

EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

**"I HAVE LOVED YOU  
WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE.  
I HAVE HAD PITY  
ON YOUR NOTHINGNESS"**



RIMINI 2016



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*“On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini, entitled ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness,’ (Jer 31:3) His Holiness Pope Francis, in sending you his cordial greetings, desires to remind you that the Jubilee of Mercy is a propitious occasion for rediscovering the beauty of the faith that places at its center the loving mercy of the Father made visible in the face of Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who guides the steps of believers through the vicissitudes of history.*

*Mercy is the way that unites God and man, opening the heart to the hope of being loved forever, notwithstanding the limit imposed by our sin. The Holy Father confidently hopes that all those who follow the charism of the late lamented Monsignor Luigi Giussani may bear witness to this mercy, professing it and incarnating it in their lives through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and that they may be signs of God’s closeness and tenderness, so that modern society may also discover the urgency of solidarity, love and forgiveness.*

*He invokes the celestial protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, as he asks for your prayer to support him in the ministry of Peter, imparts a heartfelt apostolic blessing upon you and all the participants, extending it to all those following by satellite link-up and to the entire Fraternity.”*

**Cardinal Pietro Parolin**, Secretary of State of His Holiness,  
April 29, 2016

# Friday, April 29, evening

*During entrance and exit:*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Requiem in D minor, KV 626*

*Herbert von Karajan – Wiener Philharmoniker*

*“Spirto Gentil” n. 5, Deutsche Grammophon*

## ■ INTRODUCTION

**Julián Carrón**

No act of our conscious life is true if it does not start out from the awareness that we are sinners. “We are here because we acknowledge first of all this truth: that we are sinners. If you feel virtuous, this is not the place you should have come to: it would be entirely useless,” Fr. Giussani used to tell us, because “the awareness of being sinners is the first truth of the person who acts in life and in history.”<sup>1</sup> Sinners, that is, needy. From this need arises the cry, the entreaty, like the one we have just listened to in Mozart’s *Requiem*, “Salva me, fons pietatis.”<sup>2</sup> As the publican said, standing off in the distance, “O God, be merciful to me a sinner.”<sup>3</sup>

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to grant us the awareness of this need for His mercy.

*Come Holy Spirit*

Let’s begin these days by reading the message Pope Francis has sent us:

“On the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises for the members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation held in Rimini, entitled ‘I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness,’ (*Jer* 31:3) His Holiness Pope Francis, in sending you his cordial greetings, desires to remind you that the Jubilee of Mercy is a propitious occasion for rediscovering the beauty of the faith that places at its center the loving mercy of the Father made visible in the

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<sup>1</sup> “Questa cara gioia sopra la quale ogni virtù si fonda” [This Dear Joy Upon Which Every Virtue Is Founded], Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Notes from the meditation [by Luigi Giussani], Rimini 1993, supplement to *Litterae communionis-CL*, n. 6, 1993, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> W.A. Mozart, *Requiem in D minor*, KV 626, III. Sequentia, n. 3 Rex Tremendae, CD “Spirto Gentil” n. 5.

<sup>3</sup> *Lk* 18:13.

face of Christ and sustained by the Holy Spirit, who guides the steps of believers through the vicissitudes of history. Mercy is the way that unites God and man, opening the heart to the hope of being loved forever, notwithstanding the limit imposed by our sin. The Holy Father confidently hopes that all those who follow the charism of the late, lamented Monsignor Luigi Giussani may bear witness to this mercy, professing it and incarnating it in their lives through the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, and that they may be signs of God's closeness and tenderness, so that modern society may also discover the urgency of solidarity, love and forgiveness. He invokes the celestial protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary and, as he asks for your prayers to support him in the ministry of Peter, imparts a heartfelt apostolic blessing upon you and all the participants, extending it to all those following by satellite link-up and to the entire Fraternity. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

“So the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, ‘It is the Lord!’ When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he tucked in his garment, for he was lightly clad, and jumped into the sea.” There with Him, “none of the disciples dared to ask Him, ‘Who are you?’, because they realized it was the Lord.”<sup>4</sup>

“While He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, but He vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’”<sup>5</sup>

The stories of the apparitions of the risen Christ consistently report the amazement of the disciples at seeing Him alive in front of them. His living Presence dominates, determining their existence and actions.

It is moving to see how Jesus bends over their need and bewilderment caused by His passion and death—He responds to the disciples’ fear, tears, solitude, doubts, and longing with His Presence. What is the source of this urgent need of theirs? After all they had seen and experienced for years, why is their need so strong? They feel this way because the entire story they had lived with Jesus, the three years spent with Him, the events they had seen, the words they had heard, are not sufficient to meet their present need.

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<sup>4</sup> *Jn* 21:7–12.

<sup>5</sup> *Lk* 24:30–32.

The memory of the past, no matter how fascinating, is not enough for facing the present hour. In fact, the disciples of Emmaus said to one another, “We were hoping that He would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.”<sup>6</sup> All the signs they had seen, the time they shared with Him, eating and drinking with Him, could not overcome the bafflement, fear, and solitude. The tears of Mary Magdalene will document this forever. Only His living Presence could constitute a response that adequately met their need. And so the very nature of Christianity is revealed to the disciples through their experience. Christianity is not a doctrine, a system of ethics, or a feeling, but the fact of a present Presence that dominates the gaze of those who perceive it, a Presence whose one concern is to show Himself, to invade the life of His friends and make them experience a life without fear, without sadness, even though He is not with them as He was before dying.

That living Presence is what they have in common. That Presence constitutes the one true foundation of their communion. And precisely this experience makes them more aware that they are different.

## **1. The style of God**

God’s way of acting, this revelation of Himself to them after the resurrection, that rendered them so different from all others, makes even more pressing the question that Saint Jude Thaddeus asked Him during the Last Supper, “Master, (then) what happened that You will reveal Yourself to us and not to the world?”<sup>7</sup> Taking up this question in his book on Jesus, Benedict XVI adds, “Why, indeed, did you not forcefully resist your enemies who brought You to the cross? [...] Why did You not show them with incontrovertible power that you are the Living One, the Lord of life and death? Why did You reveal yourself only to a small flock of disciples, upon whose testimony we must now rely? The question applies not only to the Resurrection, but to the whole manner of God’s revelation in the world. Why only to Abraham and not to the mighty of the world? Why only to Israel and not irrefutably to all the peoples of the earth?”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Lk* 24:21.

<sup>7</sup> *Jn* 14:22.

<sup>8</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week. From the Entrance in Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2011, p. 276.



And here is his response: “It is part of the mystery of God that He acts so gently, that He only gradually builds up *His* history within the great history of mankind; that He becomes man and so can be overlooked by His contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that He suffers and dies, and, having risen again, He chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom He reveals himself; that He continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to Him,”<sup>9</sup> and, thus, enables us to understand.

At this point Benedict XVI observes, “And yet—is not this the truly divine way? Not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love. And if we really think about it, is it not what seems so small that is truly great? Does not a ray of light issue from Jesus, growing brighter across the centuries, that could not come from any mere man and through which the light of God truly shines into the world? Could the apostolic preaching have found faith and built up a worldwide community unless the power of truth [the power from on high] had been at work within it? If we attend to the witnesses with listening hearts and open ourselves to the signs by which the Lord again and again authenticates both them and himself, then we know that He is truly risen. He is alive. Let us entrust ourselves to Him, knowing that we are on the right path. With Thomas let us place our hands into Jesus’ pierced side and confess: ‘My Lord and my God!’” (*Jn* 20:28)<sup>10</sup> This turns our world upside down now, as it did then.

