



"FROM FAITH, THE METHOD"

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY
OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION



RIMINI 2009

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Translated by William Vouk, edited by Suzanne Tanzi.

On the cover: Barna da Siena, *The Calling of Saint Peter* (14th century).
Collegiate church of San Gimignano.

Vatican City, April 20, 2009

*Reverend Father
Julian 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 “From Faith, the Method,” the Supreme Pontiff offers the many participants his cordial best wishes with the assurance of his spiritual closeness; and while he wishes that this blessed occasion may awaken a renewed and lasting fidelity to Christ as well as a more generous commitment to the work of evangelization, he invokes a generous outpouring of heavenly favors and sends you and the responsables of the Fraternity and all those gathered his special and heartfelt apostolic blessing.

Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State for His Holiness

Friday evening, April 24

Before the introduction and after the conclusion:

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

*Wilhelm Kempff – Ferdinand Leitner – Bamberg Symphony Orchestra
Deutsche Grammophon*

■ INTRODUCTION

Julián Carrón: Each one of us knows how much effort he has made to be here now. All this effort is the first expression of our cry, of our asking Christ.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit; let us invoke His help so that He bring this attempt, this cry of ours to completion.

Come Holy Ghost

We welcome everyone and we greet our friends who are connected by satellite: twenty-three countries live, and later on forty countries, for a total of seventy-three. For the first time, Malta is connected with us live.

We begin this encounter of ours by reading the telegram the Holy Father has sent to us:

“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme ‘From Faith, the Method,’ the Supreme Pontiff offers the many participants his cordial best wishes with the assurance of his spiritual closeness; and while he wishes that this blessed occasion may awaken a renewed and lasting fidelity to Christ as well as a more generous commitment to the work of evangelization, he invokes a generous outpouring of heavenly favors and sends you and the responsables of the Fraternity and all those gathered his special and heart-felt apostolic blessing. Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone, Secretary of State.”

1. “The circumstances through which God has us pass are an essential and not a secondary factor of our vocation, of the mission to which He calls us. If Christianity is the announcement of the fact that the Mystery has become flesh in a man, the circumstance in which one takes a posi-

tion about this in front of the whole world is important for the very definition of witness.”¹

We all know well what these circumstances are that have challenged us throughout this year: the economic crisis, the earthquake in Abruzzo, the many forms of pain which have caused us to reflect (above all, the case of Eluana [a comatose woman who died after her feeding tube was removed]), seeing a world collapse in front of our eyes, with laws that no longer know how to defend the good of life or of the family, finding ourselves more and more obliged to live our lives without a homeland, dramatic personal and social circumstances from illness to trouble to the loss of work, if not in fact the loss of everything, like our friends in Abruzzo. So these circumstances through which God has us pass, says Father Giussani, “are an essential and not a secondary factor of our vocation.” For us, then, circumstances are not neutral. They are not things that happen without any meaning; that is, they are not just things to put up with, to suffer stoically. They are part of our vocation, of the way in which God, the good Mystery, calls us, challenges us, educates us. For us, these circumstances have all the weight of a call, and thus are part of the dialogue of each one of us with the Mystery present.

Thus, as Father Giussani said to us fifteen years ago, introducing the Fraternity Exercises in 1994, life is a dialogue.

“Life is not a tragedy. Tragedy is what makes everything amount to nothing. Yes, life is a drama. It is dramatic because it is the relationship between our I and the You of God, our I that must follow the steps which God indicates.”² It is this Presence, this You that makes circumstances change, because without this You everything would be nothing, everything would be a step toward an ever darker tragedy. But precisely because this You exists, circumstances call us to Him. It is He who calls us through them. It is He who calls us to destiny through everything that happens. We are not exempt from the risk that Father Giussani pointed out years ago, of living life in the total anesthesia that our society creates: “The true danger of our age, said Teilhard de Chardin, is the loss of the taste for life. Now, the loss of the taste for life implies not having a feeling for oneself . . . non-affection for oneself. But it would take total anesthesia for a man to wholly, entirely lose the sense of attachment to himself, to lose at least an embryonic emotion for himself, a concern for himself. It would take total anesthesia. The type of society in which we live manages

¹ Luigi Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino* [*Man and His Destiny*] (Genoa: Marietti, 1999) 63.

² Giussani, “*Il tempo si fa breve*” [*The Time Is Short*] (Milan: Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 1994) 7.

to bring about this total anesthetic [and we know this well, because, on many occasions, it is as if we were asleep in our numbness, in our distraction, in the flight from ourselves, where the furthest thing is that affection for ourselves. It is enough to think about when it was that each of us (and I say this first of all to myself) had a moment of tenderness for himself, felt this tenderness toward himself vibrating inside], but it cannot last forever. Even this very widespread (since this is a society totally characterized by alienation) total anesthetic has a limit. It cannot last forever, and so suffering ... cannot be avoided. Suffering ... indicates the suspension, the interruption, the end of a total anesthetic.”³

By means of these circumstances, the Mystery wants to rouse us from this anesthesia, to educate us to the awareness of ourselves, to our truth. He awakens us to the awareness for which we were made. He does not allow us to go toward nothingness without caring about us, because of His passion for our life, which is the most powerful sign of God’s tenderness for us. And how does He educate us? Not by means of a speech, not through a reflection (which we often do not want to hear), but through the experience of reality, by means of the circumstances to which He calls us, He shakes us: “Do you see what’s happening?” We read it in the School of Community: “You learn life in the concrete, not theoretically,”⁴ and a bit of reality is worth more than a thousand words. So, friends, circumstances, sufferings, difficulties place us in front of the seriousness of life, which we so often want to censure.

“Normally in life, for all people, the problem of money is serious, the problem of children is serious, the problem of man and woman is serious, the problem of health is serious, the problem of politics is serious. For the world, everything is serious but life. I don’t mean life (life as health is a serious thing, to be sure), but *life* [we would need to hear the feeling in Father Giussani saying *life*, and then we would take in all the feeling of his passion for each one of us]. But, what is *life* besides health, money, the relationship between man and woman, children, work? What is life besides these things? What does it imply? Life implies all this, but with an all-embracing purpose, with a meaning.”⁵

And circumstances challenge us to discover this meaning.

³ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland] (1982-1983)* (Milan: BUR, 2008) 292-93.

⁴ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2 (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s, 2008) 75.

⁵ *Ibid.* 146-147.

2. The real problem, then, is not the crisis, not these more or less dramatic circumstances which touch us in one way or another, but rather how we find ourselves facing these circumstances, how we act in front of them. We see that often these circumstances are the occasion to become aware that we are dislocated, lost. Why? “The reality of the Church, as that daily event in which the original Event is made present, places itself in front of the world today, I don’t say forgetting, but (at least methodologically) taking for granted, as obvious, the dogmatic content of Christianity, its ontology, and therefore simply the event of faith.”⁶ The same thing can happen to us: we place ourselves in front of the circumstances, I don’t say forgetting, but taking for granted, taking as obvious the event of faith. And we feel lost.

This is precisely why the circumstances that challenge us bring to the surface, as we will see in these days, the path we have walked this year, because Father Giussani teaches us that circumstance is the place where one takes his position in front of the world, in his way of living it. For one who has received the Christian proclamation – “the Mystery made itself flesh in a man”⁷ – each circumstance is the occasion for everyone to show what position he assumes in front of the proclamation of this fact.

We tell in front of everybody who Christ is for us by the way we live the circumstances. Everyone can look at himself, can discover himself in action, because everyone has acted within these circumstances. We have all acted, we have all been challenged in one way or another by these circumstances. We have all been obliged to come out into the open (and no one has been spared) and we have said what life means for us, what Christ is, what it is we treasure more than anything else, above and beyond our intentions. I say “beyond our intentions” because we often confuse our intentions with reality. Our intentions are very often right, but then we discover that in reality we act according to a different logic. That is why it is in the way we face the circumstances that challenge us that we affirm what we belong to. “On the contrary, it is from how this position is reached in us that we understand whether and to what degree we live a belonging, which is the deep root of all cultural expression.”⁸ That is, we tell ourselves what our culture is, what and whom we love most and hold most dear, by the way we face circumstances. It is in

⁶ Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino* [*Man and His Destiny*], 63-64.

⁷ *Ibid.* 63.

⁸ *Ibid.*

front of the real challenges of living that the consistency of a cultural position and its capacity to hold up in front of everything, even in front of the earthquake, become evident.

About this, we have received a powerful witness from our friends in Abruzzo, who wrote this recently:

“Monday, April 6, was the day of the shock. Our first move was to find one another, to track each other down and to take a head count. Then we felt the astonishment and the gratitude for us all being kept safe: the first great miracle. Right from the start, there was an availability, in every part of the region, to take on the various needs that we were becoming aware of. This attempt to embrace those in pain, in all our inadequacy, was essential, because through this simple relationship we were led to recognize, in the ‘rubble’ of our companionship and of the people of Abruzzo, events that were not rubble at all. The dynamic of sharing helped us to recognize unexpected and unimaginable manifestations of human beauty that began, right from the start, to allow us to see something exceptional. Something great was happening, precisely in a moment when we believed that nothing could happen. Precisely among the people we thought we knew everything about (our communities and the dispersed of L’Aquila) emerged a moving and unforeseeable authority. May we be able to follow. In particular, we are inspired by Marco and his wife Daniela, who decided the day after the earthquake to set themselves up in a camper in L’Aquila. Last night, we were moved when he said, ‘What my heart needs is here! The earthquake has made it present!’ Among the rubble, flowers are blooming. A flower is not an emotion. It is something present. The flower is Grazia and Gino, it is my wife, the campers that they gave us, the Way of the Cross, this place of communion, and Teresa, who a year and a half after having left, came back to embrace us again, saying, ‘It took an earthquake to have me come back!’ The flower is Father Eugenio, Ugo, Manlio, and the others from our community and Rimini. A continuous display of the resurrection after a week of passion... It would take many pages to recount the facts that we have witnessed, because the earthquake has made all of our poverty come out, and it has caused us to return to the memory of all the times that we hoped in material things that now the earthquake has taken away; it would also take many pages to tell how Jesus is showing Himself risen among us. Tears flow when He visits us, showing Himself as incomparable beauty precisely in some of us whom we used to judge as ‘normal’ or even ‘rubble.’ The unity and the belonging to

this companionship are the other aspects of the miracle that we are seeing. Who would have imagined seeing some of us take to heart what we say to one another! [Here, in front of circumstances so dramatic, one sees who takes what we say seriously.] Yesterday, Marco, referring to a meeting between the two of us, said, 'If I start from myself I get one. If I start from others I get five. I don't know why, but it works. I see that to belong, to the point of being consumed into unity, causes a rebirth.' The evidence is that we are still as broken as before, but One is uniting us. We get together very often and in many different ways, not with the desire to rebuild the houses or the region (which may crumble again in any moment), but with a new desire: to be able to relish the fascination with Christ who is rebuilding in His way and to not abandon that. Now the earth continues to shake and adds fear to pain. We all have the temptation to want to turn the page, saying, 'Let's hope that these shocks finish soon, so at least we can start over,' while He, in the meantime, may be making all things new. The School of Community says, 'The enemies of this faithfulness in belonging, the most noticeable enemies, are weariness and pain.' Every day we touch these enemies with our hands and they often defeat us. May the Lord forgive us. May all of you, together with Carrón, be able to forgive us, giving your life so that we may remain in Christ."

Who would not want a friendship like this? Friends who ask to give their life to remain in Christ!

Friends come from all over, including from Uganda. Rose writes to me,

"On the Thursday following the earthquake, I received the Italian version of the Movement's flyer and I read it to the 100 women of the Meeting Point of Kireka, the area of Kampala where the women grind stones to earn a few dollars. In Acholi (their native language), they told me, 'They are our people; what happened affected our people. We have to do something.' They asked me if there was a way to go and help the people in Abruzzo, to get on a bus and go. The papers said that there were still people buried under the rubble, and the women wanted to go there to move the stones and retrieve the bodies. I told them that it was impossible because Abruzzo is very far and one can only get there by plane. They answered, 'We have to do something because they belong to our people. At least we have to send them something to show them that they are part of our people, that they belong to us.' One of the women

said, ‘They belong to Father Giussani’s tribe.’ They were so moved that, as they were leaving, they gave me the equivalent of 250 Euros [approximately 330 American dollars], which is a very large sum for them. They asked me to send the money right away, maybe to pay somebody to help extract the people from under the rubble. That same day, we did not engage in our usual activities – making necklaces, dancing, and playing soccer – because the women wanted to discuss things. We talked, and when they understood that the people affected were Italians, they said that those people belonged to our same tribe, Father Giussani’s tribe. They consider themselves part of Father Giussani’s tribe. They are still raising money. They often ask me for news about our friends; they don’t have a clear idea of the exact location of Abruzzo, and they think that the earthquake affected the whole Italian peninsula, and therefore their friends too. They now want to write a letter. If you ask me to comment on these events, all I can say is that those women were moved. It is true that faith generates a method. When you are immersed in the Mystery, you can’t but notice what happens and be moved. These women challenged me to be moved. They didn’t spring into action because the Movement sent a flyer or a suggestion; they were moved and therefore they moved. If your heart is moved, you move.”

Who wouldn’t be pleased to have felt like that? Who wouldn’t like to feel like that? Who, in listening to this, could not help feeling (as I did) all the shame of our distance in front of this experience that comes to us from our friends at the farthest reaches of the world?

Rose also sent me a letter from Alice:

“Dear Rose, Somebody opened my eyes so I could discover who I am, so precious and loved. I can say that we are the tribes of Father Giussani and the Pope, who loved us and would surely give – and have given – everything for our lives. We have learned from this. Those people who are suffering because of the earthquake are our tribemates, so I want to send my heartfelt love for them – and my contribution is a sign of this. Rose, you know that a person who has never experienced love can’t understand what we feel for those people because love is the movement of the heart that no one can explain. Those who have never loved can only respond mechanically, but what happened to us is such a great thing: somebody was moved for us and cried with us, giving us a shoulder to cry on. I too want to give my shoulder so that somebody can cry on it. If you can, tell those people in Abruzzo that we love them and

belong to them. We feel their pain because we ourselves have passed through it. May God be with them in this moment of trouble, and may He protect them and console them on our behalf.”⁹

This is why, at the beginning of our gesture of the Exercises, we feel the urgent need for a conversion. In the face of this beginning, we can have one of two attitudes, those two types of attitude that Father Giussani traced out in those who were beginning to follow Jesus:

“On one side, there were those who already had the solution of things up their sleeve, or at least already knew what might be the instruments to face the problem of man and the problem of the people (the scribes and the Pharisees, and along with them all the people who shared the spirit of this attitude). Imagine how they were listening to Him there, just like rocks on which His words fell uselessly, or like rocks that contradicted those words, skeptically, or rather with a radically opposed criticism: the rock of that attitude refuted the offering of that discourse, it contradicted it or let it fall away. But let’s try to imagine the other people, the poor people. Not ‘poor people’ because they were poor (Nicodemus was not a poor man, nor were many others mentioned in the Gospel), but poor of heart, who went to hear Him because ‘never has any man spoken as this man speaks!’— that is, because they were and they felt loved, touched in their emotions; they felt renewed in their affection for themselves, in their humanity, in the feeling of their own humanity. These people followed Him ... forgetting even to eat. And what was the first factor that defined that phenomenon? ‘Jesus Christ’? No! The first factor that defined that phenomenon was that they were poor people who felt ... the rock against them; they were people who were hungry and thirsty, as He was to say in the Beatitudes. What does hungry and thirsty mean? Being hungry and thirsty for justice ... means desiring the realization of one’s own humanity, the rising of the true feeling of one’s own humanity... To desire, to be hungry and thirsty for the fulfillment of one’s own humanity, one must sense himself, must sense his own humanity.”¹⁰

Let us begin this gesture with the awareness of this need of ours. Let us begin as the needy: drawn, by this correspondence with ourselves and with our need, to be open to everything this gesture of ours implies –

⁹ Meeting Point of Kireka, a neighborhood of Kampala.

