take seriously the work we are doing and understand the reasons why Fr. Giussani did what he did. All the reasonableness of faith is here: in its capacity to exalt the human in order to grasp the pertinence of faith to the needs of life. Christianity and humanity share the same lot!

This present experience of faith is decisive so that the newness introduced into history and our life by Baptism can endure, can last in us as

¹⁰ E.L. Fortin, "The Regime of Separatism: Theoretical Considerations on the Separation of Church and State," in *Human Rights, Virtue, and the Common Good*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Lanham (MD), 1997, p. 8.

¹¹ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., p. 11.

awareness, as the Pope reminded us during the Chrism Mass: “In his great baptismal catechesis, Saint Peter applied this privilege and this commission of Israel to the entire community of the baptized, proclaiming: ‘You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people’ (*1 Pet 2:9*). Baptism and Confirmation are an initiation into this people of God that spans the world; the anointing that takes place in Baptism and Confirmation is an anointing that confers this priestly ministry toward mankind. Christians are a priestly people for the world. Christians should make the living God visible to the world, they should bear witness to Him and lead people toward Him. When we speak of this task in which we share by virtue of our Baptism, it is no reason to boast. It poses a question to us that makes us both joyful and anxious: are we truly God’s shrine in and for the world? Do we open up the pathway to God for others or do we rather conceal it? Have not we—the people of God—become to a large extent a people of unbelief and distance from God? Is it perhaps the case that the West, the heartlands of Christianity, are tired of their faith, bored by their history and culture, and no longer wish to know faith in Jesus Christ? We have reason to cry out at this time to God: ‘Do not allow us to become a “non-people”! Make us recognize You again! Truly, You have anointed us with Your love, You have poured out Your Holy Spirit upon us. Grant that the power of Your Spirit may become newly effective in us, so that we may bear joyful witness to Your message!’ For all the shame we feel over our failings, we must not forget that today too there are radiant examples of faith, people who give hope to the world through their faith and love. When Pope John Paul II is beatified on May 1st, we shall think of him, with hearts full of thankfulness, as a great witness to God and to Jesus Christ in our day, as a man filled with the Holy Spirit.”¹²

Blessed John Paul II is an exceptional witness for facing these days, and shows us that it is possible to live as Christians today. We have evident reasons for feeling the event of the beatification of his person particularly close, because of the history that united us to him, so that we can respond to what he himself urged us: “When a movement is recognized by the Church, it becomes a special instrument for a personal and ever-new adherence to the mystery of Christ. Don’t ever let the woodworm of habit, routine, and old age lodge in your participation [the exact opposite of new life!]. Continually renew the discovery of the charism that fascinated you and

¹² Benedict XVI, Chrism Mass, April 21, 2011.

it will lead you more powerfully and make you servers of that one power who is Christ the Lord!”¹³ How can we not feel this call of his as particularly vivid in a moment like this, that coincides with his beatification? Who among us does not hear these words as a particularly pressing call to conversion? We can respond adequately to this charge only if we continue to follow the charisma that fascinated us, as we will try to do during these Spiritual Exercises.

Let us ask John Paul II and Fr. Giussani to make us open, at the beginning of this gesture, to the grace of Christ who continues to come to us, to be able to become—like them—witnesses.

A gesture of these dimensions is impossible without the contribution and sacrifice of each of us, in our attention to the announcements, to silence, and to directions. Each of these things is an immediate modality of our prayer to Christ to have mercy on our nothingness, to keep us from becoming a non-people—because this is the battle, friends. It is not a matter of putting something in order, because the risk is that we lose interest, that we become a non-people, like many around us. And we all know the need we have for silence, which enables us to allow everything we hear to soak in to the bone, and to make this silence become a cry, a prayer to Christ to have mercy on us, on our nothingness.

¹³ John Paul II, *To Priests of the Communion and Liberation Movement*, September 12, 1985.

HOLY MASS

HOMILY BY FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

“This was now the third time Jesus was revealed to His disciples after being raised from the dead” (*Jn* 21:14). Practically every day, His physical presence, real, this new life, had erupted into the life of the Apostles, and yet that evening they were sad; that night was barren. Above all, Peter thought he could enter into relationship with Him, with that new presence of the Lord, according to what he already knew, according to what he was capable of doing. “I am going fishing.” Nothing was happening, a total barrenness.

Only the initiative of Christ, only the real happening of the newness of His presence throws wide open again all of our humanity. But there is a detail: this being grasped by Christ, by *Him*, not by our images, not by what we already know, not even by the richness of the patrimony of so many years of history with Him in the Movement, this being seized by Christ happens, for Peter and the others, through he who lived deep down the drama of his humanity, who was the most attentive: John was the first to become aware of His presence. His cry tears through our somnolence, our presumption, our distraction: “It’s the Lord!” For us, Fr. Giussani is this; the charism is this—the concrete possibility of being grabbed again, but grabbed again now, because there is a voice that cries now. The Sea of Tiberias or the Adriatic Sea... it is the same; there is no difference. It is a face, a hand that indicates to us this Presence that seizes us one by one. “It’s the Lord!”

Let us ask Our Lady for the grace for each of us not to sleep and not to resist.

Saturday Morning, April 30

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra no. 23 in A Major, KV 488

Wilhelm Kempff, piano

Ferdinand Leitner - Bamberger Symphoniker, Decca

Fr. Pino. Whoever is in Christ is a new creature, because Christ is something that is happening to me now.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

The “Eternal Mystery of Our Being”

If we had asked Our Lady how she began to conceive of herself after the Annunciation of the angel, she would have used words similar to these of Fr. Giussani: “The entire personality of Our Lady flows from the instant in which she was addressed, ‘Hail, Mary,’ when she perceived that sign, that call. From the instant of the Annunciation she assumed her place in the universe and before eternity. A totally new spring of morality was established in her life. A profound, mysterious sentiment of herself flowed forth: a veneration of herself, a sense of greatness equal only to the sense of her nothingness, which she had never thought of this way.”¹⁴

Who of us would not like to live entirely dominated by this sentiment of self, so profound and mysterious, by this sense of greatness, the more one is conscious of one’s nothingness? And if the same question were put to Andrew after the encounter with Jesus, he could have looked at his wife and children to intuit what was happening to him and had filled him with silence on the road back: “And when they went home that evening, as the day came to an end—probably walking most of the road in silence, because they had never spoken to each other as they did in that great silence in which an Other was speaking,

¹⁴ L. Giussani, *Tutta la terra desidera il Tuo volto* [*All the Earth Desires Your Face*], San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo, 2000, pp. 146-147.

in which He went on speaking and echoing within them—and they reached home, Andrew’s wife saw him and said, ‘What’s happened to you Andrew?’, and the children, too, looked at their father astonished: it was him, yes, it was him, but it was ‘more’ him; he was different. It was himself, but he was different. And when—as we said once with an image that is easy to bring to mind because it is so realistic—she asked him, ‘What’s happened?’, he embraced her. Andrew embraced his wife and kissed his children—it was him, but he had never embraced her like that! It was like the dawn of a new, different humanity, a truer humanity. It was as if he was saying, ‘At last!’, without believing his own eyes. But it was too clear for him not to believe his own eyes.’¹⁵

What human intensity! Who would not like to feel all the vibration of such a new humanity, in order to be able to embrace his own wife this way? And what wife would not like to be embraced in this way? Not a discourse! To be embraced in this way! Not the husband who repeats the correct discourse to her, but who makes her experience what he says, embracing her in this way! What child would not want to be looked at by his father when everything is already beginning to decline because of the normal logic of life, and say, amazed, ‘It’s him, but it’s ‘more’ him now than when I was young.’

But some might think that Our Lady and Andrew could experience the other world in this world because it was the first time, and that then they would experience what everyone does: everything would flatten. This is like a confirmation of our skepticism: it was this way, but then everything declines. We have all seen—all of us with our own eyes—that it does not end up this way! Who does not remember the power of Fr. Giussani’s testimony in Saint Peter’s Square toward the end of his life?! “‘What is man that You should keep him in mind, mortal man that You care for him?’” (*Ps* 8:5). No question in life has ever struck me like this one. There has been only one Man in the world who could answer me, by asking another question: ‘What would it profit a man if he gain the world, and then lose himself? Or what could a man give in exchange for himself?’ (*Matt* 16:26). I was never asked a question that took my breath away so much as this question of Christ! No woman ever heard another voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb, with such a wholly positive affirmation of its destiny; only the voice of the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements. No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this! Only Christ takes my

¹⁵ L. Giussani, *Il tempo si fa breve [Time Is Short]*, Esercizi della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione. Appunti dalle meditazioni, [Notes from the meditations], Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 1994, pp. 23-25.

humanity so completely to heart. This is the wonder expressed by Dionysius the Areopagite (5th century): ‘Who could ever speak to us of the love that Christ has for man, overflowing with peace?’ I’ve been repeating these words to myself for more than 50 years!”¹⁶

Each of us can make the comparison between our own human experience and what these women and men testify to us. Not to feel it as the *n*th remonstrance that we are not up to snuff—because of our habitual tendency to reduce everything to moralistic terms—but in order to realize what we are missing. We are missing this intensity, this vibration! Each of us knows that this is true; we have experienced it in certain moments of life. But what distance, so often, between them and us! This is anything but living with bated breath before Christ; what reduction we so often find in ourselves! We are together, friends, to accompany each other, to support each other, to witness reciprocally to each other that in the midst of our limits—the limits have nothing to do with it; let’s stop it; they have nothing to do with it!—it is possible to live this way.

Now, the first thing to understand, with the irreplaceable companionship of Fr. Giussani, is why we are reduced to this state.

1. The confusion of the “I”

“Behind the word ‘I’ today there is a great confusion, and yet it is of prime interest to understand what *my subject* is. In fact, my subject is at the center, at the root of every action of mine (thought is an action, too). Action is the dynamic with which I enter into relationship with any person or thing. If I neglect my own ‘I,’ it is impossible for relationships with life to be mine, for life itself (the sky, my spouse, my friend, music) to be mine [...]: by now the very word ‘I’ evokes for the great majority of people something confused and drifting, a term used for convenience with a purely indicative value (like ‘bottle’ or ‘glass’). But behind the little word there no longer vibrates anything that powerfully and clearly indicates what type of concept and sentiment a person has of the value of his or her own ‘I.’ For this reason it can be said that we live in times in which a civilization seems to be ending: in fact, a civilization is evolved in the degree to which it promotes the emergence and clarification of the value of the individual ‘I.’ We are in

¹⁶ L. Giussani, “In the Simplicity of my Heart I Have Gladly Given You Everything” in L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. ix-x.

an age that promotes, instead, a great confusion about the content of the word ‘I.’”¹⁷

This is described—to give an example among many—in this passage from Philip Roth’s novel, *The Counterlife*: “All I can tell you with certainty is that I, for one, have no self, and that I am unwilling or unable to perpetrate upon myself the joke of a self. It certainly does strike me as a joke about my self. What I have instead is a variety of impersonations I can do, and not only of myself—a troupe of players that I have internalized, a permanent company of actors that I can call upon when a self is required, an ever-evolving stock of pieces and parts that forms my repertoire. But I certainly have no self independent of my imposturing, artistic efforts to have one. Nor would I want one. I am a theatre and nothing more than a theatre.”¹⁸

An experience that does not respond to this widespread mentality, even if we attend a great number of meetings and take part in many initiatives, is defeated! It is the eclipse of humanity, as Heschel says: “The inability to perceive our value [...] is in and of itself a terrible punishment,”¹⁹ that we pay the price of every day.

Why has this happened? “The first observation at the beginning of every serious inquiry about the constitution of one’s own subject is that the confusion that dominates today behind the fragile mask (almost a *flatus vocis*) of our ‘I’ comes in part from an influx external to our person. It is important to keep clearly in mind the decisive influence on us of what the Gospel calls ‘the world’ and that shows itself to be the enemy of the stable, dignified, and consistent formation of a human personality. There is a very strong pressure by the world that surrounds us (through the mass media, or also school and politics) that influences and ends up hampering—as a prejudice—any attempt to become aware of one’s own ‘I.’”²⁰

What is this external influence, this “world”? It is the powers that be—as Fr. Giussani said on so many occasions—that do not remain outside us (as Bernanos says, speaking of the dominant opinion: “Before power, energies wear down, characters become impoverished, sincerities lose their clarity”²¹), but on the contrary, penetrate us so deeply that we become strangers to ourselves. Would that it were only an external per-

¹⁷ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1995, pp. 9-10.