The point of departure of the disciples was this ineradicable fact. Their consciousness was defined by the manifestation of Christ, by the living encounter with the Living One. But this fact awakened the question in them: why did You choose *us*? This question threw them open to the awareness of the method of God—choosing some (by election, preference) to reach all—and to His gentle style of acting. The divine style is not to intervene by means of external power, but to elicit freedom without forcing Himself in any way. Péguy reminds us of this in a marvelous way, “To that liberty, [...] I have sacrificed everything, God says, to that taste I have for being loved by free men, freely.”<sup>11</sup>

This method of God—the awareness of this method—is particularly important in this moment, because “today we are not living an epoch of

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 276-77.

<sup>11</sup> Charles Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents, and Other Poems*, Harvill Press, Glasgow, 1956, p. 121.

change so much as an epochal change.”<sup>12</sup> In recent years we have often returned to this theme of change. The new situation, characterized by the collapse of so many ancient sureties, provokes in us, as it did in His disciples, bewilderment, fear, and doubts about how to face them.

In a recent and stunning interview, Benedict XVI identified the key of this epochal change, the crucial dimension. “For the man of today, compared to those of the time of Luther and to those holding the classical perspective of the Christian faith [dominated by the concern for eternal salvation], things are in a certain sense inverted [...]. It is no longer man who believes he needs justification before God, but rather he is of the opinion that God is obliged to justify Himself [to man] because of all the horrible things in the world and in the face of the misery of being human, all of which ultimately depend on Him.”<sup>13</sup>

This turns the burden of proof on its head. Now God is the one who must in some way justify Himself, and no longer women and men who must do so. This is the situation in which we live, the “underlying trend of our times.”<sup>14</sup> In a certain sense, God is the one who must justify Himself to us, and not vice versa. Paradoxically, God is the one who must show He measures up to the human person, to our request, our cry. “Things are in a certain sense inverted.” God is the one who must demonstrate that He is for the human person, that He is indispensable for living.

It is amazing how Fr. Giussani grasped the signs and the import of this epochal change long ago, and made this inversion the cornerstone of his method. It is as if God, God-made-man, and His Presence in history, the Church, had to justify Himself to women and men or, in more familiar words, it is as if God, the Church, “had to appear at the tribunal where you are the judge through your experience.”<sup>15</sup>

This inversion characterized the beginning of our movement. Unlike many others, already back in the 1950s, Fr. Giussani realized that

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<sup>12</sup> Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, November 10, 2015.

<sup>13</sup> “Interview with His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in Italian in *Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali* [Through Faith: Doctrine of Justification and Experience of God in the Preaching of the Church and the Spiritual Exercises], ed. Daniele Libanori, SJ, Cinisello Balsamo-Mi, San Paolo, 2016, p. 127. See also *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Avvenire*, March 16, 2016. Available in English translation online at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Luigi Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* [The “I” Is Reborn in an Encounter], Bur, Milan, 2010, p. 300.

although Christianity was everyone's traditional background, it no longer had a hold on the young people with whom he dealt in Milan and at high school. It was clear to him that God-made-man, Christ, once again had to justify Himself to those young people who wanted nothing to do with God, but rather held that they needed to free themselves of Him. Therefore, Christianity had to be proposed anew according to its nature—an event that bowls over life now and changes it.

Without wanting to impose anything external, from the first day of school Fr. Giussani submitted himself to the tribunal of his students, entrusting his proposal to their judgement. "I'm not here so that you can take my ideas as your own. I'm here to teach you a true method that you can use to judge the things I will tell you."<sup>16</sup>

The characteristic element of this method is the announcement of Christianity as an event that proposes itself to the verification of our experience. Therefore, since the beginning, as documented in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani has made his young interlocutors aware that they have within themselves the criterion for judging the proposal he will make to them—the heart.

In the third volume of the PerCorso (*Why the Church?*) Giussani re-affirms that the proposal of Christ, which reaches people today through the Church, "wishes to measure up" to this criterion of judgement, "placing itself at the mercy of authentic human experience. It leaves its message to the actualization of our heart's original criteria. It does not require certain conditions to be mechanically respected. Rather, it entrusts itself to the judgment of our experience, and indeed, it constantly urges that experience walk its path in completeness. [...] The Church repeats with Jesus that it can be recognized as credible because of its correspondence to man's elementary needs in their most authentic flourishing. This is what Jesus meant by the expression we have already cited, by that promise to His disciples of a 'hundredfold' on this earth." Fr. Giussani continues, "It is as if the Church is also telling man: 'With me, an experience of fullness of life that you will not find elsewhere will be yours.' It is on the razor-edge of this promise that the Church puts itself to the test, proposing itself to all men as the prolongation of Christ."<sup>17</sup>

So then, what is God's justification of Himself to the human person, to us? The justification of God is called "correspondence," an

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<sup>16</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2001, p. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Why The Church?*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2001, pp. 205-06.

otherwise impossible correspondence to the profound and ineradicable needs of the heart of the human person, of every person, of real people, those needs that persecute us, in spite of ourselves, through an incurable restlessness after any achievement. God justifies Himself to women and men through the “better,” the flourishing that He generates in life, through the fullness of humanity that He introduces into existence and that we cannot obtain by our own strength alone.

So then, as Fr. Giussani insists, the Church does not cheat, because “everything she says and does is totally open to anyone’s verification. Her formula is: test me, test me! She totally abandons her proposal to the content of your experience: you are the one to judge.” And he adds, “You can’t get any more open than this! [...] The Church does not cheat, in the sense that she does not impose anything that you, if you are not persuaded, are forced to observe anyway.”<sup>18</sup>

## 2. “Sign of the times”

So then, how can the Church justify herself to us and to all people? It is necessary to identify the question well, as Fr. Giussani often repeated, quoting Niebuhr, “Nothing is so incredible as the answer to a question that is not asked.”<sup>19</sup> It is necessary to grasp what the problem of today is, so that each of us may perceive the answer as credible.

What is the question today, the question of women and men today? Pope Benedict XVI, in the interview quoted earlier, identified it as “the perception that we are in need of grace and forgiveness.”<sup>20</sup> Consequently, the Church will be able to justify herself to the people of today if she responds to this need for grace and forgiveness.

This is the reason Benedict XVI states, “For me it is a ‘sign of the times’ the fact that the idea of the mercy of God should become more and more central and dominant.” He also notes that, “Pope John Paul II was deeply impregnated by this impulse. [...] Starting from the experiences which,

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<sup>18</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Una presenza che cambia [A Presence That Changes]*, Bur, Milan, 2004, p. 294.

<sup>19</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man. A Christian Interpretation*, II, London/NY, 1943 (1964), pp. 6-7.

<sup>20</sup> “Interview with His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in Italian in *Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali [Through Faith: Doctrine of Justification and Experience of God in the Preaching of the Church and the Spiritual Exercises]*, ed. Daniele Libanori, p. 128. Available in English translation online at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

from the earliest years of life, exposed him to all of the cruel acts men can perform, he affirms that mercy is the only true and ultimate effective reaction against the power of evil. Only where there is mercy does cruelty end, only with mercy do evil and violence end.”<sup>21</sup> John Paul II did nothing other than propose mercy as the one true response to evil and violence. Benedict continues: “Pope Francis is totally in agreement with this line. His pastoral practice is expressed in the fact that he continually speaks to us of God’s mercy. It is mercy that moves us toward God [mercy is what attracts us], while justice frightens us [...],” and states further, “In my view, this makes clear that, under a veneer of self-assuredness and self-righteousness, the man of today hides a deep knowledge of his wounds and his unworthiness before God. He is waiting for mercy. It is certainly no coincidence that the parable of the Good Samaritan is particularly attractive to contemporary man. And not just because that parable strongly emphasizes the social dimension of Christian existence,” but also because, Benedict observes, it speaks of how “men in their intimate consciences expect the Samaritan will come to their aid; that he will bend down over them, pour oil on their wounds, care for them and take them to safety. In the final analysis, they know that they need God’s mercy and his tenderness. In the hardness of the technologized world in which feelings no longer count for anything, the expectation however increases of a saving love that is freely given. It seems to me that in the theme of divine mercy is expressed in a new way what is meant by justification by faith. Starting from the mercy of God, which everyone is looking for, it is possible even today to interpret anew the fundamental nucleus of the doctrine of justification and have it appear again in all its relevance.”<sup>22</sup>

Benedict XVI’s words have been embraced fully by his successor. Grasping deeply this need that we all have for the mercy of God, the genius of Pope Francis was to declare a Holy Year of Mercy. The Pope (and his predecessors John Paul II and Benedict XVI, as we have just seen) feels a profound sensitivity toward modern women and men, an understanding of their condition, a heart-thawing compassion for their restlessness and their wounds, that often surprises us and knocks us off balance, inside and outside the Church, because it breaks with the usual measurements and the consolidated frameworks, on one side and on the other.