¹⁰ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria* [*Men without a Homeland*] (1982-1983), 293-94.

because it's a sort of asking, the sacrifice that we must make to build this gesture. From silence to the discomfort of moving around, all of this is part of our cry, of our poverty, so that the Lord may have pity on us.

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF FATHER MICHELE BERCHI

Today, just like two thousand years ago, we take part in the same event made greater, made truer; and today, just like two thousand years ago, Jesus challenges us: where can we buy bread so that they can eat? Jesus challenges all our calculations, all our images, all our anesthesia, all the hardness of our heart, all our lack of hope.

Today, just like two thousand years ago, Jesus, in these three days, in all the days of our life, challenges us, and this challenge is our salvation; it is tenderness for our heart, so that our measurement can be broken, so that our measurement becomes His measurement, because much more, infinitely more beautiful than the multiplied loaves, is being able to take part in the great event of the miracle of His presence.

May our life, our nothingness, be an instrument of His explosive presence. This is what we beg of the Blessed Mother for these three days, just as for all the days of our life: that our nothingness may serve Your presence in the world, Lord.

Saturday morning, April 25

*Before the introduction and after the conclusion:
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Symphony no. 38 in D major, K504 "Prague,"
Wiener Philharmoniker – Karl Böhm
Deutsche Grammophon*

Father Pino: What is life? Life is a dialogue; life is not a tragedy. Tragedy is what makes everything amount to nothing. Life is dramatic, because it is the relationship between our I and the You of God, our I that must follow the steps that God indicates.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ FIRST MEDITATION

Julián Carrón

***“We have come to believe, and have known
that you are the Holy One of God”***

(Jn 6:69)

1. “The collapse of ancient religious certainties”

a) The split between knowing and believing

The context where we are facing the challenges we spoke of yesterday evening is that of the collapse of ancient religious certainties.

In his book *Truth and Tolerance*, then-Cardinal Ratzinger refers to a very significant episode, related by Werner Heisenberg, which happened in Brussels during a discussion among scientists.

“They found themselves discussing the fact that Einstein often spoke of God and Max Planck was of the opinion that there was no contradiction between natural sciences and religion.... According to Heisenberg, at the root of that openness [of Planck] was the understanding that natural sciences and religion are two totally different spheres, which are not

in competition with one another: what matters in the natural sciences is the alternative between true and false; in religion what matters is the alternative between good and evil, between valuable and valueless... ‘The natural sciences are, in a certain sense, the way we approach the objective side of reality... Religious faith, on the other hand, is the expression of a subjective decision, which we use to establish what the values we refer to in life should be.’ ... At this point Heisenberg added, ‘I have to admit that I am not comfortable with this separation. I doubt that human societies can live together in the long run with this sharp split between knowing and believing.’ At a certain point Wolfgang Pauli spoke up and affirmed Heisenberg’s doubt – in fact, he raised it to the level of certainty: ‘The complete separation between knowing and believing is only an emergency measure for a very limited time. For example, in Western culture, the moment could arrive in the not too distant future when the parables and images of religion held up to now will no longer hold any persuasive force, not even for simple people; then, I fear, even the ethical system which has lasted until now will quickly collapse and things will happen that will be so atrocious that we cannot even imagine them.’”¹¹

This was 1927. We all know what happened afterwards. Ratzinger goes on,

“In the post-war recovery, there was a living confidence that no such thing could ever happen again. Constitutional law approved at that time in the ‘responsibility before God’ sought to be an expression of the link between law and politics on the one hand, and the great moral imperatives of Biblical faith. Today, in mankind’s moral crisis, which is taking on new and disturbing forms, that former confidence is vanishing. The collapse of the ancient religious certainties, which seventy years ago still seemed to hold, has in the intervening years become a *fait accompli* [and he said this fifteen years ago: imagine today...].”¹²

This is the situation in which we find ourselves facing these challenges of reality: the collapse of religious certainties. But this separation between knowing and believing has a still more distant origin:

“The Enlightenment raised as its banner the ideal of ‘religion in the limits of pure reason.’ However, this religion of pure reason rapidly fell apart, but above all it lacked the strength to sustain life.... Thus, after

¹¹ Josef Ratzinger, *Fede, Verità, Tolleranza* [*Faith, Truth, Tolerance*] (Siena: Cantagalli, 2003) 145-46. (This quotation is not found in the English translation entitled *Truth and Tolerance*.)

¹² *Ibid.* 147.

the end of the Enlightenment ... a new space was sought for religion.... Hence 'sentiment' was assigned to religion as its proper area of existence in human life. Schleiermacher was the great theoretician of this new concept of religion: 'Praxis is art, speculation is science, religion is the sense and the taste of the infinite,' he asserted. Faust's reply to Gretchen's question about religion has become proverbial: 'Sentiment is everything. The name is just noise and smoke....'¹³

The sharp separation between knowing and believing, between knowledge and faith, is a synthesis of the decisions that traverse and characterize the modern age. This separation defines, as we have seen, on the one hand, a sphere of knowledge where a rationalistic concept of reason dominates (reason as "measure of reality,"¹⁴ as Father Giussani called it), which has nothing to do with the question of the ultimate meaning of life, with the Mystery and with faith; and, on the other hand and correspondingly, a sphere of belief intended as the realm of the non-rational, the sentimental, subjective decisions about values, which confines the whole religious phenomenon. Belief, then, finds itself in drastic opposition to knowledge rationalistically conceived.

b) "Stripping the hypothesis of Christian faith from man"

But there is still something else that is crucial for us. Along with this reduction of the entirety of religious experience to the realm of the sentimental, another reduction, even more insidious, occurs, which was denounced many times by Father Giussani: the reduction of Christian faith ("the recognition that what a historical Presence says of Himself is true"¹⁵) to the dynamic of the religious sense and to religiosity ("the asking for totality which is essential to our reason and present in every action"¹⁶). "For modern man, 'faith' is nothing other than a vague aspect of 'religiosity,' a kind of sentiment with which he lives the restless search for his own origin and destiny, which is, in fact, the most suggestive element of every religion. The whole modern mindset anxiously tries to strip [this is the problem] the hypothesis of Christian faith from man and to reduce it to the dynamic of the religious sense and the concept of religiosity, and this confusion unfortunately penetrates the mentality of the Christian people as well."¹⁷

¹³ *Ibid.* 148-49.

¹⁴ Giussani, *The Religious Sense* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1997) 136.

¹⁵ Giussani, Stefano Alberto, Javier Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [*Generating Traces in the History of the World*] (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998) 22.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 21.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 22.

We see that this stripping away of the Christian hypothesis has happened by the fact that the overwhelming majority of the Christian people face reality without the Christian tradition in view; that is, without fully living the memory. This tradition is no longer the criterion for entering into reality; it is no longer the starting point. I am reminded of the impression I had recently when hearing the creation account in the Liturgy. I had heard it many times, and I was once again struck by the tremendous companionship and education the Church gives to people. Yet this is now in decline. We have seen it often this year: what was once normal – a people who had this perception of reality with a loving face at its origin, a Father – has almost become an exception.

Precisely in this context, we can understand all the import of the efforts of Father Giussani, who took on the challenge of this way of seeing things that we have described. The Movement was born responding to this challenge from the first hour of religion class at Berchet, where a student said that faith and reason had nothing to do with one another. Father Giussani never accepted the reduction of faith to sentiment, nor of reason to measure, and this gave birth to a way of living Christian experience that made it interesting for us, when we met it. In our lives, this tradition, which for many has disappeared, has become interesting again thanks to the Christian encounter with the Movement. Otherwise, we would also be like many of our contemporaries: lost.

2. A collapse that has to do with us

As Father Giussani always taught us, one cannot live in a situation without being influenced by it. This is why we often find ourselves acting just like everyone else. What shows us this?

Reality is where faith is verified. Thus, in what we've found ourselves facing this year, the crucial and dramatic point that repeatedly came out is the question of faith and the connection between faith and hope. Comparing ourselves with the chapter on hope¹⁸ brought to light a fragility regarding faith that shows itself first of all as a difficulty in looking at our experience, as a weakness in judgment, as a reluctance to follow to the end that path of knowledge which certain profoundly moving events and facts warrant. There are many examples that prove this. I'll refer to one, starting with a letter that was written to me:

¹⁸ Cf. Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2.

“The School of Community on hope entered my life like a stone. Life was going well before Christmas. I had been married for over a year. In April, my very lovely first daughter was born. I have a job that I love. I was helping the teachers in GS; I was doing a lot of things. Then, before Christmas, something happened [and he tells me about a situation that blindsided him...]. Dissatisfaction and sadness were taking control. I wondered, ‘What am I spending my life for every day?’ And your words came to mind, when you said that our faith has an expiration date. After a number of years spent being the ‘good CL person,’ I found myself with my faith shaken, leaning on nothing, and so the future was entirely a fog.”

And we say this after we have all been put in front of a proposal. Last year, we followed the whole path in the School of Community and also at the Exercises: faith as a method of knowledge. I am a witness to the fact that many of you worked seriously, but when reality presses us, what takes over is what we just heard: everything vanishes. As Franco Nembrini said when gathering all the contributions that came in for my meeting with the schoolteachers,

“There’s an avalanche of goodness, truth, initiatives, and also certainty. Here, a great many of these witnesses speak about a present miracle, and they speak not as visionaries, yet they seem to suffer from an ultimate uncertainty, in the sense that seeing the miracle, seeing the experience of good and truth that is imposed on life in facts, in things, it’s as if they were afraid of losing it. So many people conclude their stories by asking how it can endure, how they can make this thing endure, how they can avoid betraying it, how – to use your exhortation – they can avoid deviating from the method. It’s as if they suspect that, the next morning, one might get up and find that the powerful nature of the experience has evaporated, disappeared.”¹⁹

And so we are all lost, as if the whole path we followed on faith as a method of knowledge were suddenly wiped out. This makes us aware, friends, of the long haul we still have ahead, and it shows us that we are in the same boat as everyone else. We make three serious reductions:

a) Faith reduced to the religious sense

First of all, there is the reduction of faith to the religious sense. Christianity often gets reduced to the religious sense by us. In our daily

¹⁹ Julián Carrón, “Che cosa introduce veramente al reale? Un fatto presente” [“What Truly Introduces One to Reality? A Present Fact”], meeting of Father Carrón with the teachers of Communion and Liberation in Milan, March 15, 2009 (see *Traces* Vol. 11, No. 5, booklet insert).

life, this translates into the fact that the faith is lived as one of the many hypotheses that we can form in order to face the situation, as if nothing had happened and we found ourselves once again in front of the unknown: I, with my religious sense, gropingly trying to build the connection with this unknown. And what shows us this? I could recount one episode after another, from the fact that the starting point for facing the day is not something known with certainty, and the hidden reason is that what we know doesn't seem real enough, not real enough to prevent us from overlooking it. We discover that it is a hypothesis that doesn't even enter our heads; every other possibility comes to mind before faith. Why? Because for us, faith is not the same as true knowledge. And this is the "collapse of the ancient certainties." Anything seems more real to us than the Presence recognized by faith. Uncertainty and fragility are the inevitable consequences of the separation of knowledge and faith. So, instead of starting from a Presence that has been met and loved, we start from an absence, from the unknown. It is totally the opposite for the one for whom faith is true knowledge, a knowledge of something real! In fact, Father Giussani asserts that "the first gesture of compassion toward yourself, the first expression of love for your origin, for your path and for your destiny ... is ... to profess this Other [whom you have recognized in faith]."²⁰ This is the first gesture of compassion, before any sort of coherence.

You see it precisely when someone starts from something he recognizes with certainty, like this girl who writes to me:

"Many things happen: beautiful things that move me, and also less beautiful, painful things that hurt me. But I hold in my hands an unbelievable treasure, because I can look at everything, I can enter into everything, first of all by looking at everything in a different way (which is not to be taken for granted), and it makes me breathe more freely than the rest of the world."

It's important to note that even if this reduction does happen, it still doesn't keep us from continuing to use Christian words or taking part in certain Christian gestures – but these gestures just don't have the same meaning.

b) Faith reduced to sentiment

The second reduction is that of faith to sentiment. This sentimental or emotional conception of faith can also be asserted in our midst where

²⁰ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland] (1982-1983)*, 270.

believing, instead of being a recognition of a Presence that has been encountered, becomes a “leap,” an irrational act, an act of the will with no basis, in which, in the end, it is faith that gives birth to the fact, and not the other way around. Rudolf Bultmann, the exegete who said that it is faith that gives birth to the Christian fact, is not so far from our way of life. Look how things get turned upside down! In a sentimental conception of faith, it is the force of feeling, the “will to truth”²¹ (we’re in bad shape!) that creates its object. Like a leftist student wrote beneath one of the flyers of our university friends, “Is what you are saying here something you verified, or a creed?” Often, it is not true knowledge for us; it’s a creed; faith belongs to an act of belief that has no visible connection with knowledge, with the use of reason. This is exactly the first objection that Father Giussani heard in the first hour of religion class! Forget faith as a method of knowledge! And this happens after a year of the School of Community on faith! So when we talk about Christ, about the object of faith, we aren’t talking about reality, so reason is not involved, and this is why it doesn’t come to mind in facing the challenges of life. We don’t consider the content of faith to be real: faith is reduced to sentiment.

c) Christianity reduced to ethics or culture

And finally, there is the reduction of faith to ethics. What remains are a few values from Christian culture or some rule from Christian ethics. We often found ourselves defending these values this year, but without needing to talk about Him, about the Presence we have recognized and loved. We defend life, but which of us could stay in front of a drama like Eluana’s just defending life? Which one of us, were it not for the companionship of Someone present, recognized and loved? Were it not for the “caress of the Nazarene,” who could stay in front of a drama like this?! If there is not this Presence, we are the first ones to collapse. Both inside and outside the Church, we breathe the air of this reduction, of faith reduced to a certain vision of the world and life, to a morality or a set of values that, as such, can be admired or fought against. There are those, like Christians and some from the secular world, who uphold them, and others who fight against them in the name of the principal of the radical self-determination of the individual.

We are not strangers to the temptation to a “Christianity of values.” This is what Father Giussani denounced already in 1982, when he bit-

²¹ Emanuele Severino, *La buona fede [Good Faith]* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999) 120.

terly said to the university responsables that “it is as if the Movement of Communion and Liberation from 1970 on had worked, built, and fought for the values that Christ brought, while the fact of Christ ... ‘had run parallel.’”²² But this sort of Christianity is insufficient to sustain life, and as soon as life gets complicated, uncertainty gets the upper hand.

3. The irreducibility of a fact

Ratzinger asked, “How on earth is it that faith still stands any chance of success [even for us]? I would say that it is because it finds a correspondence in the nature of man.... There is in man an inextinguishable, nostalgic aspiration toward the infinite. None of the answers which he seeks is sufficient; only the God who has made Himself limited in order to pierce through our limitation and to lead it to the breadth of His infinity is able to meet the questions of our being. Thus, again today, the Christian faith shall return to find man.”²³

How is it that all these reductions have not gained the upper hand in us? We know the answer: because the Fact that we have encountered (literally, thanks to God) is absolutely irreducible. We are not able to wipe it away. Today (not in the past, but today!) we stand in front of an absolutely irreducible fact, full of witnesses, and this is the clearest sign that the Mystery continues to have pity on us.

There is a passage in *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, familiar to everyone, which is enormously significant, because it contains all the originality and rationality of the faith, all of its difference from a religious sentiment, from a believing opposed to knowing:

“What is the first characteristic of faith in Christ? For Andrew and John, what is the first characteristic of the faith they had in Jesus? ... The first characteristic is a fact! What is the first characteristic of knowledge? It is the impact of our awareness with a reality.”²⁴

The fact that continues to challenge each of us is the starting point we will go back to again this year: the foretaste of a correspondence that we cannot get rid of, because we bump into a different humanity:

“The event of Christ becomes present ‘now’ in a phenomenon of a different humanity: a man bumps into and discovers a new foretaste of

²² Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland] (1982-1983)*, 56.

²³ Ratzinger, *Fede, Verità, Tolleranza [Faith, Truth, Tolerance]*, 142-43.