¹⁸ P. Roth, *The Counterlife*, Vintage Books, 1986, pp. 324-325.

¹⁹ A.J. Heschel, *Who Is Man?*, Stanford University Press, 1965. [Translated into English from Italian by *Traces*.]

²⁰ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano*, op. cit., p. 10.

²¹ G. Bernanos, *Un uomo solo [A Man Alone]*, La Locusta, Vicenza, 1997, p. 41.

secution, and that our self-awareness remained intact! “What surrounds us, the dominant mentality, the invasive culture, power, achieves an extraneousness from ourselves [it tears out our soul!]: it is as if there were no longer any real evidence other than fashion, because fashion is a project of the powers that be.”²²

Let’s listen again to Fr. Giussani: “The common mentality, created by the mass media and the whole network of instruments held by the powers that be—and that is continually strengthening, so much so that John Paul II had cause to say that the danger of our era is the abolition of man by the powers that be—alters the sense of self, the sentiment of self, or, more precisely, atrophies the religious sense, atrophies the heart, or, better, totally anesthetizes it (an anesthesia that can become a coma, but it is an anesthesia).”²³

The sign of this alteration of the sense of self, of this extraneousness, is the consequent reading we do of our needs. For this reason, Fr. Giussani warns us, “We must be very careful, because all too easily we do not start from our true experience; that is, from our experience in its entirety and authenticity. We often identify our experience with partial impressions, truncating it, as often happens with affective matters, when we fall in love or dream about the future. Even more often we confuse our experience [even if it is always on our lips] with the prejudices or schemes that we absorb from our environment perhaps unawares [they “coincide” so much with ourselves that we think they’re ours—this is how far the influence of the powers that be reaches in us!]. Therefore, instead of opening up to that attitude of expectation, sincere attention, and dependence that our experience suggests and fervently demands, we impose categories and explanations that constrict and distress our experience, while presuming to resolve it. [We impose schemas on experience: we recount facts that bring no clarity, only comments, which means that there is no experience.] The myth that “scientific progress one day will solve all our needs” is the modern formula of this presumption, a wild and repugnant presumption, because it does not consider or even know our real needs. It refuses to observe our experience clearly and to accept what it means to be human, with all the needs that this implies. For this reason modern civilization causes us to move blindly between this desperate presumption and darkest despair.”²⁴ The French

²² L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro [The I is Reborn in an Encounter]* (1986-1987), Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 182.

²³ *Ibid.* pp. 364-365.

²⁴ L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2006, p. 54.

scholar Rey says, “We are so used to this misery that most of the time we no longer even feel it”²⁵—we settle.

But Giussani warns us that this influence of the powers that be is in direct proportion to our impotence. Why does he say this? Because “no human achievement can be attributed to mere outside circumstances alone, since man’s freedom, albeit made fragile, remains as the indelible mark of God’s creature.”²⁶ Original sin weakened my “I,” but I remain a creature of God; I do not view myself as a piece of the mechanism of circumstances of the powerful. This means that the powers that be have such a strong influence on us also because of our complicity. What could seem like a further accusation by Giussani actually becomes a resource for vindication for us. The human person is not definitively defeated. For this reason, he says, “We don’t talk about the powerful because we are afraid; we speak of them because we have to wake up from our slumber. The strength of the powers that be is our impotence. [...] We do not fear the powerful; we fear people who sleep and therefore enable them to do what they want with them. I say that the powers that be make everyone fall asleep, as much as possible. Their great system, the great method is that of sending to sleep, anesthetizing, or, better yet, atrophying. Atrophying what? Atrophying the heart of the human person, our needs and desires, imposing an image of desire or need different from that boundless impetus of the heart. And thus it raises people who are limited, enclosed, imprisoned, already half cadaver—that is, impotent.”²⁷

As the Pope says in his very recent book, “Across the centuries, it is the drowsiness of the disciples that opens up possibilities for the power of the Evil One.”²⁸

How can we know that the powers that be are wrong? “You know what lies in the human heart, because it lies in you. What is the criterion for understanding the truth about the human person (see *The Religious Sense*)? It is reflection upon yourself in action [not a correct, clean discourse!]. There is nothing else!”²⁹ There is nothing else!

But as Hannah Arendt reminds us, “Unfortunately, it seems to be much easier to condition human behavior and to make people conduct themselves

²⁵ O. Rey, *Itinéraire de l'égarement Du rôle de la science dans l'absurdité contemporaine*. [*Directions from Bewilderment: The Role of Science in Contemporary Absurdity*], Seuil, Paris, 2003, p. 17.

²⁶ L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 2001, p. 34.

²⁷ L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., pp. 173-174.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: from the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2011, p. 153.

²⁹ L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 365.

in the most unexpected and outrageous manner, than it is to persuade anybody to learn from experience, as the saying goes; that is, to start thinking and judging instead of applying categories and formulas which are deeply ingrained in our mind.”³⁰ What help we could be to each other if we could truly accompany each other in this!

A friend wrote me, “Dear Julián: Last Thursday, some friends of our Fraternity group and our responsible gathered to share a meal and work on the fourth chapter of *The Religious Sense*. We recounted what had happened that week, facts that struck us particularly, for positive or negative reasons, and that had aroused a certain type of wonder, joy, or pain in us. Our responsible exhorted us however to seek in what happened ‘the constituent factors of our “I”’ without sliding into already formulated and accommodating answers [I’m consoled that it doesn’t happen just to me...]. I won’t deny that it was a very provoking work, and for my part, painful as well. I realized that often all my cry and entreaty for goodness, justice, and beauty before the circumstances of life is suffocated and I am tempted to let it be suffocated. My authentic cry, mine. Not that of my colleagues: mine. Not that of my friends in the Movement: mine. Mine, which is absolutely original and makes me perceive that immense disproportion, that lack, that expectant awaiting. It’s like being uncovered; you can’t hide behind the already known or behind your friends, who, ‘after all, think just the way you do.’ You are there, with that immense mystery that is your cry in the face of the circumstances, in the circumstances you care most about. It is a dizzying cry and I often am afraid to stay in front of it. Paradoxically, I needed a friend in order to stay in front of it. I needed the testimony of this friend of mine, who challenged all of us: he was ‘alone’ against everyone, and yet I’ve never felt him to be such a friend as now. The work has just begun.”

Friends, we continually have to decide whether to truly follow Fr. Giussani or just to have the intention to follow him, and then stick our thoughts on the facts. Because it is only in discovering ourselves in action, as he teaches us, that we can make emerge all that we are. In this work, the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense* helps us (to continue our journey), because here Giussani describes that true nature of the “I,” of an “I” that is not reduced. Each of us can make a comparison between that human vibration and the flattening of desire that we so often find in ourselves and which, as Fr. Giussani says, is the origin of “the disorientation of young people and the cynicism of the adults.”³¹

³⁰ H. Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, Random House, 2003, p. 37.

³¹ L. Giussani, *L'io, il potere, le opere [The “I”, Power, Works]*, Marietti, Genoa, 2000, p. 168.

2. The “mystery of our being”

“Nothing is as fascinating as the discovery of the real dimensions of one’s own ‘I,’ nothing so rich in surprises as the discovery of one’s own human face,”³² says Fr. Giussani. This is a thrilling adventure but—as we have just heard—in order to set out on this adventure and vanquish this extraneousness from ourselves, we need someone to look at our humanity with us, someone who is not shocked by our humanity. As a girl wrote her friend, “At the moment, I really feel the need to talk with you, now that those questions that I kept hidden inside me for so long, closed in and chained, have finally exploded. Finally... Everything conspired and conspires against me, everything; even my mother told me, ‘Don’t worry, this sadness will pass,’ or, ‘Don’t think about it.’ But it has never passed and I have never stopped thinking of it because it’s a gripping need for meaning that never leaves me and torments me every day without letting go, without respite. Everyone has tried to tame me, tranquilize me, keep me from suffering, and make everything more bearable, to sedate a restless heart that however had no intention to stop desiring and asking for more. Then you arrived. I’ve never had a friend like you. You’re the only one who hasn’t been scared of or scandalized by my pain and my desire for the infinite. Nobody has ever looked at me this way. My heart trembled, vibrated like never before. I was suddenly invaded by the bitter awareness that till now nobody has ever looked at me the way I truly desired; everyone has set aside my uncomfortable need, sharing everything with me except what was indispensable. But a life that doesn’t consider my humanity, my most visceral and profound requests, isn’t life, nor is it even death; it’s only a desperate cry. I can’t push aside my search for meaning, otherwise I’ll suffocate. I just can’t go on; everything is equal, flat, useless, boring, and terribly unbearable. The encounter with you created in me a demand for my whole life, every second, and I don’t want to live for anything less. You ignited a passion in me, a gusto never before experienced. I need to have people alongside me who are equal to the thought that dominates my life, people with whom I can talk about what is truly worthwhile. I want to be with you because you don’t reduce me, or deny me, or mortify me; you don’t console me and don’t try to give me an answer. You don’t try to distract me or cheer me up, but you share with me the expectation, the entreaty, the nobility of our pain, the greatness of this unbounded desire and the disproportion it creates. I need you because you make me look in the face, stay in front of this terrible but dear pain that makes me so human.”

³² L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, op. cit., p. 9.

Think of the Samaritan woman: the gaze of that Man revealed precisely the true nature of her “thirst”³³—as the gaze of the friend did for this girl.

Therefore, “the starting point for the kind of inquiry which interests us here is one’s own experience, oneself-in-action. [...] The religious factor represents the nature of our ‘I’ in as much as it expresses itself in certain questions: ‘What is the ultimate meaning of existence?’ or ‘Why is there pain and death, and why, in the end, is life worth living?’”³⁴

The first characteristic of these questions is that they cannot be uprooted: “These questions attach themselves to the very core of our being. They *cannot be rooted out*, because they constitute the stuff of which we are made.”³⁵ Once again, Heschel states, “Notwithstanding the failures and frustrations, we continue to feel obsessed by these inexpressible questions and we don’t know how to accept the idea that life is empty, void of meaning.”³⁶ And, as Leopardi says, notwithstanding the universal shipwreck, the question endures: “Thou, like a tower/on some deserted plain, standest alone, gigantic, amidst thereof.”³⁷ That dominant thought, “mighty, belovedest,”³⁸ is the clue to something that does not drown in the conflict, that reemerges from the universal shipwreck, that “the boundless vanity of all”³⁹ cannot remove. Think of the prodigal son: when he realized the boundless vanity of things, the urgent human need became even stronger than before.

For this reason, the second characteristic of these questions is that they are inexhaustible, have within a need for totality: “In these questions, the adjectives and the adverbs are the decisive words: *at its core*, what is the *ultimate* sense of life, *at its core*, what is reality made of? Why is it *really* worthwhile to exist, for reality itself to exist? These types of questions exhaust the energy, all of reason’s searching energy. They require a total answer, an answer which covers the entire horizon of reason, exhausting completely the whole ‘category of possibility.’ And reason, being coherent, will not give in until it has found an exhaustive answer, ‘beneath the dense blue/ sky, seabirds flash by, never/ pausing, driven by images below:/ “Farther, farther!”’”⁴⁰ Beginning to recognize this becomes light for the

³³ Jn 4:15.

³⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1997, p. 45.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

³⁶ A.J. Heschel, *Who is Man?*, op. cit.

³⁷ Giacomo Leopardi, “The Dominant Thought” in *The Poems of Leopardi*, translated by Geoffrey L. Bickersteth, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1923, p. 285.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, v. 3.

³⁹ G. Leopardi, “A se stesso”, v. 16; English translation: “To Himself”, in Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, translated by Jonathan Galassi, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 2010, p. 235.

⁴⁰ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 47.

road of life. Look at what Fr. Giussani says, commenting on this passage from Montale: “The problem, in fact, is not to live relationships as if they were ‘gods,’ as if they were relationships with the divine; they are relationships with the sign, therefore they cannot fulfill, they can become road, landscape, sign, can point beyond, as Clemente Rebora said in the poem I quoted in *The Religious Sense*: ‘Whatever you may say or do/there is a cry inside:/ that is not why, that is not why!’: all the things you take tell you ‘that is not why, that is not why!’ And Montale, from a pagan, atheist, point of view, says: all things strangely cry, bear the writing, ‘further on.’ And so they are treated not as if they say, ‘I am everything,’ and this makes one enjoy things more, people, because, for example, it is much more fascinating to be companions on a journey than accomplices in a provisional enjoyment.”⁴¹

Each of us can choose.