When an interviewer asked, “*Why, in your opinion, is humanity so in need of mercy?*” Pope Francis responded, “Because humanity is wounded, deeply wounded. Either it does not know how to cure its wounds, or it believes it’s

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 128-29.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

not possible to cure them.” Today, there is also the burden of “considering our illness, our sins, to be incurable, things that cannot be healed or forgiven. We lack the actual concrete experience of mercy. This is also the fragility of the time we live in—believing that there is no chance of redemption, a hand to raise you up, an embrace to save you, forgive you, pick you up, flood you with infinite, patient, indulgent love; to put you back on your feet.”<sup>23</sup> One sees in this Pope an understanding of the problem and of the road, what the wounds are, and what can heal them, how they can be healed.

Contemporary people need “the concrete experience of mercy.” In front of the confusion of thought, which also wounds many people, the Pope knows that ontology—that is, the truth of the human being, the clear awareness of it—cannot be recovered simply with a correct discourse about the human person or with a repetition of the content of moral doctrine. This will happen only through the experience of mercy, which can open a person to understanding the doctrine as well.

Therefore, to respond to the deep wounds of contemporary man, the Pope has not organized a conference on mercy. He has not limited himself to proposing a reflection on the theme, but has promoted a gesture that first of all allows us to experience mercy during a full year, accompanying us with his continual guidance to help us live it.

In order to intervene in a real way in humanity’s toil, to respond to concrete women and men in all their fragility, the Church—and therefore each of us—first of all needs to experience the embrace of God’s mercy, in order to be able to communicate it to all our sisters and brothers we meet along the way.

This is the goal of the Jubilee of Mercy, in continuity with the “gentle” method of God: to reach everyone through His own companionship of those He chooses and who acknowledge Him, that is, through the Church. In proposing the Jubilee of the Church, the Holy Father shows that he does not succumb to the error of taking for granted the subject who must testify to mercy and the “place” where this subject is generated.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy*, transl. Oonagh Stransky, Bluebird Pan Macmillan, London, 2016, pp. 13-14.

<sup>24</sup> “Faith, in fact, needs a setting in which it can be witnessed to and communicated, a means which is suitable and proportionate to what is communicated. For transmitting a purely doctrinal content, an idea might suffice, or perhaps a book, or the repetition of a spoken message. But what is communicated in the Church, what is handed down in her living Tradition, is the new light born of an encounter with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion.” (Francis, Encyclical letter *Lumen fidei*, p. 40).

This awareness of the goal and the method is seen at work in the very fact that he asks the question, “*Why have a Jubilee of Mercy? What does this mean?*” and in the way he answers. “The Church”—that is, each of us—“is in need of this extraordinary occasion. I am not saying this extraordinary occasion is good for the Church. I am saying the Church needs this extraordinary occasion. [...] In this era of profound changes, the Church is called to offer her particular contribution, rendering visible the signs of the presence and closeness of God. The Jubilee is a favorable time for all of us, because by contemplating Divine Mercy, which overcomes all human limitations [...] we are able to become more certain and effective witnesses.”<sup>25</sup> The goal is to testify. The method is contemplation, in other words, immersion in the experience of mercy, because the Christian people is the first to be in need: we are in need, each of us.

So, in the final analysis, what does all this mean for us? “Turning our gaze to God, merciful Father, and to our brothers and sisters in need of mercy, means focusing our attention on the *essential contents of the Gospel*, Jesus, Mercy made flesh, who renders the great mystery of the Trinitarian Love of God visible to our eyes.” Therefore, “celebrating a Jubilee of Mercy is equivalent to placing once again the specific nature of the Christian faith, namely Jesus Christ, the merciful God, at the center of our personal life and that of our communities.”<sup>26</sup> In this way, the Pope insists in the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee, “Jesus Christ is the face of the Father’s mercy. These words might well sum up the mystery of the Christian faith. Mercy has become living and visible in Jesus of Nazareth, reaching its culmination in Him.”<sup>27</sup> It is a Holy Year, then, “so as to *live mercy*. Yes, dear brothers and sisters, this Holy Year is offered to us so that we may experience in our lives the sweet and gratifying touch of God’s forgiveness, His presence beside us and His closeness especially in the moments of great need.”<sup>28</sup> It is Jesus, risen, who bends over our wounds today.

“This Jubilee, in other words, is a privileged moment for the Church to learn to choose only ‘*what pleases God most*.’” What is it that “*pleases God most*”? Pope Francis asks himself. “Forgiving His children, having mercy on them, so that they may in turn forgive their brothers and

<sup>25</sup> Francis, *General Audience*, December 9, 2015.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus. Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy*, April 11, 2015, ¶ 1.

<sup>28</sup> Francis, *General Audience*, December 9, 2015.

sisters, shining as a flame of God's mercy in the world. [...] The Jubilee will be a 'favorable time' for the Church if we learn to choose '*what pleases God most*,' without giving in to the temptation of thinking that something else is more important or primary. Nothing is more important than choosing '*what pleases God most*,' in other words, His mercy, His love, His tenderness, His embrace and His caresses!"<sup>29</sup>

And anticipating a possible objection, as if reading our thoughts, Pope Francis adds, "Of course, someone could object: 'Father, shouldn't the Church do something more this Year? It is right to contemplate the mercy of God, but there are so many urgent needs!' It is true, there is much to do, and I for one never tire of remembering this. However, we must bear in mind that whenever mercy is forgotten, *self-love* is at the root. In the world, this takes the form of exclusively seeking one's own interests, pleasures and honors joined with the desire to accumulate wealth, whereas in the life of a Christian it is often disguised in hypocrisy and worldliness. All of these things are contrary to mercy. Surges of self-love, which make mercy a stranger in the world, are so abundant and numerous that we are often unable to recognize them as limitation and as sin. This is why it is necessary to recognize ourselves as sinners, so as to strengthen within us the certainty of divine mercy. 'Lord, I am a sinful man; Lord, I am a sinful woman: come with your mercy.' It is a beautiful prayer. It is an easy prayer to say every day: 'Lord, I am a sinner: come with your mercy.'" <sup>30</sup>

### **3. "I have awaited you day and night"**

Each of us now has the opportunity to compare ourselves against these authoritative words of Pope Francis, which coincide with those of John Paul II and Benedict XVI. "Whenever mercy is forgotten, *self-love* is at the root." Other interests dominate. Prophets always shift us from our position. Our hope lies in our willingness to be shifted.