²⁴ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 2008) 28.

life ... When a person bumps into a different humanity, it is something *absolutely* simple, absolutely elementary, which *comes* before everything, every catechesis, reflection, and development; it does not need to be explained, but *only to be seen*, intercepted; it arouses wonder, awakens an emotion, calls us back, moves us to follow by the strength of its correspondence with the structural longing of the heart.”²⁵

If His presence were not here and now in the phenomenon of a different humanity, the Christian faith would not be possible. And the way Christ is present here and now today is this fact of a different humanity (which many of you witness to me), a fact that challenges my reason and my freedom.

But how, then, if this witness is so patently clear, if we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, how is it that after a while we are once again lost, trapped in our sentiment, suffocated in circumstance?

What we are missing today is not the Presence (we are surrounded by signs, by witnesses!): humanity is missing. If humanity is not involved, the path of knowledge stops. Friends, the Presence is not missing; the path is missing. What is missing is our decision to walk the whole path of faith as it was announced to us, because from this situation, from this context where we find ourselves living the faith (which influences us more than we realize it), we cannot automatically break out, warming our benches without doing any work. “It is a slavery from which we are not automatically freed; we are freed by an asceticism.... [A]sceticism is man applying his energy, intelligence, and will, in a work upon himself.”²⁶

Our experience in these past years makes us aware that it is not enough to repeat certain phrases of Father Giussani (thus reducing who he is to a catalogue of talks) or to take part in beautiful moments. We need to seriously engage in a path, in a work, and the challenge in front of us is whether or not to take seriously the proposal Father Giussani made to us. Let’s stop kidding each other! Few places in the Church of God have had the courage to take on the challenge of modern times like the experience born from Father Giussani has. We often reduce it to a series of initiatives, to taking part in certain gestures, but without following a human path, that is, a path of reason and freedom. We have taken it a bit “casually,” as if not truly aware of the dramatic situation we find ourselves in, which in fact requires a person’s total engagement to verify. But he had already foretold this years ago:

²⁵ Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” *Traces* 2008 No. 10: 1-2.

²⁶ Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 87.

“If the Movement is not an adventure for yourself, and it is not the phenomenon of a broadening of your heart, then it becomes a [political] party ... which can be overburdened with projects [which we are not lacking], but where the individual person is destined to remain ever more tragically alone [together, but alone!] and individualistically defined.”²⁷

But what journey is lacking, what adventure?

a) *The journey of faith*

I want to emphasize once again two aspects of the journey of faith that I see as decisive.

1) *Correspondence*

The first difficulty that I see is that we lack an awareness of what we call “correspondence,” which is the most confused word in the entire CL vocabulary. Notice that Father Giussani warns that “the reason why people no longer believe or believe without believing (they reduce believing to a formal, ritualistic participation in gestures, or else to a moralism) is because they are not living their own humanity [the human is missing]; they are not committed to their own humanity, to their own sensibility, to their own awareness, and thus to their own humanity.”²⁸ “That is, commitment in the human path is the condition for being ready when Christ offers us His encounter.”²⁹

When the commitment of our humanity is lacking, the result is what he describes in a lesson he gave in Chieti, Italy, in November of 1985: “We Christians in the modern climate have not been directly separated from Christian formulas, nor directly from Christian rites, nor directly from the laws of the Decalogue. We have been separated from the human foundation, from the religious sense [from our humanity]. We have a faith that is no longer religiosity. We have a faith that no longer responds as it should to the religious sentiment; that is, we have a faith which is not aware, a faith that is no longer intelligent about the self. One of my favorite authors, Reinhold Niebuhr, said, ‘Nothing is as unbelievable as the answer to a question which is not asked.’ Christ is the answer to the problem, to the thirst and hunger that man has for truth, for happiness, for beauty and for love, for justice, for ultimate

²⁷ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland]* (1982-1983), 204.

²⁸ Giussani, *Vivendo nella carne [Living in the Flesh]* (Milan: BUR, 1998) 66.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 65.

meaning. If this is not alive in us, if this need is not educated in us, what is Christ going to do for us? That is, what are Mass, confession, prayers, the catechism, the Church, priests, and the Pope going to do for us? They are still treated by the world, depending upon the areas of life, with a certain respect; they are kept in place for a certain period of time by force of inertia, but they are no longer answers to a question, and so they no longer have durability... [They have an expiration date, as I was saying.] Thus, Christianity has become Word, words.”³⁰ Chatter...

Ratzinger had already grasped this many years ago: “The crisis of Christian preaching, which we have experienced in growing measure now for a century, is due in no small part to the fact that Christian answers overshadow man’s queries; they were correct and continue to remain so; but they had no influence insofar as they did not begin with the problem and were not developed from within it. Thus it is an essential component of preaching itself to take part in man’s research, because only in this way can word (*Wort*) become answer (*Ant-wort*).”³¹

This is the decision that each of us must make: either taking part in the adventure of knowing, taking his own human questions seriously, or repeating a speech he has learned, performing formal, organized gestures. This is why Father Giussani always invited us to take our humanity, that is, affection for ourselves, seriously:

“The first condition for the event, the Movement as event, as an imposing phenomenon to be realized, the first condition is precisely this sentiment of one’s own humanity ... affection for self.”³² And what does this affection for self mean? It is not sentimentality: “Affection for self brings us back to the discovery of the constitutive requirements, of the original needs, bare and vast... an endless longing.... This is man’s originality and, in fact, man’s originality is the longing for the infinite.”³³

But this is what we so often lack, this sense of the Mystery, so that in the end, as we lack the Mystery, everything “corresponds” to us because everything is the same. “This is the problem of modern people: they don’t have the sense of the Mystery.”³⁴ Often, as I listen to us talking to

³⁰ Giussani, “La coscienza religiosa nell’uomo moderno” [“Religious Awareness in Modern Man”], pro manuscripto (Chieti, Italy: Centro Culturale Jacques Maritain, 1986) 15.

³¹ Ratzinger, *Dogma e predicazione* (Brescia, Italy: Queriniana, 2005) 75. (The English translation, *Dogma and Preaching*, published by Franciscan Herald Press in 1983, does not contain this quote.)

³² Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland]* (1982-1983), 294.

³³ *Ibid.* 297-98.

³⁴ Bruce Marshall, *All Glorious Within* (London: Constable, 1944) 126.

one another, this is what is missing most. *He* is not missing; the sense of the Mystery is missing. This is why the words of Chesterton always come to my mind: “They say that the wise don’t see the answer to the riddle of reason. The problem is not that the wise don’t see the answer, it’s that the wise don’t see the riddle.”³⁵ They don’t perceive the riddle; they don’t perceive the Mystery. This is why Martin Heidegger said that “no era has understood less about what man is than our own.”³⁶ This is so true that everything is reduced to the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. Look at what Immanuel Kant said (we can almost recognize ourselves in these words): “That is, what each person places his happiness in depends on the feeling of pleasure or displeasure proper to each person ... and therefore a *subjectively necessary* law (such as a law of nature) is *objectively* a practical principle that is completely *accidental*, that in different subjects may and must be very different, and for this reason can never provide a law.”³⁷ The criterion of judgment is absolutely subjective, and so the word “correspondence” (which here is reduced to what matches this subjective feeling) gets manipulated by each person, each person’s choice.

This is why I bring you back to what Father Giussani said in *Is It (Really) Possible to Live This Way?* with regard to the experience of correspondence, because it struck me as I reread it: “The content of experience is reality. A man is in love with a certain girl: this is a fact, a phenomenon. A poet goes around with his hands in his pockets and comes upon this fact. This fact enters into his horizon; it enters the realm of what he knows. Since it is a real phenomenon, it becomes an object of knowledge. This is the beginning of the phenomenon, but it is not all. As he faces this object of knowledge, the poet’s eyes are inflamed with curiosity, with affection, with approval, because in this phenomenon he sees something he too would like to have, but being only a little fifteen-year-old poet, he does not yet have it. He experiences a nostalgia: he experiences this, that is, he reacts with a sense of envy and with a desire that he too would have that phenomenon.”³⁸

Here I should stop and ask you: is this experience? Is this correspondence? And I would bet that the vast majority of you would say *yes*: I

³⁵ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2007) 24.

³⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997) 147.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2004) 9-11.

³⁸ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Really) Possible to Live This Way?]* (Milan: BUR, 1996) 81.

experience nostalgia, I experience this curiosity, I experience this affection, so it corresponds to me. And this is our justification: one can follow anything, and then justify any type of naturalism (going to the bottom of his own sentimental nostalgia) in the name of correspondence, and even we justify any kind of stupidity in the name of correspondence. For us, correspondence is often synonymous with a desire to possess. But pay attention to how Father Giussani continues:

“Up to this point, it’s not experience, but something that is felt.... ‘Is it real satisfaction? Is it the true answer to my need? Is it happiness? Is it truth and happiness?’ These are the needs that are not born in what he feels, but are born in him in the face of what he feels, in him who is engaged in what he feels. These questions judge what he feels.”³⁹ This, yes, this is correspondence! “Here, mere feeling becomes experience.... It becomes experience when it is at the same time judged by the criteria of the heart: if it’s really true, if it’s really beautiful, if it’s really good, if it’s really happy. On the basis of these ultimate questions of the heart, of these ultimate criteria of the heart, man governs his life.”⁴⁰ Otherwise, he is a snot-nosed kid who follows what he feels without judging it! This is why, in the end, this confusion between feeling and correspondence is what prevents us from recognizing what the correspondence of Christ is. It’s not just that I keep making mistakes (which would be enough), but that I don’t understand the newness that Christ brings in. This is why we think we don’t see the answer, but in reality we don’t see the riddle. In fact, “an answer is understood only to the degree that one feels the question within himself.”⁴¹ Only then does he understand the answer. This is why nothing is more unbelievable than an answer to a problem that is not posed. And you can see right away when a person has this humanity, when he has this humanity and when he doesn’t. I always remember the example of Cleuza, who instantly after hearing that even the hairs of her head are numbered (and 700 of us were there to hear her), immediately experienced the impossible correspondence. “We can go back home,” she told Marcos. Why did she understand? Why? Because she felt the riddle far more than many of us wise men who were there; far more! How could we tell that she understood that, to her, faith was knowledge? We could tell by how she put it into play in front of everyone, and more than everyone. The judgment on the excep-

³⁹ *Ibid.* 81-82.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 82-83.

⁴¹ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland]* (1982-1983), 62.

tionality of Christ, on this impossible correspondence, is possible only for those who have this humanity. If this humanity is lacking, even if the Presence is in front of us, we'll trade it in for any kind of cheap satisfaction. So, for us, faith is not knowledge; we remain lost like everyone else. In the end, we see that we, the wise, don't understand a thing.

2) *Who is this man?*

The second point I wanted to dwell on after correspondence is that this is the beginning of a journey, which culminates in a question: who is this man who corresponds to me in this way? We are surrounded, as we said before, by exceptional facts that sometimes trigger the question, but we often don't make the journey and there we are, like the Jews, in suspense. "So the Jews gathered around Him and said to Him, 'How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.'"⁴² That is, they want an answer that will spare them the commitment of their own humanity, of their own reason and of their own freedom. Sorry, but Jesus doesn't give in: "Jesus answered them, 'I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness to Me; but you do not believe, because you do not belong to my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.'"⁴³ He had said earlier, "But the testimony which I have is greater than that of John; for the works which the Father has granted me to accomplish, these very works which I am doing, bear witness that the Father has sent me."⁴⁴

We, like the Jews, stand in front of works, facts, witnesses, in front of this different humanity. We see an avalanche of signs of a miracle present with us; but there is a sort of fear of losing it an instant later, because we don't know what it has to do with. (If one has had the experience that water is wet, is it possible that the next day he would doubt that it will still make him wet?). That is, it is not knowledge. Our fear begins in the moment when we block the path of knowledge, the knowledge of that beauty that wounds me, that I cannot avoid having in front of me. Who can be afraid that it will not remain, that it will vanish after a while?

⁴² *Jn* 10:24.

⁴³ *Jn* 10:25-30.

⁴⁴ *Jn* 5:36.

The one who hasn't arrived at faith, the one who does not perceive the sign of His presence in these works, in this beauty. And why doesn't he perceive it? Because he stops at appearances, like the Jews: they see the works, but they don't come to recognize their ultimate origin. It's as if we think this beauty we have in front of us were detached from Him, as if it were not proof of Him working among us; we always detach the sign from its origin. So the signs don't confirm for us that He is at work and faith is not the knowledge of Him through what He is doing. If it is He, then it is He who will concern Himself with giving me still more signs; it is He who will concern Himself with remaining present (if we were to come to recognize Who makes this beauty in front of us, we wouldn't even have a thought about how it could last), because He is the only one who said that He will be with us till the end of the world. How He will be with us is not our problem. If we don't come to this true knowledge, we are always in the trap of uncertainty.

b) Verification of the faith

But the journey doesn't end here. Once we recognize it, we have to verify this Presence that we have recognized in our experience. Quoting again from Ratzinger,

“Christian faith is not a system [It's not a thought]. It can't be presented like a closed theoretical edifice. It is a road, and you can recognize a road only by getting on it and following it. And this is true in two ways: the Christian fact is not disclosed to anyone except in the experience of being accompanied [Christ does not reveal Himself before our eyes except to the degree that He manifests Himself in how He changes us and accompanies us]; and in its totality it allows itself to be grasped only as a journey in history.”⁴⁵

Thus, we need to give faith the space to disclose its truth, so that it can show that it is capable of sustaining life, of persevering in the face of the circumstances. Our God is a God who reveals Himself in history, not in our thoughts. It is there that He reveals the difference between Himself and all our idols.

This is why if one does not risk in reality, at work, in this crisis, in sickness, in relationships, and in circumstances, the evidence that we need to reasonably remain with Christ cannot come forth – because what we need is the evidence of Christ in our experience, not to repeat a speech. And we don't need someone else to explain it to us; we need

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Fede, Verità, Tolleranza [Faith, Truth, Tolerance]*, 152-153.

to see for ourselves that faith holds up in the circumstances, that it's capable of sustaining life. We don't need spiritual direction; we need an invitation to verify within our own circumstances. This is precisely what can give us the certainty we need. Only the one who risks this verification can come to the certainty of the knowledge that we all need: to be able to verify that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life and has the experience of the hundredfold here below. Without this, adhering to the faith is not reasonable, because we haven't recognized Him at work. But the one who verifies it can have this certainty.

A mom who had a son who was very beautiful but who had Down's Syndrome writes to her friend, "What I would like to tell you is that in these past three months of being in the hospital, my husband and I have stayed with the circumstances that arose, with a desire to embrace all of reality as it is revealed to us. I met the Movement about twenty years ago, but only in these circumstances, in this fact, has the Mystery of the great Presence been revealed to me. He exists; He is a fact, just as my son is a fact. From this position of ours, many beautiful encounters and relationships have come forth and the unity with our friends has been revealed. This is why the School of Community struck me when it said, 'Stay within reality, asking ourselves who gives it to us; stay with it to the end and beg, asking to the end what I am made of, desiring, waiting for Him who makes me.'"

c) Faith is a method of knowing

In this way, faith can go back to being knowledge. Faith is a method of knowing! This dramatic path is part of certainty, friends, of overcoming the separation between knowing and believing. History is not useless; the circumstances that the Mystery has us pass through are not worthless; they are the possibility of seeing, that can reveal before our eyes who He is whom we believe in. Through this history, we have recognized Him in whom we believe. Like the disciples, we believe because we have seen; we do not believe because of a sentimentalism or because we have decided to believe, to create faith. We have seen Him at work, and His works speak of Him. This is the undoing of the separation between knowing and believing. We have seen the unmistakable signs of His presence when we have followed this journey. This is nothing like the reduction of faith to the religious sense and to sentiment!