For this reason, a person truly attentive to experience cannot help but recognize the structural disproportion that constitutes our “I,” and that Leopardi described incomparably in this text: “...the inability to be satisfied by any worldly thing or, so to speak, by the entire world. To consider the inestimable amplitude of space, the number of worlds, and their astonishing size, then to discover that all this is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one’s own mind; to imagine the infinite number of worlds, the infinite universe; to accuse things always of being inadequate and meaningless; to suffer want, emptiness, and hence *noia*—this seems to me the chief sign of the grandeur and nobility of human nature.”⁴²

What a sentiment of greatness! “The inexhaustibility of the questions heightens the *contradiction* between the urgent need for an answer and our human limitations in searching for it. And still we willingly read a text inasmuch as those questions vibrate and the drama of our disproportion underlies its theme.”⁴³ This irresolvable contradiction is “the eternal mystery of our being”⁴⁴ that is the thing most missing among us for the reason I already gave: because of the influence over us of the powers that be, with our complicity. God is not missing; the mystery of our “I” is missing, this eternal mystery of our being! So we have no need of Him and therefore seek the answer where everyone looks for it.

⁴¹ L. Giussani, *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 385.

⁴² G. Leopardi, *Pensieri LXVIII*, translated by W.S. Di Piero, Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1981, p. 113.

⁴³ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 48.

⁴⁴ G. Leopardi, “On the Portrait of a Beautiful Lady,” vv. 22-23, in *Selected Prose and Poetry*, translated by Iris Origo and John Heath-Stubbs, Oxford University Press, London, 1966, p. 285.

But when you begin to experience reflectively this eternal mystery of your own being, then the confusion that ruins life begins to be defeated and you discover a unique clarity of judgment.

Here is the dramatic example of a friend who wrote me: “Dear Julián: I’d like to tell you about a fact that is turning my life upside down. I do so after your words at the most recent School of Community, in which, quoting the song *Il mio volto*, you said, “I look in my depths and see endless darkness.” If we don’t discover this, it’s because what we most lack—I will return to the Fraternity Spiritual Exercises—is the sense of Mystery. And you see it from the fact that, in the end, we seek satisfaction in life exactly where everyone else looks for it.’ Well, I’ve been in CL for years, married, with children, and I’ve fallen in love with a girl. It took me a while to understand it, because deep down I didn’t want to admit it, but it’s true. I tried to push away this evidence, sticking ‘Christ’ on our friendship, but it was evident that it was only a psychological consolation in order not to look at the drift of my ‘I.’ Every fiber of my being vibrates for the face of that person. If I have summoned my courage and decided to write you, it’s because after the School of Community on the chapter ‘The Religious Sense: the Starting Point’ I began to look deeply at my situation and discover in action the constitutive factors of my ‘I,’ and I discovered I was truly a bottomless need that cannot even be satisfied by the beautiful and pure face of that girl. In an instant, acknowledging this evidence, the confusion fed by this situation dissolved, without removing the enormous sacrifice of the separation from her and the pain I feel when I think of my wife, who I love dearly, and my sweet children, my friends, and witnesses. For the first time, I perceive deep down the mystery of my being, its infinite vastness and at the same time its nothingness and smallness. The surprise is that, in the midst of this pain, I see before me the beauty of the truly human road you are proposing to us, how it is to my advantage, with a decisiveness and frankness that for me are the greatest sign of God’s tenderness for my nothingness. If Christ weren’t a real presence for me, I wouldn’t be able to look at myself in this way, and I am very grateful for this because I don’t have to throw out anything of my humanity; on the contrary, everything that is happening to me is a provocation to ask myself to Whom I belong, to Whom I want to give my whole life. I don’t want to live anymore as if I had a flat electroencephalogram.”

Only in this way can life be resolved outside a sterile moralism. If we are able to look deep down at the mystery of our being, then everything is small compared to the capacity of the soul—how we complicate life because of not understanding this—because it does not resolve anything to go after the first

thing that passes. It does not resolve anything: it complicates everything even more, and then you find yourself back where you started. We cannot respond to this in a merely moralistic way: “Because it’s prohibited,” and then tell ourselves, “But, deep down, we lose the best.” It means we have not understood anything! As Gertrud von le Fort says: everything considered from the religious point of view acquires lucidity and clarity.

So then, looking at ourselves as the mystery that we are makes us understand what we find in ourselves (and that often disconcerts us), for example, sadness, “great sadness, that fundamental characteristic of a life lived with awareness. St. Thomas defined this sadness as ‘the desire for an absent good.’”⁴⁵ When I feel sadness, it is because I desire a good that is still absent. For this reason, being aware of the value of this sadness means being conscious of the stature of life and the sentiment of its destiny. Then one can feel the truth of this sadness as Dostoyevsky describes it to us (anything but a misfortune!): “that eternal and sacred longing which many a chosen spirit, having once tasted and experienced it, will never afterwards exchange for some cheap feeling of satisfaction.”⁴⁶

Referring again to Dostoyevsky, Fr. Giussani continues: “If sadness is a spark which is generated by the lived ‘potential difference’ (to use an electrical term) between the ideal destination and its historical unfulfillment, if this is what sadness is, then the concealment of that “difference”—however it is done—creates the logical opposite of sadness, which is *despair*: ‘The mere presence of the everlasting idea of the existence of something infinitely more just and happy than I, already fills me with abiding tenderness and—glory—oh, whoever I may be and whatever I may have done! To know every moment, and to believe that somewhere there exists perfect peace and happiness for everyone and for everything, is much more important to a man than his own happiness. The whole law of human existence consists merely of making it possible for every man to bow down before what is infinitely great. If man were to be deprived of the infinitely great, he would refuse to go on living, and die of despair.’”⁴⁷

For this reason, the “I” discovered in action shows itself as a promise, as Pavese described brilliantly: “[W]hat a man seeks in his pleasures is that they should be infinite, and no one would ever give up hope of attaining that

⁴⁵ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴⁶ Cfr. F. Dostoevsky, *The Devils*, translated by David Magarshack, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1971, p. 54.

⁴⁷ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., pp. 52-53.

infinity,”⁴⁸ because “expectation is the very structure of our nature, [...] structurally life is promise.”⁴⁹ We do not decide this ourselves; this is the way it is.

Therefore, the more you enter into the mystery of your own being, the more you realize what true solitude is—not the passing sentiment of feeling alone, which would be nothing: “We can well say that the sense of solitude is borne in the very heart of every serious commitment to our own humanity. [The more you are serious with your own humanity, the more you realize the nature of your own needs and feel all your inability to answer them.] Those who believe they have found the solution to a great need of theirs in something or someone, only to have this something or someone disappear or prove incapable of resolving this need, can understand this. We are alone in our needs, in our need to be and to live intensely, like one alone in the desert. All he or she can do is wait until someone appears. And human persons will certainly not provide the solution because it is precisely their needs that must be resolved.”⁵⁰

So then it is precisely at this point that we can begin to glimpse what true companionship is: “The Anglo-American philosopher, Alfred N. Whitehead, defines religion in this way: ‘Religion is what the individual does with his own solitariness.’ The definition, although interesting, does not fully express the value of the intuition that gave it birth. True, this ultimate question is indeed constitutive of the individual. And in that sense, the individual is totally alone. He himself is that question, and nothing else. For, if I look at a man, a woman, a friend, a passerby, without the echo of that question resounding within me, without that thirsting for destiny which constitutes him or her, then our relationship would not be human, much less loving, at any level whatsoever. It would not, in fact, respect the dignity of the other, be suitable to the human dimension of the other. But that same question, in the very same instant that it defines my solitude, also establishes the root of my companionship, because this question means that I myself am constituted by something else mysterious. So, if we wanted to complete Whitehead’s definition, then yes, religion is, in fact, what the individual does with his own solitariness; but it is also where the human person discovers his essential companionship. Such companionship is, then, more original to us than our solitude. This is true in as much as my structure as question is not generated by my own will; it is given to me. Therefore, before solitude there is companionship, which embraces my soli-

⁴⁸ C. Pavese, *The Burning Brand: Diaries 1935-1950*, translated by A.E. Murch, Walker & Company, New York, 1961, p. 196.

⁴⁹ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 54.

⁵⁰ L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, op. cit., p. 55.

tude. Because of this, solitude is no longer true solitude, but a crying out to that hidden companionship.”⁵¹ For this reason, those who live in this solitude, this impotence, this lack, cannot help but cry, as in the poem by Luzi: “What is it that you lack,/ heart,/ that all of a sudden/ you are full of it?/ of what?”⁵²

3. The longing for You

This is the culmination of the search, the culmination that we discover in ourselves, where the “I” expresses what it is, if it is not reduced. As documented marvelously in the poem by Lagerkvist, “My friend is a stranger,/ someone I do not know./ A stranger far, far away./ For his sake my heart is full of disquiet/ because he is not with me./ Because, perhaps, after all he does not exist?/ Who are you who so fill my heart with your absence?/ Who fill the entire world with your absence?”⁵³

With this word–disquiet, longing–Lagerkvist describes in a simple way what Giussani writes at the end of the fifth chapter: “the very existence of the question implies the existence of an answer.”⁵⁴ Longing is the very human experience through which we can all understand that the very fact of feeling it implies the existence of the other whom I miss; otherwise, longing would not exist as an experience—we would not miss anyone. Think of the times you have missed someone, felt longing for something. It was because the person or thing already existed, and exists.

So then, an “I” that is not reduced is an “I” that has this longing within, this longing for a You, real and mysterious, a longing that is within the same identical impulse with which you enter into relationship with reality. As the Psalms testify uniquely: “As morning breaks I look to you, O God, to be my strength this day. O God, You are my God, for You I long; for You my soul is thirsting. My body pines for You like a dry, weary land without water. So I gaze on You in the sanctuary to see your strength and your glory. For your love is better than life, my lips will speak your praise. So I will bless You all my life, in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul shall be filled as with a banquet, my mouth shall praise you with joy. On my bed I remember You. On You I muse through the night, for You have been my help; in the shadow of

⁵¹ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 56.

⁵² M. Luzi, “Di che è mancanza” [“What is it that you are missing?”], vv. 1-5.

⁵³ P. Lagerkvist, “My Friend Is a Stranger,” from *Evening Land: Aftonland*, translated by W.H. Auden and Leif Sjöberg, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1975, p. 119.

⁵⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 58.

your wings I rejoice. My soul clings to You; your right hand holds me fast.”⁵⁵ Or again, “Like the deer that yearns for running streams, so my soul is yearning for You, my God. My soul is thirsting for God, the God of my life; when can I enter and see the face of God?”⁵⁶

God is not missing; an “I” like this is missing! One that bears within all this longing, all this thirst. Do you understand why Jesus says, “Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied?”⁵⁷ Blessed! Only a true “I,” awakened, can acknowledge Him, moved. And this confirms the reasonableness of the journey Fr. Giussani helps us make—it seems to me!—and that he does not spare us—it is decisive, a grace.

The battle against the powers that be is at this level. An “I” like this is the victory over power, over the attempt to reduce the drive of its desire, to flatten it. For an “I” like this, the offerings of the powerful are mere crumbs, in the knowledge that no handout is enough, no place in the sun is sufficient for an “I” conscious of its need, because a person like this knows where to find rest, a rest that meets the measure of her need, and is the only one that truly rests and refreshes: “For Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee.”⁵⁸

The more human beings are conscious that only He can constitute their true rest, the more they are moved by the fact itself that God exists. They cannot help being flooded with emotion at the fact that God exists, as Fr. Giussani so often repeated: “My heart is glad because Christ lives.”⁵⁹

For this reason, His presence fills us with silence: “For Your way and Your judgments, O Lord, we look to You; Your name and Your title are the desire of our souls.”⁶⁰ But this desire cannot survive even a few minutes if it does not become an entreaty, because the true form of desire is entreaty: it is called prayer.

⁵⁵ *Ps* 63:2-9.

⁵⁶ *Ps* 42:2-3.

⁵⁷ *Mt* 5:6.

⁵⁸ Saint Augustine, *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, I:1, translated by F. J. Sheed, Sheed & Ward, Inc, 1942, p. 3.

⁵⁹ L. Giussani, *L'Alleanza [The Covenant]*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1979, p. 106.

⁶⁰ *Is* 26:8.