Re-reading these texts, I could not help but think of how Fr. Giussani, in the particularly challenging situation of the early stages of the stu-

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<sup>29</sup> "The necessary work of renewing the institutions and structures of the Church is also a way that should lead us to make a living and vivifying experience of God's mercy, which alone can guarantee that the Church is that city set on a hill that cannot be hid (cf. *Mt* 5:14). Only a merciful Church shines! Should we forget, for even just a moment, that mercy is '*what pleases God most*,' our every effort would be in vain, for we would become slaves to our institutions and our structures, inasmuch as they may be renewed. But we would always be slaves." *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*



dent protests of 1968, just after the occupation of Catholic University (in which many protesters were members of GS), identified the essence of the question as lying in the fact that we did not await the Lord “day and night.” We had other interests and more important things to do than “to await Him day and night.” In reference to that situation, Fr. Giussani stated in no uncertain terms, “We so easily lacked the intelligence of the situation and of things to do [...] because we do not await Him day and night.” Why did he say this? What does it mean that we did not await Him? It means that we awaited something else, that something else was more important than this, that our center was not Christ. “So, to my mind, if we had awaited Him day and night, the attitude of our students in their life at Catholic University would have been different; it was so generous, but how true was it?” In fact, for Fr. Giussani, “The truth of the gesture is not born of political cunning,” but from “awaiting Him day and night, otherwise our discourse will be confused with that of the others and will become an instrument of the discourse of the others. We can do our things and without realizing it, take on everyone else’s paradigm, the paradigm offered by everyone else. Our discourse and actions must be distinguished by our awaiting Him day and night.”<sup>31</sup>

It is not a matter of coherence or having everything clear already, because you can “await Him day and night” even in the approximation of all your attempts, even discounting your own smallness. It is a question of desire, of expectant awaiting. In fact, a person always awaits, desires, affirms something as the “ultimate” in every moment, “for by the very fact that he lives five minutes he affirms the existence of a ‘something’ which deep down makes living those five minutes worthwhile.”<sup>32</sup> If we are not awaiting Christ, if our desire is not for Him, then obviously, it is for something else. But this means that we expect a change of things, of the situation, be it personal or social, from this something else, not from Christ and the living encounter with Him, the communion with Him, the building of His Presence in the world. The problem is not the immaturity of our attempts, but whether the desire and expectant awaiting for His Presence are the origin of our action.

“Maybe [Fr. Giussani said on that same occasion, in November 1967] you do not articulate it explicitly, but your desire is for something else

<sup>31</sup> ASAEMD, Audiovisual documentation, *Advent Retreat of the Memores Domini*, Milan, November 19, 1967, in Alberto Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani*, Bur, Milan, 2013, pp. 391-92.

<sup>32</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 1997, p. 57.

more than this. This [desire] is not a principle—pay attention here. You cannot affirm it just as a principle once. It must be a principle reclaimed every day. It must be a mental *habitus*. It must be a mentality. It must underlie everything, the just and the unjust, merit and error, day and night. ‘I have awaited You day and night.’ In this sense, think, please, how the origin of everything—whether it be a possible defection or the lack of this expectant awaiting, or the fact that this desire does not create a mental *habitus*, a mentality—how everything depends on the fact that you stop up your ears in response to what is prophesied to us. God sends prophets to call us to Himself. Vocation always happens through prophecy, through the voice of a prophet, always. Do you understand how not listening to our communion is at the root? Our communion is how the desire, the ‘Come’ we spoke of before is concretized, without being trivialized. The group is the prophecy, the place where you are called back to God. Here is the bitter, rotten root. Strangely enough, we can take an equivocal position concerning our communion as well, because valorizing the group is not a sentimental valorization. It is not a valorization based on mutual affinity or time spent together, but one based on the discourse,”<sup>33</sup> that is, based on a judgment.

Fr. Giussani did nothing other than constantly remind us of and call us to this expectant awaiting for Him day and night, which is essential for living. How many times, in front of the continual failure of each of us, the betrayal, did he remind and call us, without being scandalized? “To understand what betrayal is, my friends, we have to think of our own distraction, because it is a betrayal to spend days, weeks, months... what about last night, when did we think of Him? When did we seriously think of Him, with our heart, in this last month, in the last three months, from October until now? Never. We haven’t thought of Him as John and Andrew thought of Him while they watched Him speak. If we asked a lot of questions about Him, it was out of curiosity, analysis, the need for analysis, for research, for clarification, for clarification. But we need to think the way one who is really in love thinks about his beloved (even in this case it happens extremely rarely because everything is calculated to get something in return!); solely in a way that is absolutely totally detached—a sole desire for the good.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> ASAEMD, Audiovisual documentation, *Advent Retreat of the Memores Domini*, Milan, November 19, 1967, in Savorana, *Vita di don Giussani*, pp. 391-92.

<sup>34</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Is It Possible To Live This Way? An Unusual Approach to the Christian Experience*, Vol. 3: *Charity*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 2009, p. 11.

How rarely do we think of Him as a present Presence, as One beloved! Just compare our experience with that of the disciples in the days after Easter, after they had seen Him risen: what dominated their thought? What prevailed in their gaze? They were all seized by a Presence that took away their fear and sadness. Someone wrote me, “I just happened to read this simple letter from Emily Dickenson to a friend. I was struck because it seemed to describe very succinctly the longing for Christ: ‘*Morning without you is a dwindled Dawn.*’” Within all the confusion, only affection for Him changes life, and without Him life has less gusto—a *dwindled Dawn*.<sup>35</sup>

At the first Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in 1982, looking at the faces of the many people present, thinking of the freshness of the encounter that had won them over and brought them to that point, Giussani said, “Who knows if we are still stirred, as we were stirred at Varigotti,” that is, at the beginning of GS. And he continued, “You have grown up, and while you have secured a human ability in your professions, there is the possibility of drifting away from Christ (in contrast with the emotion of all those years ago and, above all, certain circumstances of all those years ago). [...] It is as if Christ were far from our heart.”<sup>36</sup>

And what about us? Do we feel the urgent need to be forgiven and embraced again for all our falls, our distraction, the complicit forgetfulness that invades our days, for our betrayal, our wretchedness? What dominates our life—our thought and our gaze—in this period of confusion and bewilderment? Do we feel the need for His mercy? Saint Bernard expressed it well with this line, “Man begins his truth in the acknowledgement of his own wretchedness.”<sup>37</sup>

But recognition of our wretchedness is not enough: it marks the beginning of the truth about ourselves, but it is not enough. In fact, we often realize how insufficient it is. We need someone who brings forth our need to be forgiven.

This is what the Year of Mercy calls us to. It is an opportunity to make us aware of how much we need Him to bend over our distraction, our wounds, to attract us again, like His disciples after the devastation of His passion and death. It is as if we needed what Dostoyevsky

<sup>35</sup> Cf. “April 1885, (L 981),” in *The Letters of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1958.

<sup>36</sup> Luigi Giussani, “Familiarity with Christ,” in *Traces*, n. 2, February 2007, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> “*Primum veritatis gradus est, primum seipsum attendere, seu propriam miseriam agnoscere.*” (Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae*, PL 182, col. 948).

described: “But do you want to punish him fearfully, terribly, with the most awful punishment that could be imagined, and at the same time to save him and regenerate his soul? If so, overwhelm him with your mercy! You will see, you will hear how he will tremble and be horror-struck. ‘How can I endure this mercy? How can I endure so much love? Am I worthy of it?’”<sup>38</sup> This is what God does with us. He “overwhelms” us for a year with His mercy, so that we will come to the end of the year more certain of this mercy and thus better able to bear witness to Him.

We must become, as Pope Francis says, “ever more convinced of God’s mercy.” This is why it is in our best interest to listen to the voice of the Pope, the prophet God has given us to guide His people in this time of upheavals. “This Extraordinary Year is itself a gift of grace. To pass through the Holy Door means to rediscover the infinite mercy of the Father who welcomes everyone and goes out personally to encounter each of them. It is He who seeks us! It is He who comes to encounter us! This will be a year in which we *grow ever more convinced of God’s mercy*. How much wrong we do to God and His grace when we speak of sins being punished by His judgment before we speak of their being forgiven by His mercy (cf. Saint Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*, 12, 24)! But that is the truth. We have to put mercy before judgment, and in any event God’s judgment will always be in the light of His mercy. In passing through the Holy Door, then, may we feel that *we ourselves are part of this mystery of love, of tenderness*. Let us set aside all fear and dread, for these do not befit men and women who are loved. Instead, let us experience *the joy of encountering that grace which transforms all things*.”<sup>39</sup>

We must become ever more certain that mercy is the one true response to the situation of the human person today, to the violence, the wounds, the toil, and contradictions we find ourselves facing.