Whoever has taken on this challenge that Father Giussani gave us, whoever has agreed to follow the whole path of faith as the path of knowledge, will be able to bear witness to it, just as many bear wit-

ness of it to us. In the circumstances that everyone has to live, what has come forth? That no one, when he has followed this journey, can get rid of the experience of correspondence that he has lived and that he lives. Correspondence is the sign that through the facts (an infinite number of experiences, of events and wonders), we have been able to touch His Presence in our midst with our own hands (so much so that these events have remained in our memory and have penetrated every fiber of our being). Correspondence in every single person (one can remain standing only because of this) is the Lord of every heart, and this is why He is the Lord of all. Christianity, when we follow this road, is a fact that nobody can snatch away from us, that survives any crisis, any collapse, any earthquake. Not only that, but any crisis, any challenge is the occasion to recognize Him at work. It is the display of His presence at work in reality, not in our thoughts. It is the growing certainty of Him. This is why we have this infinite gratitude toward Him, for Him who makes Himself so present in our lives.

What has revealed itself to be more solid than anything else, than any challenge? This belonging to Him has, as our friends from L'Aquila bore witness to: a belonging to the Presence that no one can thwart. The solidity of our life depends on the relationship with this Presence. The value of our life depends on this relationship, this familiarity: "But who are You, who take such care of my nothingness?" This is the greatness of the charism to which we belong: belonging to a history, to an experience of facts that make us protagonists, not in the sense of having power, but in recognizing a Presence that answers, that corresponds to the longing of our heart, even in the midst of all the difficulties and all conditions. This is why everything is given to me to recognize the unmistakable signs of His presence in our midst, signs that are revealed not in our thoughts, but in our lives. You can see why Saint Paul said with gratitude, "He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins."⁴⁶

And this is why we implore, "Never leave me, O Presence who is always surprising me!"

⁴⁶ Col 1:13-14.

HOLY MASS

OPENING GREETING OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL STANISLAW RYLKO,
PRESIDENT OF THE PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY

Dearest friends, my heartfelt greeting to all of you, to you who have come together in Rimini for the annual gathering for the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, and to you who, throughout the world, are taking part by satellite connection.

As I see you gathered in such numbers and collected in prayerful silence before the Lord's altar, the words of the Responsorial Psalm for today rise spontaneously to my lips: "Blessed the people who know how to praise You, and walk, O Lord, in the light of Your face" (*Ps* 89).

Father Giussani said, "God is mercy for man, and the peace within us has only one name: the mercy of God." With the echo of these words in our hearts, we acknowledge that we are sinners, poor men, truly beggars for the divine mercy that knows no end or measure, and we say together:

I confess to almighty God...

HOMILY

"Here I am, send me..." (*Is* 6:8)

1. The Lord again gives you the gift of this important annual meeting: the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity. It is a gift of grace, because the Exercises are a powerful time for returning to what is essential both in the life of the Movement and in the personal life of each of you. You come back to [the Exercises] every year. But surely it is not a mere ritual repetition of an event which is always the same as it was. Every meeting is different from the one that came before it and from the one that will come after it. Today is not like last year, because our personal history is different; it has changed. And Christ's ability to surprise us with the newness of His Gospel in every phase of our existence is never-ending.

The Spiritual Exercises, then, is the time of silence that allows us to hear the Lord who does not surrender to our deafness, to our distraction, to our indifference, and who continues to knock on the door of our life: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with Me” (*Rv* 3:20). We can say with Father Giussani that the true protagonist of the Spiritual Exercises is the beggar: “Christ begging for the heart of man, and the heart of man begging for Christ” (May 30, 1998).

This is the time when the Lord reinvigorates our hope, that hope without which man cannot live, as our Holy Father Benedict XVI reminds us. It is not just any hope, but the “great hope” founded on the rock which is Christ Himself, but which, in front of the trials from which life spares no one, often wavers. How can the flame that is always at risk of going out be rekindled? Where and how can it be relit? In the first reading that we heard, Saint Peter explains, “Humble yourselves ... under the mighty hand of God, that in due time He may exalt you. Cast all your cares on Him, because He cares for you... [T]he God of all grace ... will Himself restore, establish, and strengthen you” (*1 Pt* 5:6-10). This is the message of comfort: God cares about us! God loves us! In the book of the Prophet Isaiah, God speaks words that explain the *kairos* of these Exercises well: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine” (*Is* 43:1).

2. Today the Church celebrates the Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist, cousin of Barnabas, coworker of Paul in his first apostolic voyage, and most importantly disciple of the Apostle Saint Peter, who in his first letter affectionately calls him “my son” (*1 Pt* 5:13). The Gospel passage that we just heard, which is, in fact, drawn from the Gospel according to Mark, invites us to seriously face the missionary mandate that Christ, risen from the dead, entrusts to the Church – that is, to each of us: “Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation” (*Mk* 16:15). Evangelizing the world is thus the fundamental task of the Church in every age, her very reason for existing! And this is a permanent challenge that confronts all of us, disciples of Christ. Benedict XVI does not hide the drama of the situation of the Gospel in today’s world, and even in nations with an ancient Christian tradition – where a “tired Christianity” survives, worn out and discouraged, a “strange forgetfulness of God” is spreading, and a troubling “silent apostasy” of the baptized is taking place – and so these nations are being transformed into true mission territories. The Pope says, “We ought to seriously

reflect upon how we can bring about a true evangelization, and not only a new evangelization, but often a true and proper first evangelization. People do not know God and they do not know Christ. There is a new paganism, and it is not enough for us to try to preserve the flock that exists, even if this is very important.... I believe that together we must all try to find new ways of bringing the Gospel back into today's world, announcing Christ again and establishing the faith" (Cologne, August 20, 2005). Unfortunately, the growing religious pluralism and the relativistic mentality proper to postmodernity sow a dangerous confusion into this field which is vital for the Church. And yet in some ecclesial spheres today it is said that it is enough to help men to be more men or more faithful to their own religious traditions, no matter what they may be, without necessarily encouraging their conversion to Christ and their adherence to the Church – all this in the name of a false respect and a poorly understood promotion of freedom of conscience. The advocates of this current of thought decidedly dislike the words "evangelization" and "proclamation." As an alternative to evangelization, they prefer to speak of "dialogue," meaning a dialogue that places all partakers on the same level and that eliminates the criterion of truth. But in this way, the mandate of the Risen One to proclaim the Gospel "to every creature" is betrayed. Thus, we are grateful to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for having published a "Doctrinal Note on Certain Aspects of Evangelization" (December 3, 2007) two years ago. This document offers basic clarifications about evangelization and reminds us that "evangelizing means not only teaching a doctrine, but proclaiming the Lord Jesus with words and actions, that is, making oneself the instrument of His presence and action in the world" (no. 2). God is not an excuse for talking about something else (something that would be thought of as more interesting for the dominant mentality). God must once again be the heart of the Christian proclamation. "Whoever does not give God gives too little" (Message for Lent, 2007), warns Benedict XVI. And he is not referring to any god, but to the God who is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ, His only-begotten Son, who became man for our salvation. Every person has the right to hear from us Christians this good news to be able to fully live his own vocation. This is a right that corresponds to our duty to evangelize, according to the words of the Apostle to the Gentiles: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (*1 Cor* 9:16). We, the baptized, must rediscover the courage and the pride to be Christians and missionaries of the Gospel

in our world. There is truly a need today for a reawakening of Christian awareness! We cannot allow ourselves to be intimidated by the forms of intolerance that take hold even in our Western democracies, nor by an aggressive secularism that claims to wipe God from the horizon of man's life. Some speak, and not without reason, of a "new anti-Christianity" and of a certain "Christianophobia." But we cannot hide behind an apathetic silence. We must rediscover the prophetic vocation proper to the baptized. Like Isaiah, to the Lord's question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" we must be ready to answer, "Here am I! Send me" (*Is* 6:8).

Truth imposes itself by its very nature. This is why, reading from the "Doctrinal Note" mentioned earlier, "honestly urging a person's intelligence and freedom to the encounter with Christ and His Gospel is not an undue interference in his affairs, but a legitimate offer and a service that can make relationships between persons more fruitful.... The one who proclaims the Gospel shares in the charity of Christ, who loved us and gave Himself for us (cf. *Ep* 5:2)" (nos. 5, 11). Personal witness and the person-to-person transmission of the faith, as in the first Christian communities, remain the privileged paths of evangelization in our time as well. Starting from the request of certain Greeks to Philip ("We want to see Jesus!" (*Jn* 12:21)), the servant of God, John Paul II, wrote at the beginning of the third millennium of the Christian era, "The men of our time, although not always consciously, are asking today's believers not only to 'talk about' Christ, but in a certain sense to let them 'see' Him. And is it not perhaps the task of the Church to reflect the light of Christ in every age of history, letting His face shine before the generations of the new millennium as well?" (*Novo millennio ineunte*, no. 16). It is an important instruction.

"Go into the whole world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (*Mk* 16:15). We have seen that this task has become particularly challenging to our young people. However, there is no lack of hopeful signs, first of which is the great flowering of new charisms that have given birth to the people of the ecclesial movements. They are a timely answer of the Holy Spirit to the challenges that the world continues to unleash against the evangelizing mission of the Church. Suffice it to mention the ranks of men and women in our day who, thanks precisely to these new charisms, have met Christ, have discovered the fascinating beauty of being Christian and have let themselves be conquered by an extraordinary missionary passion in service of the Gospel. And all of you, you are a living example of this!

3. To conclude our meditation, let us turn our gaze toward the man who has become the preeminent model for the evangelists of every age, Paul of Tarsus. The Church is in full swing of the celebration of the Pauline Year, announced by Benedict XVI to commemorate the bimillennium of the birth of the Apostle to the Gentiles. We all need to figuratively draw near to the “flame” that symbolically burns in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls in Rome, to rekindle our boldness of faith and our missionary passion in a world that continues to grow distant from God.

What does the gigantic evangelizing work that Paul accomplished flow from? The answer is simple: from the encounter at the gates of Damascus with Christ risen from the dead, which changed Saul’s life. He falls off his horse and, when he rises from the ground, the brutal persecutor of the newborn Church is someone else. Saul becomes Paul, a disciple of Christ, an intrepid Apostle who will one day shed his blood for the Gospel. The Holy Father said about this experience on the road to Damascus, “This turning point in his life, this transformation of his whole being, was not the result of a psychological process, of an intellectual and moral maturation or evolution; rather, it came from outside: it was not the result of his thought, but of the encounter with Christ Jesus. In this sense, it was not simply a conversion, a maturation of his “I,” but a death and resurrection for him: one existence died and a new one was born from it with Christ risen from the dead” (General Audience, September 3, 2008). What had been important, essential for him, becomes a loss, rubbish (cf. *Phil* 3:8). Now, what counts is only Christ and His word of salvation that Paul wants to bring into the whole world. To the recipients of his letters, he will write, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (*Gal* 2:20); “For to me to live is Christ” (*Phil* 1:21); “For the love of Christ controls us” (*2 Cor* 5:14). His life as an Apostle of Jesus Christ was anything but easy. He writes of “frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (*2 Cor* 11:26-27). And for the hardships of apostolic life he had only one response: “I have been crucified with Christ” (*Gal* 2:20); “I can do all things in Him who strengthens me” (*Phil* 4:13). This is Paul. Everything in his life began with the encounter with the Risen One. It is not by chance that Benedict XVI tirelessly reminds us that “Christianity is not a new philosophy or a new

morality, [but] we are Christians only if we encounter Christ” (General Audience, September 3, 2008). From generation to generation, true evangelists, persuasive witnesses of the Gospel, are born in precisely this way. Today you are the proof of this.

BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

Julián Carrón: Allow me, Your Eminence, to thank you in the name of all our friends for your presence among us, which makes the Holy Father present, in witness to Christ among us here and now, and for having reminded us that the grace that we have received is for everyone; it is for mission, for communicating all the beauty that we have encountered. Thank you, Your Eminence.

Cardinal Rylko: Thanks to all of you for this splendid witness of faith that you give to the Church and to the world every time you meet for the Spiritual Exercises.

For me personally, coming here to celebrate the Eucharist with you is always a gift, a spiritual recharge. Thanks.

Saturday afternoon, April 25

*Before the introduction and after the conclusion:
Ludwig van Beethoven, String quartet in A minor; op. 132
Quartetto Italiano
“Spirto Gentil” no. 49, Decca*

■ SECOND MEDITATION Julián Carrón

Christ here and now

1. From faith, the method

a) Something that comes first

In the first lesson, trying to respond to the break between knowing and believing, we had to go back to what Christianity is: a Fact, bumping into a different and irreducible Reality. But if faith is knowledge, and constantly requires the use of reason, it must always stay in front of this present Event that challenges it. Already last year we had said that the new knowledge implies being here and now with the Event that generates it and continually sustains it.

This is why we are not answering in an exhaustive way the question posed by the situation we find ourselves in until we have answered this other question: “How does the Christian Event remain continuously here and now?” Only in answering this question can we definitively overcome the break between knowing and believing. And, to answer this question, it’s not enough to recognize what we said this morning (that Christianity is a historical event), as you can see by the fact that even when recognizing that Christianity is a historical event, what remains of that historical event is often only the Bible. Thus, from the religion of the event, we immediately shift to the religion of the book: we lost history along the way; the event becomes nothing but word.

And we really understand the import of this question, thanks to the historical affair of the charism that has fascinated us. We too have had to and have to confront this same problem. None of us doubts that the charism is a historical fact, bumping into a different humanity, Father Giussani’s human-

ity. But now that he is gone, the question of how the charism that fascinated us stays present today becomes more critical, and we too suffer the temptation to say that it remains by means of texts. Beyond the memory of who he was, which in time would inevitably tend to become vague, the most concrete thing we have, we are tempted to say, are the texts, the books.

The books are certainly an immense asset, as Father Giussani always told us; they will always remain a sort of canon for us, as a rule of the experience of life that Father Giussani had, thanks to his faith. But if we were to have only books, sooner or later we would find ourselves in the same situation as the Jews when the prophetic voice ceased: alone with the texts; all that is left is simply to interpret them. And this is the historical moment when the scribes, the doctors of the law, the experts of interpretation came into being. We know full well that this risk is not just a manner of speaking, that often the School of Community can become this, and we know very well how tiresome it can be.

If this were our destiny, we would soon realize how we would be trapped in our interpretations; we would be like everyone else, and we would not be able to understand Father Giussani beyond our capacity of understanding, because we would not be able to escape our own presuppositions and, at this point, the charism would be gone, because interpretation would not be enough to sustain life, to engage life.

In February of 1984, Father Giussani said, "What can make ... love for oneself remain, tenderness for oneself and, therefore, as an echo, as a rebound, tenderness for others, love for destiny, love for the very destiny of others? What can sustain this? Look, a Christ who is a faraway historical fact can be read like a page of beautiful literature, can even give a momentary flutter, can generate emotions, can elicit nostalgia, but now ... with this tiredness, with this tendency toward melancholy, with this strange masochism that life today tends to foster, or with this indifference and this cynicism ... how can one accept himself and others in the name of a discourse? ... So I say that one cannot retain love for himself unless Christ is a presence just as a mother is a presence for her child who does not know what to do.... Unless Christ is a presence now – now! – I cannot love myself now and I cannot love you now. If Christ is not risen, I am done for, even if I have all His words, even if I have all His Gospels. With the Gospel texts I could still go so far as to kill myself, but not with the presence of Christ; recognizing the presence of Christ, no!"⁴⁷

⁴⁷ He is referring to the text of an Équipe meeting contained in the volume of Giussani, *Qui e ora [Here and Now] (1984- 1985)*, in the course of being published by BUR, 76-77.