Saturday Afternoon, April 30

During entrance and exit:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Concerto for Piano in C minor, no. 24, K 491

Clara Haskil, piano

Igor Markevitch - Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux

“Spirto Gentil” no. 32, Philips

■ SECOND MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

“Ubi fides ibi libertas”

“The road is beautiful for those who walk.”⁶¹ To walk is a decision that each of us has to make continually, because, even though the fabric of the human of which we are all made is accessible to the person who is truly attentive to experience and to the “I” observed in action, we all know how far we are from having this clarity. Only a few people, in a few culminating moments, manage to perceive their depths, to become truly conscious of themselves. Usually what prevails—we know well, just observe how we move so often—because of the influence of the powers that be or because of our complicity and distraction, is confusion, and so one does not walk.

The consequences of this non-walking are described by Fr. Giussani in a stunning way in the eighth chapter of *The Religious Sense*. They are baleful; just a quick list is enough: an emptying of the personality (which remains at the mercy of reactivity), aridness in relationships, dialogue reduced to chatter, solitude as the absence of meaning (the graver symptoms of which are exasperation, violence, and increasing vulnerability).

Therefore, those who are truly aware of this understand the dramatic situation in which we often find ourselves. Von Balthasar says, “Man’s alienation from God has so buried in oblivion so many of man’s own deepest aspects [of being, that veneration of self, that true self-awareness] that these can be brought up again into the light of memory and human self-understanding only through God’s Incarnation.”⁶²

⁶¹ C. Chieffo, “La strada” [“The Road”], in *Canti*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2002, p. 245.

⁶² H.U. von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like this Child*, translated by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991, p. 27.

This is the reason God set out in search of man: “He comes to meet the unrest of our hearts, the unrest of our questioning and seeking.”⁶³

In this situation, Christianity must show its capacity to awaken the “I,” this “I” that is so reduced that it often is already resigned, convinced that it is sufficient unto itself. If Christianity succeeds in awakening it, this will be the most powerful verification of the faith.

1. Only Christ saves the human

“Only the divine can ‘save’ man. The true and essential dimensions of humanity and its destiny can only be preserved by He who is their ultimate meaning—which is to say, recognized, acclaimed, defended,”⁶⁴ Fr. Giussani taught us.

“*The positive answer* to this dramatic dispersion in which society makes us live *is an event. Only an event* [...] can render the ‘I’ in all its constituent factors clear and consistent. This is a paradox that no philosophy and no theory—whether sociological or political—can tolerate: the fact that an event, not an analysis, not documented sentiments, is the catalyst that allows the factors of our ‘I’ to emerge clearly and compose themselves for our eyes, before our conscience, with firm, lasting, and stable clarity. [...] For it is the *Christian event* that is the adequate catalyst of knowledge of the ‘I,’ which makes perception of the ‘I’ both clear and stable, which allows the ‘I’ to become operational as ‘I.’ There is *no understanding* of what the ‘I’ is outside of the Christian event. And the Christian event—according to what has emerged so far in regard to an event as such—is something new, extraneous, which comes from outside and therefore is something unthinkable, that cannot be supposed, that cannot be traced back to any reconstruction of our own, but that breaks in on life. [...] This encounter opens my eyes to myself, spurs on an unveiling of me, *shows that it corresponds* to what I am: *it makes me aware* of what I am, of what I want, because it makes me understand that what it brings is just what I want, that it corresponds to what I am.”⁶⁵

This is the confirmation of the road that we are trying to walk, because it is only an event that awakens the “I,” not dogged insistence on repeat-

⁶³ Benedict XVI, *Chrism Mass*, April 21, 2011.

⁶⁴ L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal, 1998, p. 83.

⁶⁵ L. Giussani, “On the Way: Notes from a talk of Luigi Giussani with some university students, La Thuile, August 1992,” in *Traces*, Vol. 2, No. 2 [February], 2000, pp. III, VI, and VIII.

ing certain formulas. Only the Christian event makes me understand my “I,” and for this reason in the School of Community we have insisted on trying to testify to each other about how we have discovered His happening among us, because it is the awakening of the “I” that testifies to the Christian event. We are trying to understand who Christ is, observing what He can awaken in us, in order to understand ourselves, to become more substantial, more stable as consciousness, in order to be less in the grasp of the powers that be, in order to have a greater intelligence of reality, in order to be ourselves, so that nobody will take us in.

Christ is so correspondent to what I am that when I encounter Him I can finally understand Whose presence I long for: that of One who tells me, “I am the Mystery that is missing in every thing you enjoy, in every promise you live. Whatever you desire, try to attain, I am the Destiny of all that you do. You seek Me in all these things!”⁶⁶

The French author Chrétien observed well that this awareness is possible only for Christianity: “That the highest desire, the one that makes man great, is the desire for the infinite, the desire that nothing stops or satisfies, since nothing finite can satisfy it, this constitutes a uniquely Christian thought, because of the fact that infinite desire has for truth the desire for the infinite, the desire for God Himself. Such a thought is radically opposed to all the ancient Greek wisdom, for which limitless desire would be the sign of immoderation and folly, the sure journey toward unhappiness or desperation.”⁶⁷ We can see how influential the thought of the ancients is when often parents begin to tell their children that it is folly to desire so much: being unable to understand themselves, they cannot understand their children (and it is also this way with teachers and students). Christ is the one who draws forth all of my humanity, all my desire, because, as Kierkegaard says, “only when the object appears does the desire appear.”⁶⁸

Thus my desire, so disproportionate to my abilities, gives me a powerful clarity about my lack; it is the greatest testimony to Christ, the clearest sign of His contemporaneousness. It is not a matter of speaking of Christ, but of an “I” with this desire! We know a lot of people who speak of Christ, but how many do we know who are not sceptical, who at a certain age still have a vivid desire for life? If this testifies to the contemporaneousness of Christ, when one sees something like this, it is anything but a creation of the per-

⁶⁶ L. Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà* [*The Event of Freedom*], Marietti, Genoa, 2002, p. 149.

⁶⁷ J.-L. Chrétien, *La Joie spacieuse* [*Spacious Joy*], Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris, 2007, p. 196.

⁶⁸ S. Kierkegaard, *Don Giovanni*, M.A. Denti, Milan, 1944, p. 87. [Translation into English by *Traces*.]

son of faith! It is impossible for human beings to create faith, because people so awakened in their own desire is the most humanly impossible thing. A thing of the kind could never have been imagined by man; it seemed a folly to him. Therefore, our awakened humanity is the greatest apologetics for Christ.

This is what fills Isaac of Nineveh with wonder: “How marvelous is the meditation of your constitution, o man! But even more marvelous is the mystery of your awakening.”⁶⁹

The awakening of the “I” shows that Christ does not resolve the drama of the “I,” eliminating human desire, but, rather, exalting it, deepening the sense of the mystery. What kind of solution would be one that ended up flattening desire or suppressing it? Instead, those who acknowledge Christ see their humanity brought beyond all imagination. For this reason, the deepening in us of the sense of mystery is the sign of His presence.

A friend said in the course of a public testimony, “My existential journey of recent years, the principal point of newness which I can describe as the ‘explosion’ of the structural disproportion, was the radicalization of the perception of my human need, of a need for meaning, almost lacerating in certain moments, united with the perception of the human impossibility of filling it and the fall of many illusions. The first thing I want to tell you is that watching Carrón during these years has meant that my radical question has reawakened—first of all, that I realized that I had reduced the entire preceding history, that my awakening did not depend on ‘studying’ *The Religious Sense*, but on shared living of the event of Christ that some friends testified to me. The encounter with a living witness has not made me more granite-like; I thought that becoming mature meant reaching ataraxy. Instead, I find myself much more fragile, much more disturbed, much more vulnerable, much more struck by the illness of someone or by a project that is not achieved, by a desire that does not come true, by anguish for the fate of a friend and the world. The wound is much more radical than before (the existential, personal, psychological wound) and things and people disturb me much more, but at the same time, the new thing is that I perceive that nobody can respond to this bottomless pit, if not Someone not reducible to nature. It is an openness to Someone Other than oneself. That is: I have realized in these years, in this shared living, what a deception it is to try to fill the human entreaty with something less than what can satisfy it, that can very well be lived—being in the *Memores Domini*—faithfully, as it seems I have tried to live in these years, but the human hope is not in Christ

⁶⁹ Isaac of Nineveh (the Syrian), *Mystic Treatises*.

present, and it is like living parallel lives (the dualism we often speak of): on the one hand, you affirm Christ and think you pray, but the criterion of judgment you use in the relationship with reality is based on something else. If I am so needy, not once, but every time I need to re-encounter this Presence; if I do not re-encounter this Presence, I am not well, and certain days it is precisely a physical perception, as if a wound passed through my heart, and I need to see His facts, because these facts are the balm for the abyss I have inside. And so a strange thing has happened, that His Presence has sparked the perception of my disproportion, but the disproportion has made me able to see this Presence in things I didn't pay attention to before."

Such a flowering of one's "I" is the verification of faith and vocation, before which one cannot help but feel amazement and infinite gratitude. Gratitude for what? That He exists, that Christ exists and is present. And the more you discover your own need, the more you realize that you do not resolve this need with a discourse, with the right theory, with the right interpretation (not even the right interpretation of Fr. Giussani), with works, with initiatives, with your job, your career, with certain relations of love. You do not fill it with anything. In order to find the answer to this "I" so perceived, with all the impressiveness of its mystery, you must re-encounter His Presence, because nothing else is enough for us. Nothing else will do, and for this reason, being in relationship with Him is the only possibility for finding what corresponds.

Only with friends like this can we do a true reading of our needs. We said this morning that often many of us reduce the needs. "The encounter frees your needs, frees them from the gangue of that reductive interpretation that tends to functionalize all your person to the powers that be."⁷⁰

Giussani insists: "Now, the encounter generates, evokes—if the heart is sincere, if it has a minimum of sincerity—a companionship that is different, that opposes that of society, a companionship like ours! In it, the reading of needs is transformed, the reading that it gives of the needs vanquishes the suggestion of the powers that be, of what the powerful inculcate in you; in this companionship the needs begin to be read according to the truth you have encountered."⁷¹ Further on he adds, "So then, the encounter 'instinctively' generates a companionship, an affinity with the person encountered, with others who have encountered it; so a group is born, a companionship, a movement. In this companionship, in this movement, there is a true reading of needs one has. And, therefore, a contrast is set up, this companion-

⁷⁰ L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)*, op. cit., p. 377.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 362-363.

ship becomes a ‘parallel polis,’ becomes a ‘parallel humanity;’ you begin to understand the meaning of the relationship with your woman, the meaning of the relationship of friendship, the meaning of the relationship with people as such, the meaning of the relationship with time, the meaning of the past, the meaning of error, mistakes, sins, the meaning of forgiveness. In short, you begin to understand, to understand what you did not understand before, what the others do not understand, and you begin to feel compassion for everyone. It is as if one had lived in a closet, born and raised there, believing that the world was that closet, and suddenly you exclaimed: ‘Oh God, it’s another world!’”⁷²

How is an “I” like this generated?

2. The generation of our human face

Let’s listen to Fr. Giusanni: “The powers that be cannot block the wakening of the encounter, but as soon as they see it, they try to stop it from becoming history”⁷³—that is, they act on its staying power over time, its duration, the permanence of what was wakened. How do they act? Trying to reduce our desires as soon as they are awakened by the encounter. How often have we discovered that we have returned to the situation of before. “Just look at what great rips of emptiness are opened in the daily fabric of our consciousness and what lostness of memory”⁷⁴ we find in ourselves so often.

For the newness introduced by the encounter to become substantial in such a way that not only do we not return to the situation before, or worse yet, become sceptical, but instead the perception of our mystery is deepened, we must travel a road, a fascinating road, because nothing is as fascinating as the discovery of the real dimensions of our “I.” Nothing is as rich in surprises as the discovery of one’s own human “I.”

It is striking to read the suggestion that Fr. Giussani gave high school seniors years ago to encourage them in this adventure—it seems that it is useful for us as well: “Expect a journey, not a miracle that dodges your responsibilities, that eliminates your toil, that makes your freedom mechanical. No! Don’t expect this. This is a profound difference from before, from the road you’ve travelled up to now: the deep difference is that you will not be able to follow me, will not be able to follow us, if not striving to compre-

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁷⁴ L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano*, op. cit., p. 9.

hend. Until now you have been able to follow even without understanding, even without striving to understand; now you will not be able to follow us unless you are stretched taut to understand. Until now you have been able to follow without loving anything; now you will have to begin to truly love, I say, life and its destiny. Otherwise, if you are not striving to understand and if you are not stretching to love life and its destiny, you will leave us: only in that case.”⁷⁵ Because everything says the opposite, and if you do not understand the reasons for doing it, what has happened to us will not last, will not become history.