The Pope emphasizes the urgent need for mercy in this way: “A Holy Year to experience strongly within ourselves the joy of having been found by Jesus, the Good Shepherd who has come in search of us because we were lost.”<sup>40</sup> He explains that this “is the objective that the Church establishes for herself in this Holy Year. In this way we will

<sup>38</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, transl. Constance Garnett, The Lowell Press, New York, p. 846.

<sup>39</sup> Francis, *Homily, Holy Mass and Opening of the Holy Door*, December 8, 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Francis, *Homily, Celebration of the First Vespers of the Second Sunday of Easter or Divine Mercy Sunday*, April 11, 2015.

strengthen in ourselves the certainty that mercy can truly help build a more human world. Especially in our time, in which forgiveness is a rare guest in the spheres of human life, the call to mercy is made more urgent, and this is so in every place: in society, in institutions, at work and even in the family.”<sup>41</sup>

Only by reaching this certainty, which enables us to move through all our fear, solitude, and doubt, will we be able to face the enormous challenges of the epochal changes we face with the one effective weapon, testimony—the ultimate goal of the Holy Year. “For this reason I have proclaimed an *Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* [...] a time when the witness of believers might grow stronger and more effective.”<sup>42</sup> This is the mercy Jesus showed to His disciples.

“Is it naïve to believe that this can change the world?” The Pope seems to anticipate our questions! “Yes, humanly speaking, it is foolish, but ‘the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men’ (1 *Cor* 1:25).”<sup>43</sup> Saint Paul’s conviction prompted Pope Francis to tell the bishops of Mexico, “The only power capable of conquering the hearts of men and women is the tenderness of God. That which delights and attracts, that which humbles and overcomes, that which opens and unleashes, is not the power of instruments or the force of law, but rather the omnipotent weakness of divine love, which is the irresistible force of its gentleness and the irrevocable pledge of its mercy.” However, “If our vision does not witness to having seen Jesus, then the words with which we recall Him will be rhetorical and empty figures of speech. They may perhaps express the nostalgia of those who cannot forget the Lord, but who have become, at any rate, mere babbling orphans beside a tomb. Finally, they may be words that are incapable of preventing this world of ours from being abandoned and reduced to its own desperate power.”<sup>44</sup>

In these days, let us allow our hearts to open to this mercy, listening, respecting the silence, so that we may be changed by what we hear and His Presence may dominate in us, as it dominated the life of the disciples after His resurrection. We have come together here to support each other in this.

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<sup>41</sup> Francis, *General Audience*, December 8, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Francis, *Bull of Indiction*, April 11, 2015, ¶ 3.

<sup>43</sup> Francis, *General Audience*, December 9, 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Francis, *Speech at the Meeting with the Bishops of Mexico*, Mexico City, February 13, 2016.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: 1 Jn.1:5–2:2; Psalm 102 (103); Mt 11:25–30*

## HOMILY OF FR. STEFANO ALBERTO

As we entrust ourselves, our loved ones, our dear country, Italy, to its Patroness, to our Patroness, Saint Catherine, let us ask why *one*, a young woman, became the instrument for the unity of the Church, bringing the Pope back to Rome, an instrument of peace in the midst of fratricidal struggles, then as now. Giussani responds with other words, which we have just heard, but the substance is this: “I have awaited you day and night,” I have sought You, O Christ. This is the possibility for each of us in this moment which is objectively one of grace: to remain “educated,” that is full of what we already know, or to ask to return to being children, to return to being little ones in listening and in silence, and above all in enthusiasm, no matter what our history has been, in enthusiasm in front of this invitation: “Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for your selves.”

## *Saturday, April 30, morning*

*During entrance and exit:*

*Franz Schubert, Sonata for arpeggione and piano, D 821*

*Mstislav Rostropovich, cello – Benjamin Briten, piano*

*“Spirto Gentil” n. 18, Decca*

**Fr. Pino.** Watching the angel bring the annunciation to this young woman, watching the “yes” of Mary, we do not evoke a fact of the past, but we enter into the present, into this hour, into the possibility of learning, as was said last night, quoting Pope Francis, “to choose ‘*what pleases God most,*’ not yielding to the temptation of thinking that there is something more important or of a higher priority. Nothing is more important than choosing ‘*what pleases God most,*’ in other words, His mercy, His love, His tenderness, His embrace and His caresses!”

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayer*

■ **FIRST LESSON**

**Julián Carrón**

***“The beat of the heart [of God] is pity on your nothingness”***

“Under a veneer of self-assuredness [...], the man of today hides a deep knowledge of his wounds,”<sup>45</sup> but each of us is waiting for mercy. This explains the urgent need to immerse ourselves in the history of this mercy, the only thing that enables us to look at our wounds, to embrace ourselves. Looking at this history again is not just a matter of remembering the past—it means entering ever more deeply into the knowledge of that Presence without which it would be impossible to look at our life.

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<sup>45</sup> “Interview with His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in Italian in *Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali [Through Faith: Doctrine of Justification and Experience of God in the Preaching of the Church and the Spiritual Exercises]*, ed. Daniele Libanori, p. 129 (see note 13). Available in English translation online at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

## 1. The mercy of God

“It was not by dialectic that it pleased God to save His people; for the kingdom of God consists in simplicity of faith, not in wordy contention,”<sup>46</sup> said Saint Ambrose. Dialectics do not heal our wounds. God, who created us, knows this well. In fact, the beginning of the salvation worked by God is a gesture of pity. The point of departure is a surge of moved emotion, of love, of compassion. God enters into history because He has pity on His people.

“But the Lord said [to Moses], ‘I have witnessed the affliction of My people in Egypt and have heard their cry of complaint against their slave drivers, so I know well what they are suffering. [...] So indeed the cry of the Israelites has reached Me, and I have truly noted that the Egyptians are oppressing them. Come, now! I will send you to Pharaoh to lead my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.’ But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of Egypt?’ He answered, ‘I will be with you; and this shall be your proof that it is I who have sent you: when you bring my people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this very mountain.’”<sup>47</sup>

This is “the basic experience of the chosen people at the Exodus,” John Paul II wrote in *Dives in misericordia*. “The Lord saw the affliction of His people reduced to slavery, heard their cry, knew their sufferings and decided to deliver them (Cf. *Ex* 3:7). In this act of salvation by the Lord, the prophet perceived His love and compassion (Cf. *Is* 63:9). This is precisely the grounds upon which the people and each of its members based their certainty of the mercy of God, which can be invoked whenever tragedy strikes.”<sup>48</sup>

I encourage you not to skim over any of these expressions, because without this mercy there is no safety, no real foothold; such is our fragility. As our days attest, after an instant, a moment of euphoria, everything collapses in us. So then, it is crucial for us to observe the vicissitudes of the people of Israel and consider the trajectory of its history. It is not a simple ornament of life. In the Bible stories we see the people of Israel live in the memory of what shaped and formed its history.

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<sup>46</sup> Saint Ambrose, *De Fide* I, 42: “*Sed non in dialectica conplacuit deo saluum facere populum suum*,” transl. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H.T.F. Duckworth, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 10, eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Christian Literature Publishing Co., Buffalo, NY, 1896, revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3404.htm>>.

<sup>47</sup> *Ex* 3:7–12.

<sup>48</sup> John Paul II, *Encyclical letter Dives in Misericordia*, p. 4.



The people of Israel lives the memory of God's act of liberation and salvation, as the words of the prophet Isaiah show, "The favors of the Lord I will recall, the glorious deeds of the Lord, because of all He has done for us, for He is good to the house of Israel, He has favored us according to His mercy and His great kindness,"<sup>49</sup> that is, according to the boundless greatness of His grace.