This is why he urges us to clearly answer this question. And here the text of “Something That Comes First” helps us in a striking manner. We saw it this morning when it reminded us that Christianity is a fact, and this is something we all affirm. But the more disturbing question begins later: the great revolution is saying that Christianity remains, as a fact. And this cannot be taken for granted: “Bumping into the presence of a different humanity *comes before* – not only at the beginning, but in each moment that follows the beginning, one year or twenty years later. The initial phenomenon, the impact with a different humanity, the wonder born of it, is destined to be *the initial and original phenomenon of each moment of its development*. Because there is no development if that original impact is not repeated, if the event does not remain, that is, [if it is not] contemporaneous.... The originating factor is forever the impact with a different human reality.”⁴⁸

This is why we must add to what we said this morning: the here and now of Christ is a condition not only for the beginning, but for every step of the way. The alternative is clear: it is renewed, it happens again, or nothing follows; true continuity does not take place, and the charism is dead and buried. But the most disturbing thing is that if it is not renewed now, we cannot even understand what happened to us at the beginning, because “if one does not live the impact with a new human reality now, he does not understand what happened to him then. Only if the event happens again now is the initial event enlightened and deepened, and thus a continuity is established.”⁴⁹

If this does not happen, it is not that we do nothing: “The event that happened is immediately made theoretical, and one fumbles in search of other things that keep us going [because a discourse cannot sustain life] for that which is truly at the origin of the difference.”⁵⁰ And what are these other things? The same ones everyone else uses: “Power, especially economic power, is the abolition of all the gods, except one, in its triple form: usury, lust, and power, as Eliot says.”⁵¹ It’s not because we’re worse than everyone else, but because it’s unavoidable. If He is not present and able to attract all our affection and all our heart, we look for other things to keep us going.

You live for something that is happening now. This is why, if we want to know if what the Spirit began years ago through Father Giussani remains

⁴⁸ Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà [Event of Freedom]* (Genoa: Marietti, 2002) 188.

among us, here is the criterion that he himself left us: “Continuity with what happened in the beginning comes true ... only through the grace of an impact that is always new and astonishing, as if it were the first time. [And if this isn’t clear, he also offers us a proof to the contrary:] Otherwise, in place of that wonder, [our] thoughts take over.”⁵² This is the alternative. Thus, in front of the temptation to reduce it to texts, to organization, he insists that there is no difference in method between the beginning and the continuation, because it is faith that always dictates the method: from faith, the method. This means that the charism remains the different humanity that strikes us now; it is the different humanity that continues to happen now that testifies that He remains here and now and that confirms for us that we are following Father Giussani in the way he taught us. It is this difference that makes Him present among us.

We see the difference between the scribes and Christianity in these days of Easter in a spectacular way, because what is left is not discourses, is not texts which, among other things, were not yet there! What remains is His presence, which prolongs in the present what was there at the beginning. And what was there at the beginning? All of the Gospels record the difference between Jesus and the scribes, to the point that everyone was astonished: “And they were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”⁵³ And a little later: “And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, ‘What is this? A new teaching! With authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him.’”⁵⁴ Not like the scribes. He taught them with authority and not like their scribes (we have all read these texts, but how different is the loyalty of Father Giussani from what is witnessed to in the Gospel). And how does this difference remain? It is striking when we become aware of what happens every day in the Liturgy. The Church has us read the Acts of the Apostles, where the facts are recounted, the miracles, the different humanity that remains, the change that happens in people; and at the same time she has us listen to the Gospel stories of the appearances of Jesus. There are two realities that shed light on one another: it’s like saying that the true, real Resurrection is seen not only in the appearances of Christ (which are not the hallucinations of visionaries among the Apostles, but are true appearances, as the facts that we read in the Acts of the Apostles

⁵² Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” 2.

⁵³ *Mk* 1:22.

⁵⁴ *Mk* 1:27.

demonstrate). And because we do not stay with the facts, thinking that they have nothing to do with Christ risen from the dead, the Church's Liturgy combines the account of the appearances, so that you may see that the facts that you hear are proof of His presence. What an education the Church offers us every day! What Father Giussani tells us is nothing other than the proof of what Christianity is.

Now we can better understand the methodological import of the title of the Exercises, "From Faith, the Method," because the only possibility to not succumb to being a scribe, to interpretations, is the lasting presence of Christ in time, His being here and now. Christianity is either an event in every moment, or it is no longer Christianity. We would be talking about something else, because the Scriptures (the Acts of the Apostles, the Gospels) remain as the canon of what will always be Christianity; if not, it is not Christianity, even if we use the same words.

It's the same thing that happens among us. The death of Father Giussani might have made us think that we would find ourselves only with his memory or with his texts. Instead, each of us can see what is happening: witnesses and facts. And this is the way he remains and continues to accompany us and to father us as sons, to the point that today we feel him to be more of a father than ever. More than just texts, more than just a memory! This cannot and must not mean to scorn, invalidate, or gut the past that brought me here. It is part of a unique plan. The charism of Father Giussani is now living through the power of the Spirit, but who Father Giussani is does not belong to the past.

With this awareness, we can face a subtle problem that often resurfaces among us. The question, "How does it last?" is often hiding an uncertainty. The "How does it last?" in reality for us means, "How can I make it last? How can I make the event that seized me last?" At the meeting with the teachers, for example, many used "How can we make this last?" to explain what "How does it last?" means. And this isn't the same question! Father Giussani lived his life without ever asking "how to make it last." This is exactly where we are unsure. I am struck by a fact that had first escaped me when I read "Something That Comes First." If you look at that text with attention, there is no trace of this worry in Father Giussani. In Father Giussani, "How does it last?" is a question that starts from a certainty, as an aid to understanding: "Look how it lasts!" It lasts not as a discourse, not as an organization, but as the event of a changed humanity. And he tirelessly repeats that the method is always the same: bumping into a different humanity, without ever facing our fundamental worry, which is, "How can I make it last?"

The insistence on this question shows us yet again that we are unsure, that we have not understood what happened, that faith is not a path of knowledge for us, that there is still a break between knowing and believing. We keep thinking that it is we who generate it, we who keep up the show, and we who have to worry about it.

Christ risen from the dead is the One who takes care of how it lasts! This is not our problem. It's up to us to recognize Him every time it happens in our life. This is why Christianity lived in this way gives people the shivers. And so it constantly challenges our freedom through this present difference. This difference is an asset; it is a sign of Christ's preference for us, not something to be defended against. This "here and now" challenges each of us, placing us before the alternative: either clinging to what we already know (taking the past as an idol), to the possession of certain texts and a certain way of thinking, or opening ourselves to the unforeseen of how it is happening now, making us willing to follow what Christ is doing today (the ever-new way in which He shows Himself). This is the real decision, because with what is new, there is always the risk of fearing the new. But we (my friends, we are being sincere) more often than not defend ourselves from what is new. When something new happens, when it rises on the horizon, we immediately retreat. But precisely this is Christ: novelty every day of our lives.

Thus, there is no more accurate description of the alternative in front of which we find ourselves than the parable of the two sons:

"And when He entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching, and said, 'By what authority are You doing these things, and who gave You this authority?' Jesus answered them, 'I also will ask you a question, and if you tell me the answer, then I also will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, from whence did it come? From heaven or from men?' And they argued with one another, 'If we say, "From heaven," He will say to us, "Why then did you not believe him?" But if we say, "From men," we are afraid of the multitude, for all hold that John was a prophet.' So they answered Jesus, 'We do not know.' And He said to them, 'Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things.' [And He adds this parable:] 'What do you think? A man had two sons and he went to the first and said, "Son, go and work in the vineyard today." And he answered, "I will not," but afterward he repented and went. And he went to the second and said the same, and he answered, "I go, sir," but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.' Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the

harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. [What does this mean? He is addressing the high priests and the elders, who are those who said *yes* at the beginning and then said *no* to Christ, while the others said *no*, said to hell with the law, but in front of Him they said *yes*.] For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the harlots believed him; and even when you saw it, you did not afterward repent and believe him.”⁵⁵

We, like those high priests, run this risk. We have to decide, because we, like they, could think, “We already know the path. Why should we believe in Him?” Or we can be like the publicans in front of what happens, because the history that we have lived brought us here to educate us to stay in front of the Mystery that happens now, that comes to us now. If we are not open to what happens now, our history becomes an obstacle instead of a help, because we are dominated by a possession more than by an openness. Thus, you understand the import of Jesus’ reminder:

“At that time, Jesus declared, ‘I thank Thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was Thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to Me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly of heart, and *you will find rest* for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’”⁵⁶

The simple are the truly wise, the truly intelligent: they are the ones in whom the past has produced the fruit of an openness, of an education to stay in front of that event that is happening now. Therefore, the verification of this past always happens in the present. But am I open to the way the Mystery shows itself to me now through the charism? This is the real challenge that Father Giussani unleashes on us: staying through the same method, through the different humanity that is happening now. Are we open to this?

b) Not interpreters, but witnesses

Thus, the awareness of the method of faith allows us to understand that what we need is not interpreters, but witnesses; we do not need somebody

⁵⁵ Mt 21:23-32.

⁵⁶ Mt 11:25-30.

to explain it to us, but somebody who bears witnesses to us of the change happening now. Otherwise, we remain trapped in our thoughts. As we've seen in these past months, we can even do the School of Community, but against the method the School of Community points out to us.

“But then the most important aspect of the ‘School of Community’ is someone who ‘teaches’ – someone, or a few people, in whom the initial impact is renewed and expands, offering itself as a starting point for repeating in others that first surprise. Whoever guides the ‘School of Community’ must communicate an experience in which the initial wonder is renewed, and who does not, instead, carry out a role or a ‘task.’ What starts from the awareness of oneself as a role cannot be the communication of an experience, a role which begins with a view of oneself as ownership or superiority [just like the scribes], with the claim of teaching, because it is only the Spirit of God who teaches; it is the Spirit who gives the first surge and who renews it. Whoever guides the ‘School of Community’ and communicates an experience where the initial surprise recurs, develops this communication by giving reasons for the words that are used.”⁵⁷ This is because, in Christianity, content and method coincide, as Benedict XVI recently reminded us: “In the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, that is, of the fact that God became man like us, lies both the content and the method of Christian proclamation.”⁵⁸ And this is what could answer even the needs of those we meet. Thus, we too can become witnesses, since it is only this that makes Christianity present today as an event for everyone. The Gospel describes this dynamic almost in passing: “Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear Him.”⁵⁹ It was a winning attraction that made Jesus like that – they didn’t distance themselves from Him; they drew near Him. It seems banal to think about it, but it is all there. In His way of behaving, of living, of being in reality, people drew near Him. It seems like nothing, almost a bud, but it was the origin of this difference that has reached all the way to here, all the way to each of us. His presence lasts in history through whoever lives like this, whoever has this attraction in his way of living. The Second Vatican Council says this when it speaks of witnesses: “In the lives of those who, sharing in our humanity, are however more perfectly transformed into the image of Christ ... God vividly manifests His presence and His face

⁵⁷ Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” 4.

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI, *To Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for the Clergy*, March 16, 2009.

⁵⁹ *Lk* 15:1.

to men. He speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of His Kingdom to which we are strongly drawn, having so great a cloud of witnesses over us ... and such a witness to the truth of the Gospel.”⁶⁰ It says this about the witness, that it is he who translates what the Gospel says. Like some of the beautiful witnesses in the accounts from Giovanna Parravicini, as recounted in her book *Liberi* [Free Men], such as the witness of one man whom they had to move from jail to jail because, after a certain period of time, even the guards were converting to Christianity. Or think of the leftist judge who brings his mother into one of our facilities because “nobody treats people the way you do.” Or the Chinese Buddhists who are struck by the beauty of the life of Christians in a parish and ask to have a funeral of one of their number in the church. These are all witnesses in the present of that attractiveness, of how it lives on. And here Charles Péguy has given us the lasting description of the Christian method: “But Jesus came. He had three years to work. He put in His three years. But He did not at all waste His three years; He did not spend them groaning and challenging the sickness and the disgrace of those times.... He cut short. Oh, in a very simple way. Making Christianity. Inserting the Christian world. He did not incriminate, He did not accuse anyone. He saved.”⁶¹

c) Following and obedience

The condition for becoming witnesses is following, because the witness is the one who follows what is happening. This is what is striking when reading and listening to the Acts of the Apostles. After the healing of the cripple, Peter and John are brought before the Sanhedrin. “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a cripple, and by what means this man has been healed, be it known to you all, to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man is standing before you well.’”⁶² In the face of the attempt to stop them from saying these things, Peter and John do not give in: “But when they had commanded them to go out of the council, they conferred with one another, saying, ‘What shall we do with these men? For that a notable sign has been performed through them it is manifest to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that

⁶⁰ Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 50.

⁶¹ Charles Péguy, *Lui è qui* [*He Is Here*] (Milan: BUR, 1997) 110.

⁶² *Acts* 4:8-10.

it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to any one in this name.’ So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’”⁶³

What did obedience mean for them? Recognizing what they had seen and heard – not “being better,” but recognizing what they had seen and heard, what God is working in their midst. The disciples continued to share in the event of Christ through what was happening in their “here and now.” The miracle bore witness that Christ remained present, but with an entirely different method: through the miracle, not through His earthly presence or through an apparition. And it is striking how open the disciples are to recognizing Him at work. As Father Giussani says, “It takes ‘something that comes first,’ for which all this is nothing but an instrument for its development. What happened ... at the beginning must happen again, not ‘how’ it happened at the beginning, but ‘what’ happened at the beginning: the impact with a different humanity, in which the same event that moved them at the beginning is renewed.”⁶⁴ It is only in this way, following, that we continue to be witnesses in the present of what is happening now.

“Companionship does not exist except in obedience.... The companionship is not created by the one who leads it; the companionship is created by the Spirit, who is brought out in the heart of whomever; and a child can be more gifted than I, but I [he dares to say] am the driver.”⁶⁵ We must not be scandalized by these words of Father Giussani, because he always opposed every temptation toward a cult of personality in the way of conceiving obedience (the cult of personality is the bane of every kind of human association), teaching us that following is not following the person, but following the experience that person lives. This sets us free from the person we obey.

2. The flower of hope

The sign of overcoming this break between knowing and believing is thus the arrival at a certainty that can sustain life. Hope shows us this.

⁶³ Acts 4:15-20.

⁶⁴ Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” 4.

⁶⁵ Giussani, *Uomini senza patria [Men without a Homeland]* (1982-1983), 110.

“If faith is to recognize a Presence that is certain, if faith is to recognize a Presence with certainty, hope is to recognize a certainty for the future that is born from this Presence.”⁶⁶ From faith, hope is born like a flower. There are many signs of this hope among us, but from the beginning of the School of Community, the ambiguity in our way of viewing hope clearly came to the surface. Many comments at the School of Community showed that hope is viewed as a capacity of ours, a result of our resources, so, as soon as we come to the awareness that we cannot manage, hope collapses, because I am the buttress. Do you see? We use the School of Community against what the School of Community bears witness to. Since the book we use for the School of Community cannot protest the way we reduce it, we need witnesses who can fight against this reduction. Without this, when we see our resources collapsing, what is left is only the “Who knows?” because “the term of natural sureness is the phrase, ‘Who knows?’”⁶⁷ How true is what Péguy says: “In order to hope ... it is necessary to have obtained, to have received a great grace!”⁶⁸ This is why hope is the proof of faith, of having received the grace of faith, that is, of having recognized a present Presence.

The Pope reminded us on Easter Sunday, “From the depths of my heart, I wish all of you a blessed Easter. To quote Saint Augustine, ‘*Resurrectio Domini, spes nostra* – the Resurrection of the Lord is our hope’ (Sermon 261:1). With these words, the great Bishop explained to the faithful that Jesus rose again so that we, though destined to die, should not despair, worrying that with death life is completely finished; Christ is risen to give us hope.... The Resurrection, then, is not a theory, but a historical reality revealed by the man Jesus Christ by means of His ‘Passover,’ His ‘passage,’ that has opened a ‘new way’ between heaven and earth (cf. *Heb* 10:20). It is neither a myth nor a dream; it is not a vision or a utopia; it is not a fairy tale, but it is a singular and unrepeatable event: Jesus of Nazareth, Son of Mary, who at dusk on Friday was taken down from the Cross and buried, has victoriously left the tomb. In fact, at dawn on the first day after the Sabbath, Peter and John found the tomb empty. Mary Magdalene and the other women encountered the risen Jesus. On the way to Emmaus, the two disciples recognized Him at the breaking of the bread. The Risen One appeared to the Apostles

⁶⁶ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2, 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 53.