So then, Giussani proposes a journey, hard work, not a miracle or a mechanism. Behind the unease that often arises among us there is this confusion: we always think of a proposal that produces fruit without labor, without involving our freedom, without committing the totality of our “I.” Look at what Fr. Giussani tells us—we will not find another travel companion who describes us in such an authentic way, as if a scanner passed over us! “Where does the aridity, the flaccidity of shared living, of the shared life in the community [think of groups, think of families, think of friends] come from if not from the fact that too few individuals are able to say that they are committed to experience, to life as experience? It is this retreat from life as experience which causes us to chat rather than speak. The absence of true dialogue, this terrible dryness in communication, this incapacity to communicate makes our conversations comparable only to gossip.”⁷⁶ Think of certain dinners among us: what impression would someone external observing us have of what’s dearest to our hearts?

This brings us back to the importance of the road Fr. Giussani proposes to us—and I have nothing different to propose. The journey to truth is a present experience that confirms the usefulness of the faith for responding to the needs and desires that press within us ineradicably and inexorably. We all know how hard it is for us: we give our impressions, recount things, offer our opinions, but how many of us are engaged in a true experience?

The difficulty we find ourselves facing today is the same that Giussani encountered. “Thirty years ago, when I began saying these things, I did not believe that thirty years later I would have had to repeat them so many times to make them understood to those who had already been walking on the same road for ten years! Because they read these things, believe they understand them, go onwards, and are not serious with the words they

⁷⁵ L. Giussani, Raduno nazionale maturati [National Gathering of High School Seniors], Rimini, September 28-30, 1982, CL Archives.

⁷⁶ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 84.

use, that is, are not serious with the reality that the words indicate, are not serious with the subject that lives the reality of which his time is made, is formed. What is the starting point for a human inquiry, for an investigation of the truth? The starting point is experience. Not what you feel, but experience, which is what you feel judged by criteria of the heart, which, as criteria, are infallible (infallible as criteria, not as judgments: an infallibility can be applied badly). The criteria are these; there are no others. Either the criteria are of the heart, or we are alienated, sold on the market of politics or economics.”⁷⁷

Fr. Giussani warns us that you can remain apparently on the road without having an experience: the treadmill is always a definite risk. If our road and our faith do not become present experience in which we find the confirmation that it is advantageous, we will not be able to follow or be companions for each other. “Experience must be just that, experience. It must be judged by our intelligence. Otherwise, our communication becomes just blabbing out words and vomiting complaints.”⁷⁸

Therefore, the verification of whether we are having an experience or not is the growth of our “I,” its becoming more substantial. Part of the experience—we have always been told—is “the fact of realizing that we are growing.”⁷⁹ You realize that you have grown when this remains in your memory, and you do not forget it anymore. “Experience is preserved by memory. Memory is to guard the experience. I cannot have a dialogue with you unless my experience is well guarded, sheltered like a baby in its mother’s womb, and growing within me little by little, as time passes.”⁸⁰ In this case, when we talk, we can communicate something truly verified in experience.

If we have this experience, faith can generate a truly substantial person. “The substance of one’s ‘I’ is a profoundly new experience; it is truly the new birth of Nicodemus. The miracle that must happen involves the substance of your ‘I,’ that is, the dignity, the certainty of your destiny and the capacity to operate in a new and more human way.”⁸¹

Therefore, only a journey generates a new creature, who is described by Fr. Giussani in this way: “A different experience of the sentiment of

⁷⁷ L. Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Truly?!) Possible to Live This Way?]*, Bur, Milan, 1996, p. 83.

⁷⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 84.

⁷⁹ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, op. cit., 98.

⁸⁰ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 84.

⁸¹ L. Giussani, Consiglio nazionale di CL [CL National Council], Milan, February 9-10, 1985, CL Archives.

yourself, a different perception of things, a different emotion of the presence of others, a different impetus and density in relationships, a different gusto in the troubled dynamic of work, an outcome that was inconceivable, unimaginable before.”⁸² If this does not happen, what interest will faith hold for us? Sooner or later disinterest will win in us, too, but it will not be—as we say so often—because Christ does not fulfill the promise He made us in the encounter, but because we have reduced everything to a mechanism, because we are not truly engaged in the verification of experience! And without this, I do not have a face.

The final passage of a poem by Rimbaud is stunning: “In the morning I had a look so lost, a face so dead, that perhaps those whom I met *did not see me*.”⁸³ You run into someone who is without a face. Instead, being a presence means having a face, and faith is what makes the face meaningful.

The strength of our presence is faith; faith lived as present experience, and so it becomes a presence that is not forgotten: “What cannot be forgotten? [...] That which will not let itself be forgotten [...], that which, of itself, and almost beforehand, is resplendent with a clarity that nothing can extinguish or cover.”⁸⁴

3. *Ubi fides ibi libertas* (Saint Ambrose)

If the individual does not have substance, if his personality is emptied, then he remains at the mercy of the more uncontrolled forces of instinct and power: it is the loss of freedom (this is how the eighth chapter of *The Religious Sense* ends).

Today we see around us an enormous desire for freedom, but at the same time we observe the inability to be truly free, that is, ourselves, in reality. It is as if, actually, we all bow under what is expected of us in each circumstance: in this way, you have one face at work, another with your friends, another at home... Where are we truly ourselves? Not to mention how many times we feel suffocated in the circumstances of daily life, without the least idea of how to get free, except that of waiting to change the

⁸² “La fede oggi,” incontro di don Giussani con gli adulti di CL [“Today’s Faith,” a meeting of Fr. Giussani with CL adults], Turin, June 13, 1981, CL Archives.

⁸³ Cf. A. Rimbaud, “Season in Hell,” translated by Louise Varèse, *New Directions Paperback*, 1945. (In French: “Une Saison en Enfer” from the chapter “Mauvais sang.”)

⁸⁴ J.-L. Chrétien, *L’inoubliable et l’inespéré* [*The Unforgettable and Unexpected*], Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1991. [Translation into English by *Traces*.]

circumstances themselves (this often seems the only road for liberation that we manage to conceive of). In the end, you find yourself blocked, dreaming of a freedom that will never arrive. In a historical moment in which freedom is spoken of so much, we see the paradox of its lack, its absence.

For this reason, the fact that today freedom is such a scarce good, so rare, is another documentation of the lack of a real experience of faith, according to the great motto of Saint Ambrose: “*Ubi fides ibi libertas*”⁸⁵—where there is faith, there is freedom.

This is why freedom is the most precious and powerful sign, and it is there where we can truly verify whether we are having an experience of faith able to resist in a world where everything—everything!—says the opposite. Do we realize what a challenge we have to face? In this reality, if we do not have a face and we do not have a substance, our faith cannot hold up in history; we will be swept away!

What is the condition of freedom? When does it make sense to talk about freedom, the irreducibility of the “I,” and substance? What condition is necessary? Only one: “In only one case is [...] this single human being free from the entire world, free, so that the world together and even the total universe cannot force him into anything. In only one instance can this image of a free man be explained. This is when we assume that this point is not totally the fruit of the biology of the mother and father, not strictly derived from the biological tradition of mechanical antecedents, but rather when it possesses a *direct relationship with the infinite*, the *origin* of all of the flux of the world [...]. *Only* this hypothesis allows me to proclaim that the world can do what it wants with me, but it cannot conquer, possess, grasp on to me, because I am greater than it is. I am *free*. [...] So here is the *paradox*: freedom is dependence upon God. It is a paradox, but it is absolutely clear. The human being—the concrete human person, me, you—once we were not, now we are, and tomorrow will no longer be: thus we depend. And either we depend upon the flux of our material antecedents, and are consequently slaves of the powers that be, or we depend upon What lies at the origin of the movement of all things, *beyond* them, which is to say, God. Freedom identifies itself with dependence upon God at a human level: it is a recognized and lived dependence, while slavery, on the other hand, denies or censures this relationship. Religiosity is the lived awareness of this relationship. Freedom comes through religiosity! Religiosity is the single hindrance, limit, confine to the dictatorship of man over man, whether we are referring to men and women, parents and children, government and citizens, owners and workers,

⁸⁵ Saint Ambrose, *Epistles*, 65:5.

party chiefs, and rank and file. It is the *only* hindrance, the single barrier and objection to the slavery imposed by the powers that be.”⁸⁶

Look how many times we dream of reaching freedom; let’s seriously compare ourselves on this with Fr. Giussani, submitting it to the verification of experience. “It is for this reason that the powerful [...] are tempted to hate true religiosity, unless they are profoundly religious themselves [...] because [authentic religiosity] limits, challenges possession.”⁸⁷

And once again, “The faith is the fundamental gesture of freedom, and prayer is the perpetual education of the heart, the spirit in being authentically human, in being free, because faith and prayer are the full recognition of that Presence which is my destiny; and the dependence on this presence is my freedom.”⁸⁸

How is it possible to live in all circumstances religiosity, the relationship with the Mystery, that makes me so irreducible to the powers that be? It is necessary to always adhere to the Mystery we depend on. I have always been struck by this question, often evoked by Fr. Giussani: how can the person have the clear consciousness and affective energy to adhere to the Mystery as long as this Mystery remains a mystery? How can the still obscure and mysterious object waken the energy of freedom, fulfill it?

As long as the object is obscure, we can imagine what we very well please, and can determine ourselves in our relationship with that object however we want. Think of the experience of love: we desire to love and be loved, but as long as the face is unknown, what do we do? Whatever we want. Only when the face appears is there truly introduced a possibility of magnetizing the “I.” I know that I desire the infinite, that this infinite exists because I always long for Him—as Lagerkvist said—but every day I grasp the particular, I pursue any object whatsoever, and then it leaves me unsatisfied. This is the destiny of the human person, unless what Wittgenstein hypothesizes happens: “You need redemption, otherwise you lose yourself [...]. A light must enter, so to speak, through the ceiling, the roof under which I work and above which I don’t want to climb. [...] This striving for the absolute, that makes any earthly happiness seem paltry...seems stupendous to me, sublime, but I fix my gaze on earthly things: unless ‘God’ visits me.”⁸⁹

⁸⁶ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

⁸⁷ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 92.

⁸⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, op. cit., p. 89.

⁸⁹ L. Wittgenstein, *Movimenti di pensiero [Movements in Thought]*, Quodlibet, Macerata, 1999, p. 85. [This is from an Italian translation of Wittgenstein diaries found in 1996, translated into English by *Traces*.]

For this reason, we need the Mystery to become a companion we experience; we need God to visit us. It was necessary for the Mystery to become our life companion so that a fulfilled experience of freedom would enter into the world. Only when the Mystery, like the beloved, unveils His face and attracts me entirely, magnetizes me, can I have the clarity and the affective energy to adhere, that is, to engage all my freedom.

With Jesus, the Mystery became, in the insuperable expression of Fr. Giussani, an “affectively attractive presence”⁹⁰ to the point of kindling human desire and challenging, like no other, the person’s freedom, that is, capacity for adhering. It is enough to yield to the winning attraction of His person, His attraction, as happens to a person in love: the fascinating presence of the beloved awakens all of the person’s affective energy. It is sufficient to yield to the fascination of the person you have before you. This is why Betocchi said, “What is needed is a man./ wisdom is not needed,/ what is needed is a man/ in spirit and truth;/ not a country, not things,/ what is needed is a man,/ a stride that is sure and very strong/ the hand that reaches out,/ that all may grasp it and walk free, and be saved.”⁹¹

I discover the Mystery present, like the beloved, in an unexpected encounter. It is a surprise, as it was for John and Andrew. Once they encountered Him, they remained attached to Him for the rest of their lives, because their freedom was so challenged by His unique exceptionality that they could not go on without reckoning with that person. The freedom of those who encountered Him found an incomparable fulfillment in Him, the hundred-fold here below, a satisfaction a hundred times greater. If we do not find a satisfaction a hundred times greater, why would it be reasonable to follow Him? We would not last very long if it were not for a satisfaction, a satisfaction a hundred times greater, as foretaste of the full one. We see that the disciples were not visionaries by the fact they remained, because otherwise they, too, would have drifted off after a while.

“*Caro cardo salutis*,”⁹² as Tertullian acutely observed. The flesh, the Word made flesh, is the cornerstone of salvation. And with this we arrive at the most acute point of the drama before each of us. So then, if this is so, if Christ is this attractive Presence, so correspondent to our deepest needs, it would seem normal for us to yield to His attraction. He is so correspondent

⁹⁰ L. Giussani, *L'autocoscienza del cosmo* [*The Self-Awareness of the Cosmos*], Bur, Milan, 2000, p. 247.