What is the origin of this action of God? "Your surge of pity and Your mercy,"<sup>50</sup> Isaiah goes on to say. God, in the depths of His being, is this surge of pity for our destiny. The gesture of God is not a momentary reaction to the wretchedness of His people. His initiative is part of a history of preference described by the word "Covenant." For this reason, He could not remain indifferent to the cry of the Israelites. "And now that I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are treating as slaves, I am mindful of My covenant."<sup>51</sup>

The Covenant He had established with Abraham contained a promise: "Therefore, if you hearken to My voice and keep My covenant," which is the bond established with the Hebrew people, "you shall be My special possession," that is, a unique preference, "dearer to Me than all other people, though all the earth is Mine."<sup>52</sup>

Given the signs of this unheard-of preference, what response would be expected from those who received and experienced it? "To live your life," Fr. Giussani says, "attentive to the leadings of God."<sup>53</sup> This is expressed clearly by the first commandment of the Decalogue, which is not primarily a duty to carry out, but an invitation intended to evoke adhesion. The first commandment acquires all its light in the event of the liberation and salvation that God achieved for His people. After God led them out of Egypt with His powerful arm, in the midst of stupendous signs, what would have been more intelligent for the people of Israel to do than respond by acknowledging Him? "I, the Lord, am your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt, that place of slavery. You shall not have other gods besides Me."<sup>54</sup> What could have been more reasonable than to return His love? "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with

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<sup>49</sup> *Is* 63:7.

<sup>50</sup> *Is* 63:15.

<sup>51</sup> *Ex* 6:5.

<sup>52</sup> *Ex* 19:5.

<sup>53</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Bur, Milano, 2007 p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> *Ex* 20:2-3.

all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength. Take to heart these words which I enjoin on you today. Drill them into your children. Speak of them at home and abroad, whether you are busy or at rest.” What could be more important for you to do? “Bind them at your wrist as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.”<sup>55</sup>

Memory is the condition of the new life that flows from this event of liberation. This is what we need: to immerse ourselves in this memory, which is not the simple recollection of a past event. In fact, liberation happened in the past, but the One who revealed Himself in the past is *the* Lord, who remains forever.

However, almost immediately the people, the object of a preference unlike that shown to any other, revealed its true nature. We need to look this square in the face. “I see how stiff-necked this people is,”<sup>56</sup> the Lord said to Moses, for “they have soon turned aside from the way I pointed out to them, making for themselves a molten calf and worshipping it, sacrificing to it and crying out, ‘This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!’”<sup>57</sup> substituting the living God with a particular God. Here is a brilliant description of the dynamic of the idol: the calf is identified with God, and the people prostrate themselves before it and offer it sacrifices, saying, “This is your God, O Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

It is moving to read of God’s bewildered reaction to the people’s attitude. “Thus says the Lord: what fault did your fathers find in Me that they withdrew from Me, went after empty idols, and became empty themselves?”<sup>58</sup> It is as if God in some way wanted to justify Himself to the people who had betrayed the Covenant.

In the face of this betrayal, God could have given up on Israel, abandoning it to its nothingness, its caprices, as understood from Psalm 81: “I am the Lord your God / who brought you from the land of Egypt. / Open wide your mouth and I will fill it. / But My people did not heed My voice / and Israel would not obey, / so I left them in their stubbornness of heart / to follow their own designs.”<sup>59</sup>

But right after pronouncing these words, instead of giving way to His wrath, God returns to begging for His people’s love. He cannot

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<sup>55</sup> *Dt* 6:4–9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ex* 32:9.

<sup>57</sup> *Ex* 32:8.

<sup>58</sup> *Jer* 2:5.

<sup>59</sup> *Ps* 81:11–3.

help it. “O that My people would heed Me, / that Israel would walk in My ways! / At once [!] I would subdue their foes, / turn My hand against their enemies. / The Lord’s enemies would cringe at their feet / and their subjection would last forever. / But Israel I would feed with finest wheat / and fill them with honey from the rock.”<sup>60</sup> At once! As soon as we indicate the least openness, He runs to us, is lavish to us, no matter what happened. This is why it is necessary to run through the whole story of Israel, because it is the story of each of us. If we do not run through it and know it in detail, if we do not travel through it, we will be frightened by the least thing, and will end up saying, “It is not possible!” How right the Pope is when he says we think our mistakes cannot be redeemed, that there cannot be an embrace that forgives us!

But without mercy there is no possibility for the people to journey, no possibility of a relationship between God and the human person. Thus entered into history the battle between the love of God, which never stops seeking us, and our reluctance. It is a battle between preference and resistance, between God’s preference and human resistance, a battle between self and the mysterious measure that revealed itself in the history of a people. “The most suitable criterion for the human person’s action is God [...]. Instead, from the very beginning, we try to change our very nature as a creature made ‘in the image and likeness’ of God, and tend to impose our own measure on life, which in more or less shrewd and complex forms is nothing other than the reactivity of the moment, whether it appears as a mood, an instinct, or as an opinion [...]. The general lie on the level of the conscience is also a temptation in that small people that God had chosen, but it presents itself in a more dramatic way, as a battle between *oneself* and the mysterious measure. It is as if the human person had to walk totally entrusted to something that does not respond to any human measure, and found joy after abandoning itself; [what peace when we finally abandon ourselves!] but normally [this is not the case:] it is toil, resistance, rebellion.”<sup>61</sup>

In the face of this relentless obstinacy of the human person, God is “forced” to show His innermost depths of pity and mercy. Exactly like you parents, like a mother in front of her son’s stubbornness, either you slam him against the wall, or you have to draw forth all your deeply felt love as a mother. Even though the people of Israel persist in their resistance, God cannot abandon them. “When Israel was a child

<sup>60</sup> Ps 81:14–17.

<sup>61</sup> Giussani, *In Search of the Human Face*, p. 33.

I loved him, out of Egypt I called My son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me, sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks. Yet, though I stooped to feed My child, *they did not know* that I was their healer. [...] My people resists conversion: called to look on high, none of them lift their gaze. How could I give you up, O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel? How could I treat you as Admah, or make you like Zeboiim? My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred.”<sup>62</sup>

But perhaps the passage that most dramatically expresses this battle between the preference of God and the resistance of the human person is chapter 16 of Ezekiel, a passage which both Pope Francis and Fr. Giussani have found so striking.

“Thus the word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations. Thus says the Lord God to Jerusalem: By origin and birth you are of the land of Canaan; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite. As for your birth, the day you were born your navel cord was not cut; you were neither washed with water nor anointed, nor were you rubbed with salt, nor swathed in swaddling clothes. No one looked on you with pity or compassion to do any of these things for you. Rather, you were thrown out on the ground as something loathsome, the day you were born. Then I passed by and saw you weltering in your blood. I said to you: Live in your blood and grow like a plant in the field. You grew and developed, you came to the age of puberty; your breasts were formed, your hair had grown, but you were still stark naked. Again I passed by you and saw that you were now old enough for love. So I spread the corner of my cloak over you to cover your nakedness; I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you; you became mine, says the Lord GOD.” This happened through King David’s conquest of Jerusalem. Ezekiel continues: “Then I bathed you with water, washed away your blood, and anointed you with oil. I clothed you with an embroidered gown, put sandals of fine leather on your feet; I gave you a fine linen sash and silk robes to wear.” The following verses describe how God dresses Jerusalem like a bride, the details showing God’s solicitude for His people: “I adorned you with jewelry: I put bracelets on your arms, a necklace about your neck, a ring in your nose, pendants in your ears, and a glorious diadem upon your head. Thus

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<sup>62</sup> *Hos* 11:1–4, 7–8. Our italics.