⁶⁸ Charles Péguy, *I Misteri [The Mysteries]* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1978) 167. (The quote is from *Veronique: Dialogue of History and the Carnal Soul*, not published in English.)

that evening in the Upper Room and then to many other disciples in Galilee.... It is a fact that if Christ had not risen, the 'emptiness' would be set to prevail. If we take away Christ and His Resurrection, there is no escape for man, and every one of his hopes remains an illusion."⁶⁹

If we cannot truly recognize that Christ is risen, if we cannot overcome the break between knowing and believing, there is no possibility for hope. Without this recognition of reality, of the Resurrection as a real fact, evidenced by the change we can see now just like those who encountered Peter and John saw it, there is no possibility for hope.

It is only because Christ is risen, because He exists, that we can now look this great question in the face: "These desires will be satisfied, won't they? This is the point. These desires, made according to the needs of the heart [desires for the infinite], can be sure of being fulfilled ... only to the degree that one abandons himself, dares himself and abandons himself to the Presence that faith has identified [the presence of Christ risen from the dead]."⁷⁰ This means that my desire is fulfilled only to the degree that I abandon myself to the Presence that faith has recognized. The needs of the heart say that the heart's object exists, but the certainty that this will happen cannot be sustained by our heart; the certainty that this will happen can only be derived from the Presence recognized by faith. It is not we, but He – it is the exceptional Presence – that faith recognizes. Thus, the form of the answer to the desire of each of us is Christ Himself: Christ is the only hope of the fulfillment of our affection. He alone, He alone is capable of consuming, of truly satisfying affectivity, the desire for happiness that we have inside; nothing else is capable of really satisfying us. Thus, hope is the fulfillment of affection. All men burn with desire, but how difficult it is to find one who says, "O God, Thou art my God, I seek Thee, my soul thirsts for Thee; my flesh faints for Thee, as in a dry and weary land where no water is."⁷¹ This is one who is aware that only He is able to fulfill this desire. This is why we must celebrate Christ, that Christ exists! Father Giussani says that "the first thing you have to help one another to do is to celebrate the evidence that there exists an ultimate endpoint of happiness who became man, that is, Christ; that Christ exists."⁷² And who can really celebrate Him – and not in a formal way? The one who is

⁶⁹ Benedict XVI, *Urbi et Orbi Message*, Easter 2009.

⁷⁰ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2, 19.

⁷¹ *Ps* 63:1.

⁷² Giussani, *Affezione e dimora [Affection and Dwelling Place]* (Milan: BUR, 2001) 38.

aware of what the true nature of the heart's desire is (as we were saying this morning).

But one of the greatest difficulties we have found in the School of Community was the passage about the "inevitable uncertainty." Father Giussani, who hides none of the human path from us, asserts that "the certainty of faith generates the certainty of hope, but the manner in which this certainty of hope is brought about in us leaves a kind of disorientation, leaves a kind of tribulation, a kind of doubt that isn't doubt, that is uncertainty, because you aren't able to imagine, to delineate in any way what this future will be like."⁷³ Thus, this inevitable uncertainty appears, because there is this passage, this distance between the moment when the hope in the encounter with this Presence is introduced and the moment when it is fulfilled. We have seen this in "*Il monologo di Giuda*" ["Judas' Monologue"]: "But then days went by and His kingdom did not come; I had already given Him everything and He betrayed me."⁷⁴ Judas had his image of how Jesus was supposed to fulfill the hope He had brought about in him. "But the time when the first sprouts show up is something only the Lord knows,"⁷⁵ as we sang.

This is why the alternative is either abandoning oneself or seeking the solution by ourselves. "But a life that abandons itself to the force of destiny that is revealed in Christ, that abandons itself to the force of Christ, is a life where gladness rules.... The alternative to this, to the degree that this abandonment and certainty don't exist, is complaint. But it's not the heartrending complaint of a suffering child, it's the complaint that stops up the heart and ears of whomever hears it; that makes the lives of all who surround us burdensome, and our life remains a condemnation for others, also for others: life-complaint."⁷⁶ We have to decide whether to abandon ourselves to this Presence recognized by faith, which fulfills desire, the promise, according to a plan that is not ours, or to complaint. We have to accompany one another and help one another with this.

But how?

"The place of this event [of hope] is an ecclesial companionship; 'ecclesial' means people who come together for this reason: for Christ.

⁷³ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2, 28.

⁷⁴ Claudio Chieffo, "Il monologo di Giuda" ["Judas' Monologue"] in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2002) 205.

⁷⁵ Chieffo, "Il seme" ["The Seed"] in *Canti* [Songs], 214.

⁷⁶ Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, Vol. 2, 49.

Our companionship is only friendship.”⁷⁷ But we are attentive to how Father Giussani understands the relationship between this companionship and our human commitment:

“The certainty of what you met is either intelligent – aware of its motives, of its value, of what it says and of what matters – or it is without intelligence – it does not know the value of words, does not understand. In this second case, you are afraid of the future. [Do you see? If you don’t understand, if faith is not knowing, then you’re afraid of the future.] I spoke about this when I made the comparison between companionship and utopia. If you live the companionship as utopia ... you’re afraid of the future: ‘Who knows!’ ‘Who knows if it will happen or not.’ But if you live the companionship as a recognized place [pay attention!] where reason and freedom find their defense, their support, their expansion, then, no, just the opposite!”⁷⁸ So fear does not win. The companionship must not spare our reason and our freedom; it must be the place where they find their defense, their support. “If the companionship is looked upon as the place of relationship with Christ, then the companionship makes you certain; if the companionship is not viewed this way, then it leaves you a poor, deluded man living in utopia.... [And] now, in the general disaster, in the general confusion, in the lack of certainties, in today’s lack of positivity, in the lack of ideals, in today’s aridity, the only thing that man can imagine giving him comfort is getting together with other people. As Eliot said, ‘huddling close together.’ In one of his *Choruses from the Rock*, Eliot wonders, ‘When the Stranger says, “What is the meaning of this city? Do you huddle close together ...”’ so that the animal warmth cushions the coldness of the meaninglessness of life a bit.”⁷⁹ There’s a way of being together that is not correct, that is not adequate. This is why we must stay together to help one another with this recognition, with this defense of the reason that allows us to overcome the break between knowing and believing, so that each of us may arrive at the certainty that allows us to be sure that He “who began a good work in you will bring it to completion in the day of Jesus Christ.”⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Giussani, *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così? [Is It (Really) Possible to Live This Way?]*, 267.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 286.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 287.

⁸⁰ *Phil* 1:6.

3. Culture and mission

But the ultimate overcoming of this break (I'll only mention it now; we will go back to it tomorrow morning) between knowing and believing lies in the way we conceive our cultural expression, culture. If you want to understand if faith is true knowledge for you, if the break between knowing and believing has been overcome, it suffices to watch how we enter reality, how we look at things, how we relate to everything. This gaze on things and on circumstances is what we call culture, the point of view that is the starting point for how we live everything. Thus culture is the test of the victory (or its lack) over the rift between knowing and believing. If there is still a dualism between knowing and believing in the way you look at your wife, or at sickness, or a crisis, or work, then it means that we are like everyone else. If what rules this gaze is the newness that was introduced by faith, then life is something else.

“A culture cannot help but be born from a taste for life.... We create a culture of Communion and Liberation, we create a Christian culture, a new culture ... precisely to the degree to which our experience of life flowers. This is not primarily a question of a capacity for erudition or of new content or of strange and different images to create; it is a question of awareness [which is expressed in everything we deal with].”⁸¹ Look at this: “In order to bear witness to the world, in order to live mission, we have to let it be seen that we have been changed. There is no other means.”⁸²

I will conclude with a passage from Péguy: “God has *need* of us. God *needs* His creature. He has condemned Himself, in a manner of speaking, to this. He misses us, misses His creature. He who is everything needs him who is nothing. He who can do all things needs him who can do nothing. He has lost His full powers. He who is everything is nothing without him who is nothing.”⁸³

⁸¹ Giussani, *Dall'utopia alla presenza* [From Utopia to Presence] (Milan: BUR, 2006) 33-34.

⁸² Giussani, *Affezione e dimora* [Affection and Dwelling Place], 133.

⁸³ Péguy, *I Misteri* [The Mysteries], 233.

Sunday morning, April 26

*Before the introduction and after the conclusion:
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Great Mass in C minor K 427
Herbert von Karajan – Berliner Philharmoniker
“Spirto Gentil” no. 24, Deutsche Grammophon*

Father Pino: We don't know how it happened two thousand years ago, at that hour, in that corner of the Blessed Virgin's house, but in our nothingness, in our need for meaning, for truth, for affection, for positivity, we are humbly certain that what is happening now is what began in that instant. Not “how” it happened, but “what” happened is happening.

Angelus

Morning Prayer

■ ASSEMBLY

Davide Prosperi: Many questions came in, and we ascertained that the majority of them converged on three fundamental questions: first, what is correspondence? Second, there was a request to go deeper into a point often repeated in both lessons, namely, that humanity is missing. Third, clarification of the work of asceticism is needed. Clearly, this was striking because, reflecting on the path followed in these past years with its constant insistence on the “I,” one begins to ask, “Why do we still not understand?”

So let us begin immediately with the first question: “We have understood what correspondence is not; we have intuited that what corresponds by virtue of instinct is subjected to a judgment in order for it to become experience. What then is correspondence?”

Julián Carrón: Let us take the time to explain what experience is, because if we do not, then we do not have the tools to follow a human path. All of our troubles come from here, in the way we do School of

Community and in the way we live. Thus, nothing is useful, because if everything we live is not judged (and we cannot understand how one can judge without seeing whether or not there is correspondence), then we are not following a human path.

I remember that for me this was perhaps the most salient question in my encounter with the Movement: it put tools into my hands for following my human path. Without this, you cannot understand even faith. Thus, let us take a moment to begin again from here, because this is not the last footnote of the last page of the twentieth book of Father Giussani! This is the beginning of the Trilogy: what experience is.⁸⁴

So, helped by the necessary technical means, let's try – let's go back to school, my friends!

EXPERIENCE

Father Giussani says, as we heard yesterday, that we usually reduce experience to trying. It seems to me from the question that this is understood: for there to be experience, it is not enough to try something.

TRYING

I used to give this example to my students: imagine that we are learning a certain kind of mathematical problem and the teacher, after having explained it, gives you some homework to complete. Do you remember how you used to do this when you were young? You used to take your homework home and you tried to answer the problem. After doing your homework, were you sure that you had solved the problem adequately? Obviously not. And if you had done it five times instead of once, would you have known whether the fifth answer was better than the first? No. What does this mean? That, by merely trying (that is, attempting to solve the problem 200,000 times), I am not certain of having learned anything.

Life can become this: a bunch of trials, of attempts from which we learn nothing. Do you see why Father Giussani insists? If we keep

⁸⁴ Cf. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 4-10.

on just trying, we do not learn anything about life; we do not have an experience.

For this trying to become experience, a judgment (the second factor) must be made.

TRYING + MAKING A JUDGMENT

Let us stay with our example: we went back to the school the next day and we compared the attempt that we made and the solution the teacher put up on the chalkboard. Thus, we were able to compare our attempt (our try) with the exact answer. Without judging, I do not understand; I cannot be sure.

Is it clear up to this point? You can see why Father Giussani insists on the fact that we cannot learn anything; we cannot truly have an experience if we just keep on trying and do not make a judgment about what we are trying.

But making a judgment obviously needs a criterion of judgment.

CRITERION OF JUDGMENT

In our example, who gave us the criterion of judgment? The teacher.

But the big question that Father Giussani faces arises here: is there any teacher who can give me the criterion of judgment for what I try in my life? If there is some guru who makes this claim, he is presumptuous and is joking with me. It would be like saying, "Poor thing, you don't understand; I will explain it to you." And this is what happens when we entrust to someone else the criterion of judgment. If we entrust to someone else the criterion of judgment, we are slaves to that someone, we are alienated, Father Giussani explains. And so you can defend the person, you can defend all human rights, as many as you want, but if we take away the criterion of judgment from the person, we take away his dignity, because it would be like saying, "You are stupid; I will explain it to you." We sometimes stay together in just this way: "You don't understand; I will explain it to you." This is not good, because it keeps us infantile, alienated – we always need to ask the boss. I will not stay in a movement like this!

It goes against the criterion of judgment from the first page of the Trilogy. That is, it goes against what Father Giussani proposed to us.

So, what is the criterion of judgment? The criterion of judgment cannot be outside of us, because then we would be alienated. So the criterion of judgment has a primary characteristic: it is within us.

CRITERION OF JUDGMENT

- Within us

I am giving you examples so that we all understand.

Let us suppose that Davide, because of a misfortune, has a cast on his arm. He goes to the doctor and tells him, “Look, this cast really hurts; I am in a lot of pain.” The doctor answers him, “It doesn’t hurt. It is impossible that it hurts you – I have a Nobel Prize in casts! It is impossible that it hurts you.” Would Davide go home and say, “It doesn’t hurt; he has a Nobel Prize in casts... it doesn’t hurt”? I may even be stupid, but I know when a cast hurts me! The criterion is within me; it is not in any guru or expert outside of me. This is so true that, if he insists, I am going to look for another doctor! Is it someone else who tells me when something hurts me or is it I myself – even if I am, perhaps, stupid?

You could object: “Oh, sure, the cast example is really easy because you can understand it, but what about freedom?” What if someone comes to me and tells me that freedom means that I stay in jail for the rest of my life, because at the latest philosophy congress the greatest geniuses in the universe decided so? Would I go to jail? Do we all know what freedom is, or do we go to jail because the experts have decided so?

We could go on giving examples until midnight.

The criterion is within us.

So (and here comes the second characteristic) does everyone decide for himself? No; the criterion is within us, but we do not decide it!

CRITERION OF JUDGMENT

- Within us
- But we don’t decide it

We do not decide what the criterion of judgment is. This is the example that I have always given: we do not even decide our shoe size. The

criterion for the shoes that fit is within me, but I don't decide it. If we were able to decide it, think of what we could save when there are sales. (But there would not be any sales, precisely because everyone would fit his own criterion for judgment!) It makes us laugh, but this is how it is. It is so obvious that we don't decide, that we need to submit to the criterion that we find within us: there is no shoe other than the one that fits me. Thus, the criterion is within me, it is in my foot, so much so that if I put on a shoe that is too small, my foot screams, "Not this one!" It is a judgment: "Not this one." Is this objective or do we decide? (Some people have told me that they decide: "I buy the cheapest shoes and then they can stretch." Fine, we get to this craziness because we are so confused!) The criterion of judgment is within us, but we don't decide it; it is objective.

And what is the criterion of judgment that we have within us and that we don't decide, helping us to enter into everything and to be able to have an experience, that is, to make a judgment about what we try? Father Giussani called it "elementary experience": the array of needs and evidences that constitute our humanity (truth, justice, love, happiness).

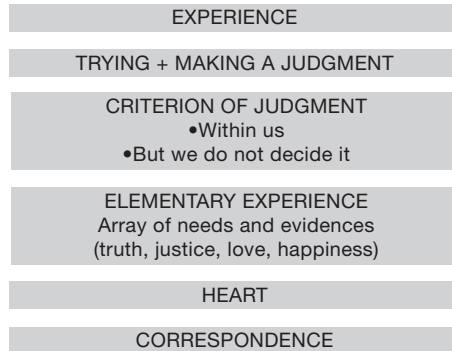
ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE
Array of needs and evidences
(truth, justice, love, happiness)

We can sum this up by using the Biblical term "heart," which is not only sentiment, as it is usually reduced to in common language, but it is this array of reason and affection – precisely what Father Giussani means by the array of needs and evidences.

HEART

This criterion, elementary experience, is objective. And here each person needs to track down examples in his experience. How often someone thinks, "If only I can get this job or [when we were younger] go to this party..." Oftentimes, the job and the party went great, and yet we came home sad. As Giacomo Leopardi said in "La sera del dì di festa" ["The Evening of the Holiday"], "...crushing my heart, as now." How often things go great, we get everything we have in mind, and it is not enough. Do you have this experience sometimes? Do you

see how this is not subjective? Literally, like the shoes, it is so objective that if I do not find a correspondence, I am not okay. This is why the key word is “correspondence.”