⁹¹ Carlo Betocchi, “Ciò che occorre è un uomo,” [“What Is Needed Is a Man”] in C. Betocchi *Dal definitivo istante Poesie scelte e inedite*, Bur (Books of the Christian Spirit), Milan, 1999, p. 146.

⁹² Tertullian, *De resurrectione mortuorum* [*On the Resurrection of the Dead*], VIII, 6-7. (The flesh is the hinge/axis of salvation.)

that it would almost seem taken for granted. But—again—attention to experience shows us that this is not so.

Why is it that on many occasions we feel such a visceral resistance to letting ourselves be attracted by Him? It is not just weakness, even though we all are weak; it is substantially a sensation of losing ourselves that impedes our yielding. Why do we feel this sensation of losing ourselves, when actually it is only in yielding to His attraction that we gain ourselves? It is because of the effect sin has on us. Sin introduced something strange that blurs the perception of ourselves and God, making God appear to our eyes as a kind of adversary of our fulfillment, so much so that we think that if we yield to Him we will lose ourselves, and so we have to keep Him at a certain distance. Not even Jesus, true man, was spared this drama; in fact, precisely because He faced it, He was able to conquer it.

Benedict XVI writes: “Human will, by virtue of creation, tends toward synergy (working together) with the divine will, but through sin, opposition takes the place of synergy: man, whose will attains fulfillment through becoming attuned to God’s will, now has the sense that his freedom is compromised by God’s will. He regards consenting to God’s will, not as his opportunity to become fully himself, but as a threat to his freedom against which he rebels. The drama of the Mount of Olives lies in the fact that Jesus draws man’s natural will away from opposition and back toward synergy, and in so doing he restores man’s true greatness. In Jesus’ natural human will, the sum total of human nature’s resistance to God is [...] present within Jesus Himself. The obstinacy of us all, the whole of our opposition to God is present, and in His struggle, Jesus elevates our recalcitrant nature to become its real self. [...] The prayer ‘not my will, but yours’ (*Lk 22:42*) is truly the Son’s prayer to the Father, through which the natural human will is completely subsumed into the ‘I’ of the Son. Indeed, the Son’s whole being is expressed in the ‘not I, but You’—in the total self-abandonment of the ‘I’ to the ‘You’ of God the Father. This same ‘I’ has subsumed and transformed humanity’s resistance, so that we are all now present within the Son’s obedience; we are all drawn into sonship.”⁹³

The Pope renewed this thought on Wednesday of Holy Week: “Man of himself is tempted to oppose God’s will, to seek to do his own will, to feel free only if he is autonomous; he sets his own autonomy against the heteronomy of obeying God’s will. This is the whole drama of humanity. But in truth, this autonomy is mistaken and entry into God’s will is not opposition to the

⁹³ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, op. cit., pp. 160-161.

self, it is not a form of slavery that violates my will but rather means entering into truth and love, into goodness. And Jesus draws our will—which opposes God’s will, which seeks autonomy—upwards, towards God’s will. This is the drama of our redemption, that Jesus should uplift our will, our total aversion to God’s will and our aversion to death and sin and unite it with the Father’s will: ‘Not *my* will but *yours*.’ In this transformation of ‘no’ into ‘yes, in this insertion of the creatural will into the will of the Father, He transforms humanity and redeems us. And He invites us to be part of His movement: to emerge from our ‘no’ and to enter into the ‘yes’ of the Son. My will exists, but the will of the Father is crucial because it is truth and love.”⁹⁴

This is the price of our redemption! This is anything but wordplay!

How does this drawing us upwards, how does this battle against our resistance, against our decline, continue? The only possibility is that Christianity continue to happen as a present event. Without the continual re-happening of the Christian Event, there is no chance for real freedom. For this reason, His remaining is the sign of His truth: like the truth, it lasts. And this is the importance of our Easter poster: if Christ did not rise and cannot remain present, our faith is empty. From the patrimony of Jesus we can choose something that is useful, but this means that we are abandoned to ourselves: “Only if Jesus is risen has anything really new occurred that changes the world and the situation of mankind. Then He becomes the criterion on which we can rely. For then God has truly revealed Himself.”⁹⁵

In order for this to become not something already known, but become a constant experience—Fr. Giussani tells us—in order for what we know, and what we have, to become experience, it is necessary that what we know and what we have be given to us right now, that there be a hand that offers it to us now, a face that comes forward now, blood that flows now, a resurrection that happens now. “Nothing exists outside this ‘now’!”⁹⁶ What power these words acquire in the face of what we have described! Because our “I” cannot be moved, touched—that is, changed—if not by a contemporaneity, by an event. Christ is something that is happening to me now. So then, in order for what we know, Christ, to be experience, there needs to be a present that provokes and shakes us, a present the way it was for John and Andrew.

What hand is extended to offer it to us now? I came upon this impressive text from 1997: “The human world needs nothing other than the *new*

⁹⁴ Benedict XVI, *General Audience*, April 20, 2011.

⁹⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, op. cit., p. 242.

⁹⁶ Cf. L. Giussani, *Easter Poster*, Communion and Liberation, 2011.

people, that companionship that is the flow of life that crosses the desert of the world. But this people and this companionship are made only by those who are prophets. I want to mention something that might seem just a particular. What is the most important factor in the reality of people to which we are called, in the reality of companionship in which we participate, in the place of prophecy and of the cry that all is God? What is the true place of the religious sense? The most important factor in the reality of a people is what we call *authority*. We absolutely must destroy to the last stone the image of authority as a robotic guide, as if it were a matter of individuals closed in a tower who send signals, guiding from this tower the progress of things. The authority, the guide, is the opposite of power; not even a speck of the word power exists in it. This is why the concept of authority in the people of God is completely void at every level of any reflection of fear. Fear corresponds to the powers that be, and to be free of fear you mustn't give a hoot about the powers that be. What is this authority? It is the place (you, too, are a place; a person is also a place) where the battle of prophecy and the verification of the prophecy are lived, the site of the battle to affirm—and the verification to confirm—the response that the proposal of Christ is for the perception of the heart; where Christ is experienced as the answer to the needs of the heart. It is the place where the religious sense (the religious sense is given by the needs of the heart that interrogate the response they have before them) is simpler and more limpid. This is why the answer does not cause fear; it is more pacific. Pasolini in a passage says that you educate young people with your being, not with your discourses. Authority is the place where the nexus between the needs of the heart and the answer given by Christ is simpler and more limpid, more pacific. *Authority is a being*, not a source of discourse. Discourse, too, is part of the substance of being, but only as reflection. So then, when you see an authority, you see that what Christ says corresponds to your heart. This guides the people. [...] The problem then is following. This is better indicated by the word *sonship*: you are a child of the authority.”⁹⁷

For this reason, Fr. Giussani always taught us that the first thing we have to ask is that there always be an authority, people like this, because only if He gives us people like this, with this limpidness in living religiosity, can we have an experience of sequela, and this can be our contribution to emerging from this confusion.

Only people like this can become an instrument for mission, “because the Movement is born, is established, and bears fruit only as a person: mine,

⁹⁷ L. Giussani, “Nessuno genera se non è generato” [You Do Not Generate If You Have Not Been Generated], in *Litterae Communionis Tracce*, no. 6, June 1997, p. 11.

yours. Alone or together, I don't care: the design of God makes me find the surprise of a brother or a companion. The Movement begins, establishes itself, and is in the hands of God as an instrument of a mission, only within and through this faith of mine, this experience of life as faith that defines my person, that gives me a face."⁹⁸

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Julián Carrón

The work we are doing together on the School of Community is a great help also for understanding the value of the Common Fund. As Fr. Giussani always taught us, the Common Fund is the instrument for educating us to poverty, which is not primarily a matter of generosity, but of the true relationship with things. For this reason, it is not a meaningless particular, and thus he always called us to it.

A friend wrote me: "Dearest friends of the Fraternity: This is a very small increase in my Common Fund contribution that cannot compare with the grace received this year in the journey of our experience. The desire to belong more assiduously, the constant prayer to be more faithful to the work, and the more conscious abandonment to Jesus as He shows Himself to me in daily reality, have made me discover a new humanity that I hadn't believed possible for me. I am truly grateful for it." If the Common Fund is not born of this gratitude, it will not last, will not hold up in a world in which everything, absolutely everything, says the opposite: "We'll do whatever we want with our money."

The Common Fund is not a problem of money, but of education; therefore, the reminder with this freedom.

I was struck by a fact I heard: a group of university students in Brazil went to the flooded zone near Rio de Janeiro to do the manual work of cleaning some churches. During an assembly, some testified to the discovery made during those days, that is, that you can have the idea that charitable work is something very good, but not live a love for charity. You can say the same of the Common Fund: you can have the concept that it is an education to poverty, but not live it for Christ, and if it is not for Christ, it remains an abstract rule.

That the Common Fund is for Christ is testified to by this friend: "Dearest Julian: With great enthusiasm today I made a gesture that is very

⁹⁸ "La fede oggi," op. cit., CL Archives.

small, but for me is vital, a sign of the victory of Christ even over my myriad worries and forms of resistance. In updating my personal information on the Fraternity site, I asked to receive the bank form to begin to pay the Common Fund again, after five years of not contributing. Now that I am finally taking the work of the School of Community seriously, I could not live a parallel life. [This is the documentation that something moves our “I,” if we do School of Community as it should be done. What is the desire that was reawakened?] I want the criterion of the Movement, which I acknowledged to be fascinating, to be the criterion with which I look at everything that happens in my life, and I understand that not even economic difficulties are objections to my contributing in my small way to the victory of Christ in the world. Thank you, because I’ve learned that either you give Christ everything, or it’s as if you give Him nothing. The money I give monthly isn’t much, but I promise myself, as soon as possible, to increase my contribution.”

This judgment on the Common Fund also establishes a scale of importance for answering the various requests we receive. The first thing to keep present is the Fraternity Common Fund, because it is the fundamental educative place that makes you think of the reason for which you pay it; then the concrete needs of the community where we live; and, finally, the needs that God sets before us as a provocation, according to the discernment that each of us must employ.

This gesture is so personal that it is the sign of the freedom of the “I” in action: one can give or simply offer the pain of not being able to give as desired.

Among the other testimonies that have arrived it is impossible not to mention the words written by a person who was supported by the Fraternity (one of the many among us we are able to support): “I was very struck when you asked to hear from us to know if we needed anything, if an economic help as before might still be useful. Knowing that we are in your thoughts, that you pray for us, that you are interested in our journey, is truly a great sign of Jesus’ tenderness and solicitude for me. In thanking you from the bottom of my heart, I want to tell you that in many ways the Lord has drawn close to us in our need during these years, above all through the faces, hands, and time of the friends of the Fraternity, and that our life flows and unfolds mysteriously in the serenity of a journey that every day teaches me to trust myself and abandon myself to Him.”

Traces magazine is a help in forming the judgment with which we look at the facts that happen and it is the only instrument, other than the official CL

site, for which we feel responsible. I would like to call your attention to the *Tracce* site, which has been recently updated.

All the richness that other people and instruments express is the fruit of their freedom and their attempts, which will be all the more rich and useful for everyone in the measure to which the experience that moved them in the beginning remains alive in them today.

Before concluding, I'll read the telegram that we sent Benedict XVI: "Holy Father, the 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises, concluded early, are about to depart for Rome to join Your Holiness, who has desired to show to all the baptized and to the whole world John Paul II as an example of what Christ can do when a man lets himself be grasped by Him. In these days, we have deepened the awareness that "whoever is in Christ is a new creation" and that He is truly useful for the journey of the human person in the relationship with things and people. We have experienced anew that the encounter with the Risen Christ has reawakened and strengthened the original sense of our dependence on the Mystery and the original nucleus of original evidence and needs (for truth, justice, happiness, love) that Fr. Giussani calls "the religious sense." Amazed by the signs of human reawakening that we see happening in us and in our friends, we are more certain that the Christian event saves the human from the consequences of the unreasonable attitudes before the fundamental questions of the heart. Well aware of the enormous debt of gratitude that our Fraternity owes John Paul II, we come to Rome as pilgrims who find, in your person, a rock standing before the world, the safety for their own journey of faith, certain that we can trust in you."

HOLY MASS

(Acts 2:42-47; Psalm 118:2-4, 13-15, 22-24; 1 Pt 1:3-9; Jn 20:19-31)

HOMILY BY FR. JAVIER PRADES

In the Liturgy of the Second Sunday of Easter, which we are celebrating, the Church proposes to us the Feast of Divine Mercy. This is another reason for thanking the soon to be Blessed John Paul II, who instituted this feast.