you were adorned with gold and silver; your garments were of fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth. Fine flour, honey, and oil were your food. You were exceedingly beautiful, with the dignity of a queen. You were renowned among the nations for your beauty, perfect as it was, because of my splendor which I had bestowed on you, says the Lord God.” But something changes in the relationship with God. The beloved woman throws herself away: “But you were captivated by your own beauty, you used your renown to make yourself a harlot, and you lavished your harlotry on every passer-by, whose own you became.” In order to express how Jerusalem—that is, the bride—has fallen into idolatry, the prophet uses the figure of the prostitute. “You took some of your gowns and made for yourself gaudy high places, where you played the harlot. You took the splendid gold and silver ornaments that I had given you and made for yourself male images, with which also you played the harlot.” All that God gave His bride, Jerusalem, as a sign of His boundless love, she reduced to an idol, asking of the idol what the idol cannot give. “You took your embroidered gowns to cover them; my oil and my incense you set before them; the food that I had given you, the fine flour, the oil, and the honey with which I fed you, you set before them as an appeasing odor, says the Lord God.”<sup>63</sup>

Let’s listen to how Pope Francis speaks of this passage: “I’ve always been struck reading the story of Israel as it is told in the Bible, in chapter 16 of the Book of Ezekiel. [...] I can read my life in light of chapter 16 of the book of the prophet Ezekiel. I read those pages and I say: everything here seems written just for me!”<sup>64</sup>

For Fr. Giussani, in this text, which is so highly dramatic, “The trajectory of God’s possession of the human person and of the human response is portrayed in a crude and impassioned way, with God speaking to His people. [...] It clearly shows that our position is rebellion in order to affirm our own reactivity, our own instinct.”<sup>65</sup>

Rejecting the Covenant with God, as Jeremiah says, the children of Israel began to go “after empty idols, and became empty themselves.” The prophet makes the unreasonableness of the people evident with this image. “They have forsaken me, the source of living waters; they have dug themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that hold no water.”<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ez 16:1–19

<sup>64</sup> Francis, *The Name of God Is Mercy* (see note 23).

<sup>65</sup> Giussani, *In Search of the Human Face*, pp. 34–35.

<sup>66</sup> Jer 2:5,13.

In the words of Fr. Giussani, we can say “good sense and intelligence vanish,”<sup>67</sup> something which all of us have experienced in our lives.

But coming to recognize one’s own rejection of the Lord and its destructive effects in life is the first sign of openness to God: “Therefore, pedagogically speaking, having the perception of this resistance to the truth of ourselves as women and men, thus having the sense of sin, is the most important thing in life because it throws us wide open to the true God. Sin is behaving as if we were the masters of our own lives, and acknowledging sin means coming closer to the fact that the measure, the criterion, the lordship of life is the mystery of God.”<sup>68</sup> Let’s compare our reaction in the face of our own sinfulness with this observation of Fr. Giussani’s. Having the sense of sin, perceiving our resistance to the truth of ourselves, is what opens us to the Presence of God, and therefore, is the most pedagogically important thing in life, not only in the beginning, but always. In fact, once we have encountered that Presence, we continue to make mistakes. This is the point of the alternative described by Péguy, between the wretchedness that “is no longer Christian”<sup>69</sup> and Christian wretchedness: we can stay in front of our errors, eating ourselves alive in anger or disappointment for having erred—and this paralyzes us—or we can have the sense of sin, which always implies the relationship with an Other whom we have failed, and the reference to that Presence we can no longer erase from our life as sinners.

“In history, God reveals to us the profound division between what we are [by nature]—the thirst for the infinite—and our existence made up of contradictions, because our rule is not the mystery, but our own vanity.” But “even this”—Fr. Giussani’s view of human nature is impressive!—“serves to teach us to understand what God is for us, to glimpse the face of our meaning. We are called to immerse ourselves in our meaning and destiny, in order to understand that God is pity, mercy for us.”<sup>70</sup> If we do not return constantly to this mercy, our anger dominates.

For this reason, Fr. Giussani holds that we cannot “understand well the word [mercy] when it is definitively revealed in history [when it is revealed fully in Jesus] unless we travel the great passage of the

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<sup>67</sup> Giussani, *In Search of the Human Face*, p. 36.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> Charles Péguy, “Dialogo della storia con l’anima carnale (o Véronique)”, in *Lui è qui. Pagine scelte [He Is Here: Selected Pages]*, Bur, Milano 2009, p. 103.

<sup>70</sup> Giussani, *In Search of the Human Face*, pp. 38-39.

prophecy of Israel.”<sup>71</sup> It is not some historical ornament for reaching Jesus, but instead, it is the great passage that God caused His people to traverse, one we, too, must experience, because “we can understand Christian experience only with difficulty if we are unwilling to relive the history of the people of Israel, in all its aspects and in all its drama.”<sup>72</sup> We will never understand Christ unless we journey through the history of Israel.

The story of Israel, like ours, is made up of space, time, circumstances, falls, and new beginnings, and we must see it and touch it for ourselves. Let’s focus on the time of the prophet Jeremiah, toward the end of the seventh century B.C., when it becomes patently clear that Israel is incapable of being faithful. Israel does not convert, even though God constantly calls it to conversion and continually offers it His forgiveness. If it does repent, it immediately falls and is corrupted, as if it were useless to try. “No use! no! I love these strangers, and after them I must go.”<sup>73</sup> The people’s rebellion reaches this level.

Out of stubbornness, Israel prefers alliances with the surrounding empires and kingdoms to the Covenant with God, and this will be the origin of a new disaster. What is God’s response? Almost giving in to the people’s obstinacy, He respects its freedom. This is followed by the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, the loss of the land, the temple, and the king, the three great gifts received from Yahweh. In this way Israel will experience its distance from its God in all its devastation.

It might seem like a total failure. But “God never fails,” says Benedict XVI. “Or more precisely: initially God always fails, He lets human freedom exist and this freedom constantly says ‘no;’ but God’s imagination, the creative power of His love, is greater than the human ‘no.’ With every human ‘no’ a new dimension of His love is bestowed and He finds a new and greater way to bring about His ‘yes’ to man, history, and creation.”<sup>74</sup>

In this moment, as well, God does not break His Covenant. He starts anew: “God is never defeated,” affirmed then-Cardinal Ratzinger, “and His promises do not fall together with human defeats; rather, they

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>72</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Psalms*, transl. William Vouk, The Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> *Jer* 2:25.

<sup>74</sup> Benedict XVI, *Homily at the Holy Mass with the Members of the Bishops’ Conference of Switzerland*, November 7, 2006.

become greater, just as love grows in the measure in which the beloved has need of it.”<sup>75</sup> This is a crucial point, one that overturns our logic. We project our defeats and our parameters of success and failure onto God. “But I am God, not man,” He repeats to us. He is “Other,” not an extension of ourselves. God is different. He is not us. God is God. He always starts anew and never ceases to take the initiative with us, because He is not bound to what we would call “successes.” God does not measure the efficacy of His initiative with this yardstick, because the source of His movement is entirely different: it comes from His innermost being, not our defeats. No matter how often we say no, no matter how inadequate our response always is, He never stops seeking us. As Pope Francis says, He is “the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose His offer of love.”<sup>76</sup>

When the people of Israel reaches the darkest point on its journey and seems to have lost everything, God’s genius manifests itself again in all its wonder. The Lord begins to speak of a New Covenant. In the midst of the so-called Babylonian captivity, through Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, God begins to announce a new thing to the people. The three great prophets cry out to everyone that a new thing is imminent. Isaiah writes, “Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not. See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”<sup>77</sup>

What new thing could ever solve the problem of the unfaithfulness of such a stiff-necked people, so incapable of a definitive conversion?

This question concerns us, too, because like Israel, we are unfaithful, lack coherence, and are stiff-necked. We find these things in ourselves, too. Only if we are serious and sincere with this question, which burns in us like a wound, will we be able to grasp the answer in all its newness.

Let’s listen to the announcement of the prophets, beginning with Jeremiah, who speaks of a “New Covenant.” How is it possible? Since the day God established His Covenant with Moses, He had never spoken of an expiration date. No matter how often the people had betrayed it from the beginning, as we have seen, He always returned to that Covenant.