I have within me the criterion for knowing what corresponds to the needs of my heart. But we often stop at trying (I feel nostalgia, I want to possess), and so we say, “This is what corresponds to me.” And this is how we justify every kind of instinctivity (let us say the word). But this is kidding ourselves – first of all, kidding yourself – and not just because you make moral mistakes. You make moral mistakes because it does not correspond to you, even if you do not care about morality, because the problem is not that you do not care about morality; it is that you end up in nihilism! Morality is nothing in comparison to the nihilism one ends up in with regard to that evidence that he has within himself.

Having nostalgia or a desire for possession is not yet experience, but with them the questions arise: Is this happiness? Does this coincide with my needs, with the criterion that I have within? Like when you go try on shoes: Does this pair correspond to the needs of my feet?

Our confusion is evident when we use the word “correspondence.” I saw this clearly when a couple invited me to celebrate their wedding, and in talking with them it came out that, in the end, they thought that the other would make them happy. And I made them understand that the other cannot make them happy, because your need for hap-

piness (this elementary experience that you find inside, this need for truth, for beauty, for justice) is greater than the whole universe, and that knowing your insufficiency and your nothingness is the greatest problem in life.

Do you see why Father Giussani invited us to read Leopardi? To understand what elementary experience is, that Leopardi was so aware of, so carnally aware of. It always strikes me that, at thirteen years old, Father Giussani could not find another companion on the journey like Leopardi. What an amazing experience of his humanity Father Giussani had, to have not been able to find another companion on the journey who could speak like this: that everything is small, tiny, compared to the soul's capacity! Father Giussani always told us this, but we do not understand it! Everything is small, tiny, for the capacity of the soul: wife, work, success, politics... Everything is small, tiny, for the capacity of the soul! If we do not understand this, we are like everyone else. Why? Because we confuse what we like with what corresponds to us. And if we do not begin to judge, we are constantly fooling ourselves – not only because you do wrong or because you are not coherent with a moral norm. You fool yourself, which is worse, because it will never correspond to you, it will not correspond to your need for happiness! We must decide whether we want to take our need for happiness seriously, the elementary experience that we find inside us, if we want to take our humanity seriously! Or, do we want to do, as everyone does, what we want, what we like? If so, there is no need for us to come here, and certainly not to then say that we are doing it because “Carrón told me so”! Certainly not, no! About correspondence, I have said and can only say what I am saying now. Let's not fool ourselves.

So you understand what a great work lies before us, if we have this minimum of tenderness for ourselves, this affection for ourselves, if we truly want our good, our happiness, our friends' happiness, our children's happiness, the world's happiness. If we do not have an experience, we are not able to understand what the difference is between whatever passes through our heads (our images) and Christ. Because, in the end, if the criterion is only what I want and what I like, Christ becomes a thought that I want and like more or less; He is not the One who makes it possible for me to have that correspondence that Father Giussani spoke about, the only true correspondence, that which is impossible for man if he doesn't find Him. This is why we need to celebrate Christ, to rejoice in Christ.

If we do not, I truly understand that we often remain confused about what we have met – because either we have not experienced it or we put up resistance to recognizing what really corresponds to us and we need to justify any sort of instinctivity. Is this clear?

Prosperi: In light of this, the next questions are more easily clarified.

The second question: “Humanity is missing: this expression came up many times in your lessons. But what does it mean, on the other hand, to have humanity? Sometimes this word seems to have really confusing aspects. What can help us to distinguish the human as you speak of it from the endless images that inevitably crop up in us?”

Carrón: The confusion, as you can see, is about this criterion of judgment, because it does not come out of what I try, but in front of what I try, in me, humanly committed to what I try. This is why it takes humanity. If I reduce my humanity only to what I want and like, I will grow more and more confused.

Thanks to correspondence, above and beyond images, one begins to have a criterion for judging when there is something truly human and when there is not. But how many times has it happened that you came home from a party or from getting a job or from finishing your degree, and yet you experienced a deep insufficiency? Do I need to tell you your own experience? Don't we all share it?

The question is if we, when we are aware of this, are loyal to the experience we have, loyal to what comes out of our experience – because in order to continue to follow things that we want and like, we have to deny our experience of non-correspondence. It's not that we don't have all the warning lights on – all of them! And we are well aware of the difference between our images and the true judgment of correspondence!

We must help one another with this, continually challenging each other on this, because otherwise we stay forever confused, all the more in a general situation like the one we spoke of yesterday. This is why a truly important work is needed. If we do not begin to have an experience and to be loyal with our experience (so as to distinguish what I want and like from what corresponds to me), we will remain more and more confused. And this is not without consequences: we do what we want and like and we are not happy; we get what we crave and we are not happy. That is, correspondence with the heart is absent. How do

we make this distinction? We make it by being loyal to our experience. I am not the one who has to explain it to you now; watch, watch your experience. Like the example of the cast: I do not have to explain to you when it hurts you or not. Do you know when a cast hurts you, or not? Do you know when you are happy, or not? Do you know when you are truly fulfilled in your life, or not? So, if we do not judge (if we do not see what corresponds to us), we remain more and more confused.

Prosperi: “Can you go deeper into the concept of ascesis, understood as a work of the intelligence and of the will? How does this work sustain the certainty that Christ saves my circumstance? How does the companionship sustain this personal work of ascesis?”

Carrón: The work of ascesis is judging, Father Giussani told us. The only way to begin to have an experience of freedom is to judge. If we do not judge, we will remain more and more confused and more and more trapped. Life is this ongoing judgment of everything that happens. We must decide whether or not to share in this adventure offered to us by Father Giussani, because otherwise we only repeat his sentences without understanding them, and in the long run this bores us because it changes nothing in our life, because it is as if we can learn nothing more about life.

The work of ascesis is this constant comparison between what I have in mind, my images, what I think life is, what I think makes me happy, and what really makes me happy. Do you recognize it for yourselves? Putting this into action is the decision of our life. Our life, belonging to the Movement, is sharing in this adventure. Otherwise, the charism is dead and buried, despite the fact that there are 26,000 of us here, because we are not doing what Father Giussani communicated to us as an experience, as a human path. And this is the great decision that we must make at the end of these Exercises: are we willing to do this work, to share in this adventure of awareness (in such a way that we are able to begin to tell black from white), or not? This judgment is what we have the most difficulty with. And then, since we do not judge, we ask someone else to solve the questions for us.

How does the companionship sustain us? It sustains you if, instead of explaining, it challenges you. What did Jesus do with the disciples? Did He spare them the work of judging? From the first moment – “Come

and see, judge for yourselves” – Jesus begins from the premise that they are not so stupid that they cannot understand whether what they are seeing corresponds to them or not. And when, in the episode we have often recalled, everyone abandoned Him, Jesus once again does not spare them at all: “Do you also want to go away?” He does not say, when He was left alone with the disciples, “At least *you* stay, please – don’t leave Me alone!” He runs the risk of being left alone, to the point of not sparing His disciples their judgment: “Do you also want to go away?” Is saying this encouraging them to go? No. He is helping them to do this work of ascesis because, without Jesus’ question, the disciples might have stayed with Him, but in a formal way, without understanding why. What does Jesus do by challenging them? He makes them aware of the experience they have had and from the depths of their experience He allows the reason for their remaining to come forth: “If we go away from You, where will we go?”

This awareness came forth thanks to One who is truly a friend: He did not set out to explain; He challenged them and thus they stayed with an awareness and a certainty that they did not have beforehand. Are we friends to one another in this way, or not? Otherwise, we are fooling one another, because friendship is the constant challenge to our relationship with the Mystery. This is disturbing for Father Giussani, because he is the only one who takes all the factors of what the Mystery has given us (this heart for judging everything) seriously. He puts us in the best conditions in front of the challenge of Jesus to the disciples: “Do you want to go away or not? Do I have to explain to you what I am for you? What have you experienced? What have you recognized?” In this way, the reason for staying came forth for the disciples. We will not remain Christians – our faith will have an expiration date, I assure you – if we do not do this work, because we will not know why we stay here and, when our mood changes, we will think that we are better off elsewhere. Without this work of ascesis, we do not understand the ultimate reason why we are here.

Prosperi: “You said that Christ is not missing, but humanity is missing. It seems that humanity is a precondition for recognizing Christ as the answer to the needs of our hearts, but if I look at my experience, I become aware that my humanity blossomed in the encounter with Christ and that before this I was much more ensnared and unable to recognize my original needs. Can you clarify this relationship between Christ and humanity?”

Carrón: To be able to recognize Christ, to be able to recognize the difference of Christ, humanity is simultaneously needed.⁸⁵ And we all have humanity. No one can say that he does not have humanity, because it would mean that he is not a person. So, let's stop saying that we do not have it! We all have humanity. (We can use it or not, but this is another problem.) This is why we can find Him who corresponds to us. If each of us thinks of why he is here, he sees that he has at least glimpsed in some way that in the encounter with certain people there is a hope for him, which is that life could be greater, more beautiful, lived in a more human way. This condition exists because God, who had decided to make us sharers in happiness by sending His Son, has made us with this heart so that we could recognize Him when we would meet Him. It was all in God's plan: He made us for Himself, for that fullness that only He can give us. The first page of the Bible tells us so: He created us in His image, that is, He made us for Himself. All the structure of the I was in that garden; He made us to live with Him, to find happiness in our relationship with Him. According to all of Christian tradition, our I is this desire for beauty, for fullness, that finds its fulfillment in the Only One who corresponds to it. This is why, until we find Him, our hearts are restless. So, yes, humanity (as Father Giussani says, and spares us a great deal of reasoning) is necessary for recognizing Christ, because it is this comparison that one makes between the need for beauty that he has and what he encounters.

And what the second part of the question says is true: the encounter with Christ makes humanity blossom. It makes humanity blossom because it makes me aware of what I desire; it awakens me. This is why many people get angry with the Movement: "It awakened my humanity and then it does not fulfill it." But it has awakened it! If it has awakened it, we are even more ourselves, and therefore more able to seize the correspondence. Thus, the more one lives the Christian experience, the more he lives this relationship with Christ, the more all the breadth of our desires comes forth. Our desire is not wiped out, but since it is He who attracts me the most, He satisfies me more, He

⁸⁵ Cf. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* (Montreal: McGill-Queens, 1998) 6: "This is why, when facing the hypothesis of revelation and of Christian revelation, nothing is more important than the question of man's true situation. It would be impossible to become fully aware of what Jesus Christ means if one did not first become fully aware of the nature of that dynamism which makes man human. Christ proposes Himself as the answer to what 'I' am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank, and live Christ. Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name."

makes me happier, so all my desire comes forth more fully. This is why I am astounded if we then say that anything whatever corresponds to us. This blossoming of the I, as you see, is the condition for recognizing Christ. This is why I need to find Him every morning. What would a day be, after having met Him, if I were not able to remember Him; what would a morning be without being able to say “You” to Christ? Just as for someone who is in love, what would a morning be like without the person that he loves? Just as for the baby who cannot find that face of his mother, what would life be?

So remembering Christ is not adding yet another burden (“Aargh, now I have to *remember*, too!”). So I ask you: how can you live without remembering? How are you able to look at yourself, to have affection for yourself, without remembering Christ, after having met Him and having seen that He is the only one who satisfies life, the only one who truly corresponds to your need for happiness, for companionship? How do you do it?! How can you live without silence? Our silence, for us, is born from the Event. One is left speechless in front of this correspondence as it happens: “Who are You, O Christ, who are able to fill my life this way?” Everything is filled with silence; Your presence fills me with silence. One remains speechless, like when he finds himself in front of an experience of beauty, of fullness, of gratuity, that strikes him so much that he remains speechless. This is silence. Christian silence is born from the Presence, from the fullness of the Presence: I have nothing more to say; I keep silent in order not to lose Him. If we do not need this silence, we are not living the way we are invited to in CL: nothing has happened and nothing is happening that fills us with silence. This is not a list of rules; everything is born as an expression of the Event that fills life with silence.

Prosperi: You said that the form of the answer to our desires is Christ Himself. “When someone does not like his job and wants to find a better one, or wants to meet a woman with whom to have a family, or when two spouses want a child, what does it mean that the form of the answer to our desires is Christ Himself? Christ is the solidity of my life, but what does it mean that He is the form of my desire?”

Carrón: It means that what I truly desire is He! We often confuse our partial desires with the heart’s ultimate desire, so much so that we have the job and it is not enough; we get married and it is not enough; we have children and they are not enough. Why are they not enough? Because

what we desire, as Leopardi says, is something greater. This is our greatness, and we always try to reduce our greatness, because our greatness is the greatness of our desire. Man's true greatness, man's true mystery, man's true paradox is that although he is limited, he desires the infinite. This is what we do not understand, my friends. If we do not understand that what we desire is the infinite, tell me, why should we be Christians, why should we waste our time staying here? If we do not experience that what the Mystery made us for is to fill us with an absolute happiness beyond all our expectations, what makes it worthwhile to be Christians?

If it is legitimate to have all these partial desires, the only one who can truly fulfill our constitutive desire for the infinite is He. This is why the form of the answer to our desire is Christ. If not this, then what does the encounter with Christ mean to us? We would not have understood the import of the encounter with Christ, and thus we would not be clear about the reasonableness of our adherence of faith. This is why I speak of expiration dates, if one does not understand what the true problem is, the one to which Father Giussani always educated us, citing Cesare Pavese: what we are looking for in our pleasures is the infinite, and no one will ever be able to stop searching for this infinite. And this is our experience: that we can have everything that we want, but it is not enough, and we become more and more aware that it is not enough. Why can we say that it is not enough? Because the criterion within us is so objective that it makes it obvious to us that what we desire is greater than what we are able to obtain. This is the paradox: that our heart is this desire, but we are limited and everything we do is small, limited, incapable of satisfying this desire for the infinite. And so either Christ exists (One who comes from outside and fills our hearts), or the only thing to do is cry, because what we desire does not exist. This is why only he who understands the infinite nature of desire is able to celebrate Christ – someone like Leopardi, like Saint Augustine, like the Samaritan woman.

Until we become aware of this, we cannot understand what a grace we have received in encountering Christ; we will not be astounded that Someone has taken pity on our nothingness and has given us that absolutely unexpected grace that none of us deserves and that so many people gropingly seek. We have received this grace, but it is often as if we had not received it, because we live in confusion, thinking that anything else can respond to the nature, to the depths, to the import of this desire. When I say that desire is missing in life, I am saying that we don't understand what the nature of our desire is. We lack the Mystery.

This makes us aware that if we do not do this work, this ascesis, we will not be happy (even if we manage to get what others are getting) and we will not really understand the fact that Christ exists and that we have met Father Giussani; this will not fill us with joy.

Prosperi: “We want to understand better the passage about the fact that what one follows is not the person, but the experience of the person, and how we can avoid allowing this to become an alibi, in the end, for applying our own measure anyhow. For example, if you follow the person and he disappoints or betrays you, this often gives rise to an objection to the experience.”

Carrón: A comparison needs to be made with what is being lived. Father Giussani communicated an experience that he had to us, and this is true even if tomorrow I betray it. It is true and will always be true, because what makes for a correspondence or not is not what I say or what Father Giussani says, but is what each of us knows in his own experience when he judges it. This is why one follows the experience of another, which he communicates to you as best he can, gropingly. We do not follow the person because of a personalism, because the boss said so. This is not human; it is not human! But if he is communicating an experience to you that he is having and if you are interested in learning, following that person means following the experience that he is having, in such a way that you can make it your own. And it will remain yours even if he would betray it. I do not want us to repeat Father Giussani’s sayings (or mine), but I want that this be our experience, that it become ours, because when we want something we want it to become ours, as we wanted what the mathematics teacher taught us to become ours. Do you not want this? Father Giussani says this when he explains obedience: obedience is following until, at a certain point, one is following himself, struck by the experience that another has had, because he is so entirely one with himself that, in the end, he follows himself, struck by another’s experience. If we do not do this, we keep on repeating the sayings of Father Giussani, but we will not have the experience that he has.