We have just repeated together, with the words of Psalm 118: “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His love endures for ever.” To be able to grasp the vibration, the sentiment of reality that the psalmist expressed in the sentence, “Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His love endures for ever;” we have to listen—even for just an instant—to how deep in us this need for “forever” is, in every dimension of our living but above all in the experience of love. There has never been an experience of love able to fill our hearts that did not bear, and does not bear within, this “forever”—loving “forever;” being loved “forever.” The heart breathes only when it lives this dimension in the first person. And yet we cannot deny that very often in life we discover ourselves thinking, “But can that person still love me after what I did to her?” This happens with friends and colleagues, between husband and wife, between parents and children. We, who have this constitutive need of “forever” in love, sense that in our affective fragility this need often seems unattainable.

Only those who grasp deep down the tension between these two aspects can understand the consciousness with which Saint Peter could proclaim today, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy gave us a new birth.” He uses a very strong expression, “gave us a new birth,” to the point that one can feel as if reborn now—even he who was dead, in other words, cynical, skeptical. “In His great mercy gave us a new birth.” The great mercy of God makes possible for us the experience of a love “for forever.” What Peter says is very similar to what Paul says when he speaks of the new creature.

Fr. Giussani said many times that the word “mercy” should be eliminated from the dictionary, because it is impossible to fill it with meaning based on our own powers. Those who have known mercy are regenerated, pulled out of nothingness, we could say existentially, in order to be born again. The symptom of this mercy in action, the symptom of this being reborn is indicated clearly in today’s Liturgy, which spoke in several places of “an indescribable and glorious joy,” as Peter himself proclaimed, and as the

Acts of the Apostles and Saint John also say. All today's readings agree on this joy, which is the unmistakable symptom, the unmistakable feature of those who experience mercy. We know it well in our life, because we have always been happy when we have been embraced in such a way as to be reborn. Let us never lose sight of those people who reflect in their faces this unspeakable joy. This joy is so exceptional that when you see it, you grab onto it, and you go after the people who live it—people we know, because they are here in our midst—who testify it to us. These are the people together with whom, even in our poverty, we can well say with the Psalm, according to that accent that has made itself familiar as the years go by, “The Lord is my strength and my song.”

MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest friends:

On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises, I join you, in prayer and with affection, to renew our bond of communion.

“To be in Christ,” Paul’s repeated invitation, above all through his personal testimony, is the best identification of Christian existence. In fact, Christians, beyond their limits and fragility, live every act as invocation of the presence of the Lord Jesus expressed with the whole mind, heart, and strength. We are also taught this in a beautiful prayer of our tradition in which we ask the Lord to inspire every action and accompany us with His help, so that what is begun in Him, ends in Him.

The fascination of the charism of Fr. Giussani consists precisely in proposing to women and men of every age that the victory of the Risen Christ happens through a change of life, renewing the relationship with God, with others, and with oneself, and throwing us wide open, with humble courage, to all of reality.

As Benedict XVI often repeats, being witnesses to this dizzying human position is at once a great joy and a serious responsibility. How can we not recognize in the imminent beatification of John Paul II the fascination of being witnesses?

My blessing to all of you.

*Cardinal Angelo Scola
Patriarch of Venice, Italy*

Dear Fr. Julián:

On the eve of the Beatification of the Servant of God John Paul II, I greet all the friends of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises. What joy we all felt when Fr. Giussani spoke with enthusiasm of the election of Cardinal Karol Wojtyła to Pope, and how confirmed we felt in the charism when, with an accent of incomparable certainty, the Pope said, “Christ, center of the cosmos and of history.” His Beatification persuades us of the fact that in the encounter with Christ, life can be completely fulfilled today.

Christ saves the religious sense. I am writing to manifest my gratitude for the journey that the Lord is having us make in this moment in the

Movement, in a constant provocation to the fascination of the contemporaneity of Christ and the work of our freedom. I send you my heartfelt greeting and accompany you with prayer to *Nossa Senhora Aparecida*.

Bishop Filippo Santoro
Bishop of Petrópolis, Brazil

TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness
Benedict XVI*

Holy Father, the 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises, concluded early, are about to depart for Rome to join Your Holiness, who has desired to show to all the baptized and to the whole world John Paul II as an example of what Christ can do when a man lets himself be grasped by Him.

In these days, we have deepened the awareness that “whoever is in Christ is a new creation” and that He is truly useful for the journey of the human person in the relationship with things and people. We have experienced anew that the encounter with the Risen Christ has reawakened and strengthened the original sense of our dependence on the Mystery and the original nucleus of original evidence and needs (for truth, justice, happiness, love) that Fr. Giussani calls “the religious sense.” Amazed by the signs of human reawakening that we see happening in us and in our friends, we are more certain that the Christian event saves the human from the consequences of the unreasonable attitudes before the fundamental questions of the heart.

Well aware of the enormous debt of gratitude that our Fraternity owes John Paul II, we come to Rome as pilgrims who find, in your person, a rock standing before the world, the safety for their own journey of faith, certain that we can trust in you.”

Fr. Julián Carrón

*Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State of His Holiness*

The 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” are grateful for the message sent in the name of the Holy Father. Having ended the retreat early, we are coming to Rome to unite with Benedict XVI and the universal Church in thanksgiving to God that in the Blessed John Paul II He has given us

such an authentic witness to Christ, the one Savior of the world. With filial devotion,

Fr. Julián Carrón

Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference

Dearest Eminence:

The 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” have concluded the retreat early in order for all to be in Rome to unite with Benedict XVI, who has decided to show the whole world the Blessed John Paul II as an example of what Christ can do when a man lets himself be grasped by Him. In faithfulness to the charism of Fr. Giussani, we continue to testify to the newness of life that Christ makes flower in and among us, for the good of the entire Italian people.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Cardinal Stanisław Rylko
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity

Dearest Eminence:

The 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” concluded early, are about to depart for Rome to unite with the other thousands of friends of the Movement and the entire Church on the day in which Benedict XVI beatifies our great Pope John Paul II, who acknowledged in our Fraternity the road toward sanctity for each of us. Faithful to the charism of Fr. Giussani and the missionary mandate of the Blessed John Paul II, “Go forth to all the world to bring the truth, beauty, and peace that are encountered in Christ the Redeemer,” we pray that Our Lady of Czestochowa will protect your service to Peter for the good of the lay faithful.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Bishop Filippo Santoro
Bishop of Petrópolis, Brazil

Dearest Eminence:

Your words deepen our awareness of the debt that the entire Movement owes the new Blessed, and make us even more aware of the responsibility of testifying throughout the world that “whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” renewing the faithfulness to the missionary mandate of John Paul II in 1984, that Fr. Giussani indicated to us as the task of our companionship and that you were among the first to embrace, departing for Brazil. Please pray for us to Our Lady of Aparecida that we may walk on the road of holiness, always more one with Christ who reached us through the charism of Fr. Giussani.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz
Archbishop of Krakow, Poland

Most Reverend Eminence,

The 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini for the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation,” have decided to conclude the retreat early in order to travel overnight to Rome, together with thousands of other friends of the Movement, for the beatification of our dearest John Paul II, a giant of a faith in love with Christ, who recognized our Fraternity and to whom we owe an enormous debt of gratitude. Knowing what a close bond there was between the Pope and Fr. Giussani and CL, founded on a consonance of the gaze of faith upon all of reality, in the passion for Christ, “center of the cosmos and of history,” we ask you to ask the new Blessed to intercede for us. For our part, we ask John Paul II to always be in your life a powerful protector.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Cardinal Angelo Scola
Patriarch of Venice, Italy

Dearest Angelo:

Your words have made us more aware of the importance in our life of the words of St. Paul, “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation.” In fact,

Christ is something that is happening to us now, a newness more powerful than our limits and fragility. Grateful for your reminder that in this consists the fascination of the charism of Fr. Giussani, we ask the Blessed John Paul II to support your ministry of testimony to the change of life that Christ realizes in those who acknowledge Him present, in the powerful sign of His Resurrection. We entrust to Our Lady the good outcome of the visit of Benedict XVI to your diocese, and send affectionate greetings.

Fr. Julián Carrón

LETTER TO THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

Milan, January 31, 2011

Dear friends,

I imagine the emotion and the enthusiasm with which each of you—like myself—welcomed the announcement of the beatification of John Paul II, fixed by Benedict XVI for the coming May 1st, feast of the Divine Mercy. Along with the Pope, we, too, exclaimed, “We are happy!” (*Angelus*, January 16, 2011).

We join in the joy of the whole Church in thanking God for the good that his person was, with his missionary witness and passion. Which of us did not receive much from his life? How many, on seeing his passion for Christ, the kind of humanity that sprang from his faith, and his infectious enthusiasm, rediscovered the joy of being Christian! In him, we immediately recognized a man—with a temperament and an accent imbued by faith—whose words and gestures illustrated the method chosen by God for communicating himself: a human encounter that makes faith fascinating and persuasive.

We are all very much aware of the importance of his pontificate for the life of the Church and of mankind. In a particularly difficult moment he repropounded, with a boldness that can have only God as its origin, what it means to be a Christian today, offering all the reasons of faith and untiringly promoting the germs of renewal of the ecclesial organism set in motion by the Second Vatican Council, without falling into any of the partial interpretations that would have reduced its effect in one sense or another. His contribution to peace in the world and to human coexistence shows how crucial for the common good is a faith lived integrally in all its dimensions.

We know how close, from the beginning of the pontificate, was John Paul II’s bond with Fr. Giussani and CL, founded on a convergence in the view of faith on the whole of reality, in passion for Christ “centre of the universe and of history” (*Redemptor hominis*). He offered us a precious teaching for understanding and deepening our charism in the many and various occasions in which he spoke to all the movements, which he indicated as the “springtime of the Spirit,” since in the Church the charismatic dimension is “co-essential” with the institutional. He spoke to us directly many times,

including in the moving letters written to Fr. Giussani in the last years of their lives, joined together by the trial of illness.

In his address for the 30th anniversary of the Movement, in 1984, he told us, “Jesus, the Christ, He in whom everything is made and subsists, is therefore the interpretative principle of man and his history. To affirm humbly but equally tenaciously that Christ is the beginning and inspirational motive for living and working of consciousness and of action, means to adhere to Him, to make present adequately His victory over the world. To work so that the content of the faith becomes understanding and pedagogy of life is the daily task of the believer, which must be carried out in every situation and environment in which they are called to live. And the richness of your participation in ecclesial life lies in this: a method of education in the faith so that it may influence the life of man and history. [...] The Christian experience so understood and lived generates a presence which places the Church in every human situation as the place where the *event* of Christ, [...] lives as a horizon full of truth for man. We believe in Christ, dead and risen, in Christ present here and now, who alone can change and changes man and the world, by transfiguring them.” (Rome, September 29, 1984). These words are strikingly relevant even today.

With a surprising and unique paternity, John Paul II embraced our young history, granting canonical recognition to the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, *Memores Domini*, the Priestly Fraternity of the Missionaries of St. Charles Borromeo, and the Sisters of Charity of the Assumption, as various fruits flowing from Fr. Giussani’s charism for the good of the whole Church. The Pope himself made us understand the import of that gesture, “When a movement is recognized by the Church, it becomes a privileged instrument for a personal and ever new adherence to the mystery of Christ” (Castelgandolfo, September 12, 1985).

So, if someone has an enormous debt of gratitude towards John Paul II, we are the ones.

We cannot find a more adequate way of showing this gratitude than to follow his authoritative warning: “Never allow the parasite of habit, of routine, of old age to lodge within your participation! Continually renew the discovery of the charism which has fascinated you and it will more powerfully lead you to make yourself servants of that one power which is Christ the Lord!” (Castelgandolfo, September 12, 1985).

For these reasons we shall all participate in the beatification ceremony on May 1st. So the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity, planned for April 29th-May 1st, will end on Saturday evening, April 30th, so that along with all the other friends of the Movement—highschool students, university students, and the adults not present at Rimini—we can make the pilgrimage to Rome to join the Pope and the Church in thanking God who has given us such an authentic witness of Christ. We want to gather closely around Benedict XVI, who in his farsightedness has decided to indicate Blessed John Paul II to the whole world as an example of what Christ can make of a man who allows himself to be grasped by Him.

Asking Fr. Giussani and the newly Blessed John Paul II to accompany from heaven our fidelity to Peter—sure bulwark of our life of faith—and Our Lady to fulfill in each of us the desire for holiness for which our Fraternity exists, I greet you wholeheartedly.

Fr. Julián Carrón

The Beatification of John Paul II

The Homily of His Holiness Benedict XVI

Saint Peter's Square, Divine Mercy Sunday, May 1, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Six years ago, we gathered in this Square to celebrate the funeral of Pope John Paul II. Our grief at his loss was deep, but even greater was our sense of an immense grace which embraced Rome and the whole world: a grace which was in some way the fruit of my beloved predecessor's entire life, and especially of his witness in suffering. Even then we perceived the fragrance of his sanctity, and in any number of ways God's People showed their veneration for him. For this reason, with all due respect for the Church's canonical norms, I wanted his cause of beatification to move forward with reasonable haste. And now the longed-for day has come; it came quickly because this is what was pleasing to the Lord: John Paul II is Blessed!

I would like to offer a cordial greeting to all of you who on this happy occasion have come in such great numbers to Rome from all over the world—cardinals, patriarchs of the Eastern Catholic Churches, brother bishops and priests, official delegations, ambassadors and civil authorities, consecrated men and women and lay faithful, and I extend that greeting to all those who join us by radio and television.

Today is the Second Sunday of Easter, which Blessed John Paul II entitled Divine Mercy Sunday. The date was chosen for today's celebration because, in God's providence, my predecessor died on the vigil of this feast. Today is also the first day of May, Mary's month, and the liturgical memorial of Saint Joseph the Worker. All these elements serve to enrich our prayer, they help us in our pilgrimage through time and space; but in heaven a very different celebration is taking place among the angels and saints! Even so, God is but one, and one too is Christ the Lord, who like a bridge joins earth to heaven. At this moment, we feel closer than ever, sharing as it were in the liturgy of heaven.

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe” (*Jn* 20:29). In today's Gospel, Jesus proclaims this beatitude: the beatitude of faith. For us, it is particularly striking because we are gathered to celebrate a beatification, but even more so because today the one proclaimed blessed is a Pope, a Successor of Peter, one who was called to confirm his brethren in the faith. John Paul II is blessed because of his faith, a strong, generous, and apostolic faith. We think at once of another beatitude: “Blessed are you,

Simon, son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven” (*Mt* 16:17). What did our heavenly Father reveal to Simon? That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Because of this faith, Simon becomes Peter, the rock on which Jesus can build His Church. The eternal beatitude of John Paul II, which today the Church rejoices to proclaim, is wholly contained in these sayings of Jesus: “Blessed are you, Simon” and “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe!” It is the beatitude of faith, which John Paul II also received as a gift from God the Father for the building up of Christ’s Church.

Our thoughts turn to yet another beatitude, one which appears in the Gospel before all others. It is the beatitude of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of the Redeemer. Mary, who had just conceived Jesus, was told by Saint Elizabeth: “Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord” (*Lk* 1:45). The beatitude of faith has its model in Mary, and all of us rejoice that the beatification of John Paul II takes place on this first day of the month of Mary, beneath the maternal gaze of the one who by her faith sustained the faith of the Apostles and constantly sustains the faith of their successors, especially those called to occupy the Chair of Peter. Mary does not appear in the accounts of Christ’s Resurrection, yet hers is, as it were, a continual, hidden presence: she is the Mother to whom Jesus entrusted each of His disciples and the entire community. In particular, we can see how Saint John and Saint Luke record the powerful, maternal presence of Mary in the passages preceding those read in today’s Gospel and first reading. In the account of Jesus’ death, Mary appears at the foot of the Cross (*Jn* 19:25), and at the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles she is seen in the midst of the disciples gathered in prayer in the Upper Room (*Acts* 1:14).

Today’s second reading also speaks to us of faith. Saint Peter himself, filled with spiritual enthusiasm, points out to the newly-baptized the reason for their hope and their joy. I like to think how in this passage, at the beginning of his First Letter, Peter does not use language of exhortation; instead, he states a fact. He writes: “you *rejoice*,” and he adds: “you *love* Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you *believe* in Him and *rejoice* with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you *are receiving* the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 *Pet* 1:6, 8-9). All these verbs are in the indicative, because a new reality has come about in Christ’s Resurrection, a reality to which faith opens the door. “This is the Lord’s doing,” says the Psalm (118:23), and “it is marvelous in our eyes,” the eyes of faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, today our eyes behold, in the full spiritual light of the risen Christ, the beloved and revered figure of John Paul II. Today, his

name is added to the host of those whom he proclaimed saints and blessed during the almost 27 years of his pontificate, thereby forcefully emphasizing the universal vocation to the heights of the Christian life, to holiness, taught by the conciliar Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*. All of us, as members of the people of God—bishops, priests, deacons, laity, men and women religious—are making our pilgrim way to the heavenly homeland where the Virgin Mary has preceded us, associated as she was in a unique and perfect way to the mystery of Christ and the Church. Karol Wojtyła took part in the Second Vatican Council, first as an Auxiliary Bishop and then as Archbishop of Kraków. He was fully aware that the Council's decision to devote the last chapter of its Constitution on the Church to Mary meant that the Mother of the Redeemer is held up as an image and model of holiness for every Christian and for the entire Church. This was the theological vision which Blessed John Paul II discovered as a young man and subsequently maintained and deepened throughout his life. A vision which is expressed in the scriptural image of the crucified Christ with Mary, his Mother, at his side. This icon from the Gospel of John (19:25-27) was taken up in the episcopal and later the papal coat-of-arms of Karol Wojtyła: a golden cross with the letter "M" on the lower right and the motto "*Totus tuus*," drawn from the well-known words of Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort in which Karol Wojtyła found a guiding light for his life: "*Totus tuus ego sum et omnia mea tua sunt. Accipio te in mea omnia. Praebe mihi cor tuum, Maria*" – "I belong entirely to you, and all that I have is yours. I take you for my all. O Mary, give me your heart" (*Treatise on True Devotion to the Blessed Virgin*, 266).

In his Testament, the new Blessed wrote: "When, on October 16, 1978, the Conclave of Cardinals chose John Paul II, the Primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński said to me: 'The task of the new Pope will be to lead the Church into the Third Millennium.'" And the Pope added: "I would like once again to express my gratitude to the Holy Spirit for the great gift of the Second Vatican Council, to which, together with the whole Church—and especially with the whole episcopate—I feel indebted. I am convinced that it will long be granted to the new generations to draw from the treasures that this Council of the twentieth century has lavished upon us. As a Bishop who took part in the Council from the first to the last day, I desire to entrust this great patrimony to all who are and will be called in the future to put it into practice. For my part, I thank the Eternal Shepherd, who has enabled me to serve this very great cause in the course of all the years of my Pontificate." And what is this "cause"? It is the same one that John Paul II presented during his first solemn Mass in Saint Peter's Square in the unforgettable

words: “Do not be afraid! Open, open wide the doors to Christ!” What the newly elected Pope asked of everyone, he was himself the first to do: society, culture, political and economic systems he opened up to Christ, turning back with the strength of a titan—a strength which came to him from God—a tide which appeared irreversible. By his witness of faith, love, and apostolic courage, accompanied by great human charisma, this exemplary son of Poland helped believers throughout the world not to be afraid to be called Christian, to belong to the Church, to speak of the Gospel. In a word: he helped us not to fear the truth, because truth is the guarantee of liberty. To put it even more succinctly: he gave us the strength to believe in Christ, because Christ is *Redemptor hominis*, the Redeemer of man. This was the theme of his first encyclical, and the thread which runs through all the others. When Karol Wojtyła ascended to the throne of Peter, he brought with him a deep understanding of the difference between Marxism and Christianity, based on their respective visions of man. This was his message: man is the way of the Church, and Christ is the way of man. With this message, which is the great legacy of the Second Vatican Council and of its “helmsman,” the Servant of God Pope Paul VI, John Paul II led the People of God across the threshold of the Third Millennium, which, thanks to Christ, he was able to call “the threshold of hope.” Throughout the long journey of preparation for the great Jubilee, he directed Christianity once again to the future, the future of God, which transcends history while nonetheless directly affecting it. He rightly reclaimed for Christianity that impulse of hope which had in some sense faltered before Marxism and the ideology of progress. He restored to Christianity its true face as a religion of hope, to be lived in history in an “Advent” spirit, in a personal and communitarian existence directed to Christ, the fullness of humanity and the fulfillment of all our longings for justice and peace.

Finally, on a more personal note, I would like to thank God for the gift of having worked for many years with Blessed Pope John Paul II. I had known him earlier and had esteemed him, but for 23 years, beginning in 1982 after he called me to Rome to be Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, I was at his side and came to revere him all the more. My own service was sustained by his spiritual depth and by the richness of his insights. His example of prayer continually impressed and edified me: he remained deeply united to God even amid the many demands of his ministry. Then, too, there was his witness in suffering: the Lord gradually stripped him of everything, yet he remained ever a “rock,” as Christ desired. His profound humility, grounded in close union with Christ, enabled him to continue to lead the Church and to give to the world a message which became all the

more eloquent as his physical strength declined. In this way, he lived out in an extraordinary way the vocation of every priest and bishop to become completely one with Jesus, whom he daily receives and offers in the Church. Blessed are you, beloved Pope John Paul II, because you believed! Continue, we implore you, to sustain from heaven the faith of God's people. You often blessed us in this Square from the Apostolic Palace: Bless us, Holy Father! Amen.

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

Prepared by Sandro Chierici

(Guide to the images drawn from art history that accompanied selections of classical music during entrance and exit)

The Sagrada Familia of Antonio Gaudí in Barcelona

- 1-2 The Nativity Façade
- 3-4 Angels announce with trumpets the birth of the Savior
- 5 The central portico, the Portico of Charity
- 6 The central column of the Portico of Charity. The scroll that winds around the column contains Jesus' genealogy; the net that wraps the lower part represents the sins of man
- 7 Scenes of the Nativity
- 8 The Annunciation
- 9 The Portico of Hope, the wedding of Mary and Joseph
- 10 The Portico of Faith, the Visitation
- 11 The Portico of Charity, angels and shepherd contemplate the Nativity
- 12-15 Joseph, Mary, and the Child
- 16-17 The Wise Men
- 18-20 Humankind rejoices at the birth of the Savior
- 21-23 An angel plays a cordless harp
- 24 An angel plays a lute
- 25-26 The Portico of Faith, the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple
- 27 The left portico, the Portico of Hope
- 28 The flight into Egypt
- 29 The slaughter of the Innocents
- 30 Joseph and the child Jesus
- 31 Rosaries carved at the top of the niche
- 32 The right portico, the Portico of Faith
- 33 Joseph and Mary in search of Jesus, and Jesus at work in Joseph's carpentry shop
- 34-35 Young Jesus teaches in the Temple
- 36-37 The upper part of the Portico of Charity, with the Coronation of Mary
- 38-39 The entrance into the Rosary Chapel
- 40 An angel

- 41 Man tempted by violence
- 42-43 Figures of snakes
- 44 The Passion Façade, Christ is scourged
- 45 The veil of Veronica
- 46 Scenes of the Passion
- 47 The dove of the Holy Spirit, and the Ascension of Jesus
- 48 The Nativity Façade, a decorative element
- 49-54 Details of one of the spires
- 55-57 The cypress (the Church) that hosts birds (the faithful)
- 58-62 Details of the pinnacle
- 63 At the top of the cypress, the Cross, the tau, and the dove
- 64 The Chalice sustained by grapes
- 65 The Host, sustained by ears of wheat
- 66 The pinnacles that crown the building
- 67-69 Views of the interior
- 69 The baldachin(canopy) and crucifix over the altar
- 70-76 Details of the columns inside the church
- 77-81 Details of the windows
- 82-84 Views of the interior
- 86-91 Details of the ceiling
- 92-93 The dome of light over the altar
- 94 Details of the pinnacles
- 95-97 Arial views of the Sagrada Familia building site
- 98 The Sagrada Familia in the context of the city

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Supplemento al periodico *Litterae Communionis Traces*, vol. 13 – n. 6, 2011.

Poste Italiane Spa - Spedizione in A.P. D.L. 353/2003 (conv. in L. 27.02.2004, n° 46) art. 1, comma 1, DCB Milano

Iscrizione nel Registro degli Operatori di Comunicazione n°6147

Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo – Via Porpora 127 – 20131 Milano

Direttore responsabile: Davide Perillo

Reg. Tribunale di Milano n. 740 – 28 ottobre 1998

Stampa: Arti Grafiche Fiorin - Via del Tecchione 36, Sesto Ulteriano (Mi)

Impaginazione: Ultreya, Milano