We follow the experience that someone has. This does not mean that we then stay with our own measure, because if someone remains with his own measure it is because he wants to, going against what clearly comes forth from the experience that he has. If he then wants to justify it with his objections to the errors of others, it is entirely his problem.

Prosperi: “If Christianity is the Event, what is the meaning of committing ourselves and defending Christian values?”

Carrón: This is the third point of the second lesson, and I want to spend some time on it to go deeper: the question of culture. It seems to me that now, after the journey of this year, we can understand a little better what is at stake.

Let us take, for example, the case of the experience we had with the Eluana incident. What did we often do? A very correct thing, from a certain point of view: we defended the value of life. But I sincerely ask you: if one of us had been in that same situation, would it have been enough to defend life? Would we have been able to stay in front of a situation like that only defending the value of life? Tell me!

Let us look, my friends: what did Father Giussani do with us in order to defend life? It’s not that he did not affirm the value of life, the importance of man and of the person. But to help us to understand this (I am summarizing) he communicated a passion for life. To explain to us what life is, what the value of man is, Christ became flesh, He became man! The principles and values became flesh and blood, as the Pope keeps on insisting. But, not having understood that we have comprehended the principles and values thanks to the encounter we have had with Christ in the Movement, which has filled our life with meaning, we often change the method. On the one hand, there is the method that the Mystery used with us in order to allow us to understand (and which we have experienced in the encounter); on the other hand is the method that we want to apply to others. So we have not understood the cognitive import of the encounter, that is, that this love for life comes to us through the encounter we have had!

This is what Romano Guardini said very well in his *The End of the Modern World*: “From the beginning of the modern era, a non-Christian culture has been expanding. For a long time, the negation has been directed only against the actual content of Revelation, not against ethical values, individual and social, which have developed under Revelation’s influence [for a long time, values have been defended, even by non-Christians]. In fact, modern culture claims to rest precisely on those values.” The illuminists did not want to abolish Christian values; they had understood that they were a consequence of the greatest thing that had happened in history, but they did not want to follow the Church; they did not want to continue to recognize Christ as decisive for life. So they defended the fruits that Christ had borne, cutting them from their origin. They wanted

to make a Christianity without Christ, defending Christian values apart from their source, the spring of these values. “In truth, these values ... are bound to Revelation,” and we truly understand this because we would be like everyone else had we not met the Movement. What would we have said about the case of Eluana if we had not met the Movement? Tell me... The same as everyone else! “Thus forces are unleashed in man which are per se ‘natural’ [we can almost reach the recognition of these values naturally], but which would not develop outside that economy [of Christianity]. Man becomes aware of values that are per se evident, but they become visible only in that environment.” If we do not understand this, that they are per se evident but that we can understand them only within the environment of the Christian encounter, we will try to beat others over the head with these values, thinking that this will make them understand them. And then we complain, wondering why they don’t understand. We would not have understood them like this either! Jesus did not become flesh by mistake! No, He became flesh because if He had not, we would not have understood. It is not that the values are not true, but we have met the path to accepting them, to understanding them, to seeing their humanity only when we recognized Christ. Guardini reports, speaking about decades ago (imagine if Guardini were living today...), that “an emptiness has revealed itself that has already existed for a long time. ... The age to come will create a terrible but salutary clarity. No Christian can rejoice in the coming of a radical negation of Christianity... But it is good that this disloyalty is uncovered [brought about by modern culture wishing to defend values without Christ, and nowadays, not even values, as we are seeing]. For then it will be seen effectively what reality is like, when man is detached from Revelation and its fruits cease to exist.”⁸⁶ Now we are already seeing with our eyes the beginning of the cessation of fruits. What no one could have imagined, that we have arrived at the point of negating life and the most obvious things, we have before our eyes (in fact, these things remain obvious for us who use reason that has been educated from within the Church). Ambiguities are falling away, and they lead us to a purification and a deepening of the faith. We must be aware of this, because we will find ourselves living more and more without a homeland, not being understood. So how do we withstand this danger? Guardini shows us two necessary conditions: “maturity of judgment and freedom to choose options.” Without these, we will soon become like everyone else.

⁸⁶ Romano Guardini, *The End of the Modern World* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 1998) 100-103.

Father Giussani was well aware of this situation when he created the Movement, because he was aware that this process had already begun in 1954 when everything appeared to be thriving, and he created an environment where we could rediscover values through the discovery of faith. So we need not abstractly defend values, but we must live the Movement, as Father Giussani did with us – this is called “witness.”

If we do not do this, we are not loyal to the way the Mystery introduced us to Himself. This is why dualism is being created in culture, in our cultural expression. Father Giussani, on the other hand, said about culture that “the educative line of the Movement tends to arouse an event of life.” It is only within this event of life that we can communicate values. It is not that we must not defend values, but we must understand that it is only an event of life that can awaken them in ourselves and in others. “For life to reawaken, all dualism must be abolished... What destroys dualism is the judgment that the love of Christ is what makes life worth living. [This is our true cultural expression.] If faith comes to be lost as the adequately unitary value, then judgments about partial values come forth, and this causes division... If dualism comes to be destroyed, a real cultural presence comes into being [a visible and public difference].”⁸⁷

This is the fundamental question that we must understand. So, as Cardinal Angelo Scola said in an article in *Avvenire*,⁸⁸ our path is proposing the Christian event in all its entirety and irreducibility, even to the point of specifying its views, implications, and values.

This is why we are very interested in the European elections, because our concerns are at stake in them, since many laws now being passed have the Church as their first target. Defending the *libertas Ecclesiae* in Europe is the reason why we are interested in the elections. We do not think that a just law solves the human problem by itself, even if we can make much better laws. We have seen that we started out from just laws on the family, on life, and this has not stopped the destruction that we see before our eyes. We must defend the *libertas Ecclesiae* above all else in order to be able to continue to have an experience of life that allows us to recover the evidence for the values that are now lost. And

⁸⁷ Giussani, “Comunità cristiana e cultura” [“Christian Community and Culture”], *CL-Litterae Communionis* June 1977: 9.

⁸⁸ Cf. Angelo Scola, “Altro che egemonia mondiale. Offerta di una speranza da ‘investire’ quaggiù” [“Worldly Hegemony? No, the Offer of a Hope to ‘Invest’ Here Below”], *Avvenire* 20 Feb. 2009: 2. See also *Traces*, No. 3, Vol. 11 (2009): 45.

this is why we need witnesses who can help this to be understood. What we are dealing with is not secondary. We are dealing with the possibility of living, that the institution does not suffocate the experience we are having. And we have to defend this at all costs.

HOLY MASS

HOMILY OF FATHER PINO

During these days, in this time, the same experience is happening to us that is on this page of the Gospel of Luke. Who introduces us to truth, to the totality of reality? What is now before our eyes, what we have heard in these days, is the happening of His presence – physical, real, concrete, in the flesh.

The Lord, in His tenderness, is not frightened by our disbelief; He is not scared by that lack of humanity that makes us think of Him as a fantasy even when He is before our eyes; He is not frightened by the fact that we block ourselves in our instinct, in disturbance, in fear.

The power of Christ present, physically present today, allows us to follow the whole path of knowledge. “Look at My hands, look at My feet, look at the facts, look at the signs. Give Me something to eat” (cf. *Lk* 24:36–42). It is in His presence that all history, all prophecy is embodied, made a substance, a reality that can be touched, seen, followed.

Without the grace of this history, with the different humanity that happened and is happening before our eyes, Christ would remain a fantasy for us and the last word would be uncertainty about reality and fear of the future. Our great work is this simplicity that allows us to be grasped by the power of His presence, by this tenderness, which nothing can resist.

It has touched us, it is touching the same reality of those eleven, not “how” it happened in that room two thousand years ago, but “what” happened is happening to us; it is a fact. And Christ says to us what He said to the eleven. All truth is here, the meaning and responsibility of our life: “You are witnesses of this” (*Lk* 24:48).

MESSAGES RECEIVED

On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme “From Faith, the Method,” the Supreme Pontiff offers the many participants his cordial best wishes with the assurance of his spiritual closeness; and while he wishes that this blessed occasion may awaken a renewed and lasting fidelity to Christ as well as a more generous commitment to the work of evangelization, he invokes a generous outpouring of heavenly favors and sends you and the responsables of the Fraternity and all those gathered his special and heartfelt apostolic blessing.

*His Eminence, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State for His Holiness*

Dearest friends,

The renewal of the beautiful gesture of the Spiritual Exercises strengthens the bond of intense communion that connects us.

Faith as a method translates Jesus’ uplifting affirmation: “*I am the way, the truth and the life.*” With great insight, Augustine rewrote this affirmation, saying that Jesus is the way *to the truth and to life*.

Our dear Father Giussani vigorously taught us how important it is to walk in unity along this path (method). His constant attention to method is certainly a constitutive factor of the fruitful charism that the Spirit gave him.

It is a responsibility for each one of us and for the entire community of “Communion and Liberation” that faith becomes a method of life.

I assure you of my prayers so that, this year too, the gift of conversion may be given to you by the power of the Spirit, so that you may be a *living offering* to all our fellow men through a conscious belonging to Our Holy Mother Church.

I greet you in the Lord and I bless you.

*His Eminence, Angelo Cardinal Scola
Patriarch of Venice*

Dearest Father Julián,

I want to communicate my greetings to all our friends of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered for the Spiritual Exercises in Rimini. These days are a grace, not just for the Movement, but for the entire Church and for the whole world. We who are living in the missionary areas of the Church are well aware of this.

In a meeting of the priests of the Fraternity in Latin America, Cleuza thanked us for our *yes* during all these years because it made her *yes* possible, and the encounter which changed her life. On the flip side, her *yes* is helping us to truly live the charism of Father Giussani and to follow today the path that you, Julián, are showing us.

May these Exercises be a moment of growth in the encounter which gives satisfaction to our life and sustains the desire to communicate the beauty of what has happened to everyone.

A heartfelt embrace.

*His Excellency, Bishop Filippo Santoro
Bishop of Petrópolis*

TELEGRAMS SENT

*To His Holiness
Benedict XVI*

Your Holiness,

More than 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, gathered in Rimini, and others joined by satellite in 63 nations of the world, have experienced the annual Spiritual Exercises, which took their title from a teaching of Father Giussani: “From Faith, the Method.” We have deepened our awareness that in front of the current situation of crisis at all levels, we need to encounter a different humanity, where the event of Christ happens here and now as the answer to the questions of our heart, because this is the method of faith, as you have recently said in wonderful words: “In the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word, in the fact that God became a man like us, lies both the content and the method of the Christian proclamation.”

Certain that only faithfulness to this method chosen by God can make us witnesses to all of this Christian novelty in front of the crisis born of the break between reason and faith, we entrust to the Blessed Mother your upcoming apostolic journeys to Abruzzo and to the Middle East, wishing to more and more be active coworkers in your passion for man and for Christ who challenges the world as mercy which saves us from perdition.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone
Secretary of State*

Your Eminence,

More than 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation and others joined by satellite in 63 nations of the world have experienced the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme: “From Faith, the Method.”

The telegram sent in the Holy Father’s name finds the members of the Fraternity more certain and glad to be able to serve Peter in his witness to his fellow men of the new humanity that is born of faith.

May Mary indicate the path of his service to the Church as a passion for showing the importance of Christ in the affairs of men.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco
President of the Italian Bishops' Conference*

Your Eminence,

More than 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation and others joined by satellite in 63 nations of the world have experienced the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme: "From Faith, the Method." Now, more certain that Christ has conquered and remains in our midst, they offer their energy so that the Church may live in Italy as a new humanity that fulfills the constitutive needs of the heart.

May the Blessed Virgin sustain His sacrifice for the life of the Christian people and our country.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Excellency, Bishop Josef Clemens
Secretary of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

Your Excellency,

More than 26,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation and others joined by satellite in 63 nations of the world have experienced the annual Spiritual Exercises on the theme: "From Faith, the Method." The Magisterium of Benedict XVI has been a sure point of reference for the meditations. He continues to bear witness that in Christ, the content and method of the Christian proclamation coincide.

As *christifideles laici*, we follow the Holy Father who invites us to show to the world the import of the faith in the life of the baptized.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Eminence, Cardinal Angelo Scola
Patriarch of Venice*

Dearest Eminence,

The letter you sent us finds us more aware that our weakness has found mercy in the eyes of the Father, which through the charism reaches us more and more as a way for the constitutive needs of our heart to find the answer that, when it is followed, allows everyone, and us first, to see the cognitive import of the faith, especially when, as today, reality challenges man's hope more.

May Mary obtain for you what His heart desires.

Fr. Julián Carrón

*His Excellency Bishop Filippo Santoro
Bishop of Petrópolis*

Dearest Excellency,

We too continue to follow what the Lord is causing to happen before our eyes with Cleuza and Marcos, challenged by their witness to recognize it with the faith they have. Let us pray for one another to remain faithful to the method that the Lord has chosen for us by allowing us to meet Father Giussani.

Fr. Julián Carrón

ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

By Sandro Chierici

(Guide to the images taken from the history of art which accompanied the classical music played before and after each session)

Beginning with creation, the slides present in the first part certain Old Testament figures who live the faith as an obedience to the signs God gives: Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph.

With the Incarnation of Christ, faith becomes a witness to a concrete experience, to an encounter, to liberation from evil, to forgiveness, to mercy, to victory over death, to glory. This experience gives birth to an affection of man for Christ, to which Christ responds with a still greater affection. Paul is the new man grasped by Christ and made a new creation in Baptism, who in Peter's embrace gives full form to the Church and makes it possible for each of us to encounter Christ today.

All images are taken from the mosaic cycle of the Basilica of Monreale, Sicily

- 01 – Creation of the heavens and the earth
- 02 – Creation of light and darkness
- 03 – Creation of the waters
- 04 – Separation of the land from the waters
- 05 – Creation of the stars
- 06 – Creation of the animals
- 07 – Creation of Adam
- 08 – Adam led into Eden
- 09 – Creation of Eve
- 10 – Eve presented to Adam
- 11 – God orders Noah to build the ark
- 12 – Building of the ark
- 13 – Entrance of the animals into the ark
- 14 – The deluge
- 15 – Exit of the animals from the ark
- 16 – Covenant of God with Noah
- 17 – Visit of the three angels to Abraham
- 18 – Abraham's hospitality

- 19 – God orders Abraham to sacrifice Isaac
- 20 – The sacrifice of Isaac
- 21 – Meeting of Isaac and Rebecca at the well
- 22 – The journey of Isaac and Rebecca
- 23 – Isaac blesses Jacob
- 24 – Jacob’s dream
- 25 – Jacob’s fight with the angel
- 26 – The Annunciation
- 27 – The Visitation
- 28 – The Nativity
- 29 – The Adoration of the Magi
- 30 – Joseph’s dream
- 31 – The flight into Egypt
- 32 – Presentation in the temple
- 33 – Jesus among the teachers
- 34 – Jesus’ Baptism
- 35 – Healing of the leper
- 36 – Healing of the withered hand
- 37 – Healing of the woman with the hemorrhage
- 38 – Healing of Peter’s mother-in-law
- 39 – Healing of the stooped woman
- 40 – Healing of the man with dropsy
- 41 – Healing of the ten lepers
- 42 – Healing of the two blind men
- 43 – Healing of the paralytic
- 44 – Healing of the blind and lame
- 45 – Healing of a paralytic
- 46 – Christ and the Samaritan woman
- 47 – Multiplication of the loaves and fishes
- 48 – Raising of the son of the widow of Nain
- 49 – Raising of the daughter of Jairus
- 50 – Raising of Lazarus
- 51 – The Transfiguration
- 52 – Mary Magdalene washes the feet of Christ
- 53 – The Last Supper
- 54 – Jesus before Pilate
- 55 – The Crucifixion
- 56 – The descent into the netherworld
- 57 – The women at the tomb
- 58 – *Noli me tangere* [“Do not cling to me”]

- 59 – Meeting the disciples on the way to Emmaus
- 60 – The supper at Emmaus
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