So then, what does Jeremiah mean with the expression “New Covenant”? What is it? “The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Guardare Cristo. Esercizi di Fede, Speranza e Carità [Looking at Christ. Meditations on Faith, Hope and Love]*, Jaca Book, Milan, 1989, p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> Francis, *Address at the Meeting with the Bishops of the United States*, Washington D.C., September 23, 2015.

<sup>77</sup> *Is* 43:18–19.



make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt.” What distinguishes this “New Covenant”? “This is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel [...]. I will place My law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more.”<sup>78</sup>

Ezekiel speaks of “a new heart and a new spirit.” For a Jew, this was inconceivable. In fact, Semitic anthropology considers the heart to be the locus of conscious life, memory, decisions, and reason. Therefore that expression, “a new heart,” indicated another creature, a new creation. Ezekiel wants to emphasize precisely this: that Israel needs a new heart in order to be faithful to its God. What will be the form of this new thing? What historical manifestation will this “new heart and new spirit” take?

Here are his words: “I will take you away from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you back to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you to cleanse you from all your impurities, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put My spirit within you and make you live by My statutes, careful to observe My decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”<sup>79</sup> So then, it is a matter of a new creation, the generation of a different “I.”

Finally, Isaiah confirms God’s intention to make a new creation. “Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth. The things of the past shall not be remembered or come to mind. Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness in what I create, for I create Jerusalem to be a joy and its people to be a delight.”<sup>80</sup>

Why is this New Covenant, this new creation, so crucial? Why is it so important that we be given a new heart and a new spirit? Why is it necessary for the law to enter the heart of the human person, as Jeremiah said? Because, as Benedict XVI says, “Man can never be redeemed sim-

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<sup>78</sup> *Jer* 31:31–34.

<sup>79</sup> *Ez* 36:24–28.

<sup>80</sup> *Is* 65:17–18.

ply from outside.”<sup>81</sup> Until the preference of God penetrates our deepest depths, becoming ours, we will continue to prefer idols. How can such a new thing happen? Only an event capable of touching the “I” in its innermost depths, according to the gentle style of God, which is to give freedom, to give and evoke love, only an event capable of attracting the “I” to the point of evoking its acknowledgment and adhesion, can enter the human heart without violence. God has taken this initiative, has become an event in history, has entered into the life of women and men as a man, and has given Himself for us, to win us over with the power of His attraction, in freedom, to redeem us from within.

But God’s new initiative, which contains the prophetic promise, was not to be painless. Rather, the sign sent by God triggered an unparalleled resistance in the people, despite the power of the attraction and the newness of the gesture.

## **2. The face of mercy and the scandal it provoked**

Jesus’s preaching centered on the announcement of the kingdom of God, founded upon the “good news” of mercy. This announcement, which was not only verbal, but also an action—Jesus’s entrance into relationship with people—far exceeded the religious and moral canons of the era, and was profoundly disturbing for the people of the time. We find it hard to understand their difficulty and thus when we read about it in the gospel, we often underestimate its importance. It was so strong that Jesus was led to declare, “Blessed is the one who takes no offense at Me!”<sup>82</sup>

What did Jesus do to offend and scandalize? To understand the reasons, we need to consider just exactly who followed Him.

Jesus’s adversaries called His followers—at least some of them—“publicans and sinners.” We skim over these expressions lightly, without understanding them well. Let’s consider them for a moment: “publicans [a profession] and sinners,” “publicans and prostitutes,” or simply, “sinners.” Jesus’s adversaries created these expressions to identify those who followed Him, and Jesus Himself used these terms. “The Son of Man came eating and drinking and you said, ‘Look, He is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’”<sup>83</sup> To understand why this so scandalized the scribes and Pharisees, how

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<sup>81</sup> Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Spe Salvi*, p. 25.

<sup>82</sup> *Mt* 11:6.

<sup>83</sup> *Lk* 7:34.

Jesus's behavior was so revolutionary, we need to clarify the meaning of "sinners" in the historical context in which He operated. A sinner was not just someone who disobeyed the commandments, but one who also carried out activities considered sinful. In his sense, the sinners *par excellence* were the publicans. They were despised because they collected a particular type of tax on the transit of goods or their entrance into the city, the amount of which was not pre-set and thus not under the control of financial officials. The collection of these taxes was entrusted to wealthy citizens who in turn used collaborators, these "publicans," who enriched themselves through fraud, exploiting the ignorance of the people to overcharge them, as Luke recounts in his Gospel.<sup>84</sup> They were considered such crooks that their families, too, were despised.

They were also viewed with great hostility from the religious point of view. Pharisees who became publicans were expelled from the community. The great tradition of the Talmud declared, "Come and hear: for shepherds, tax collectors, and revenue farmers it is difficult to make repentance."<sup>85</sup> In fact, penitence required abandoning the activity and restoring all one had defrauded plus a fifth.<sup>86</sup> It was practically impossible!

Therefore, according to the canons of Pharisaical orthodoxy, the people who followed Jesus were excluded from the kingdom of God because of their immorality or religious ignorance. In fact, Jesus's adversaries called His followers "small," "simple," and "ignorant," while they considered themselves "wise and intelligent." But Jesus—Jesus!—subverted this mentality. We see this beautifully in His answer to those who were scandalized because He ate with publicans and sinners. His was a flamboyant gesture, certainly not the same thing as sitting down at table with the first person who comes by, as we have seen. In fact, Jesus said, "I did not come to call [to the banquet of the king-

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. *Lk* 3:12 ff.

<sup>85</sup> Baba Qamma, 94b, available at [http://www.come-and-hear.com/babakamma/babakamma\\_94.html#PARTb](http://www.come-and-hear.com/babakamma/babakamma_94.html#PARTb).

<sup>86</sup> Pope Francis recently spoke about this particular category of sinners: "Matthew was a 'publican,' namely, a tax collector on behalf of the Roman Empire, and for this reason was considered a public sinner. But Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him and to become His disciple. Matthew accepts, and invites Jesus along with the disciples to have dinner at his house. Thus an argument arises between the Pharisees and the disciples of Jesus over the fact that the latter sit at the table with tax collectors and sinners. 'You cannot go to these people's homes!' they said. Jesus does not stay away from them, but instead goes to their houses and sits beside them. [...] By calling Matthew, Jesus shows sinners that He does not look at their past, their social status, or at external conventions, but rather, He opens a new future to them." (Francis, *General Audience*, April 13, 2016)

dom] the righteous, but sinners.”<sup>87</sup> And elsewhere He declared, “Amen, I say to you, [here He really ups the ante] tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you,”<sup>88</sup> while the scribes and Pharisees, the “wise” spoken of in the gospel, will be excluded.

The same is true for the poor, those who labor and are burdened.<sup>89</sup> Jesus affirms that the kingdom of heaven is theirs, and looks with infinite compassion upon all these beggars who bear a dual load: they are despised by others and desperate, because they are deemed morally unworthy of salvation before God.

I will never forget as long as I live how struck I was when I heard these things from Father Mariano Herranz, my professor of Biblical Exegesis at the Seminary in Madrid.<sup>90</sup> For me, it was a point of no return. Nothing has marked my life as powerfully as this, in its simplicity. It is not that I had never read the gospel before then, but listening to that professor made me finally understand, and my whole way of looking at myself and others was changed by that new thing. Therefore, I understand well why Pope Francis holds that nothing is more important than immersing yourself in Jesus’s gaze upon us, in order to look at yourself and others in the right way.

We see throughout the gospels the controversy between Jesus, the gaze He introduces upon life, and the Pharisees, who held that salvation, that is, participation in the kingdom of God, depended on ethical perfection obtained through the observance of numberless precepts, thus making it unachievable for those they despised. This conflict runs throughout the gospels. Let’s look at a few examples.

Let’s begin with the parable of the two sons, in which Jesus reproves “the chief priests and the elders of the people.”<sup>91</sup> He had no intention of just entertaining them: “Now I’ll tell you the parable of the two sons,” as if He had nothing better to do. No, Jesus was attacking them harshly—the chief priests, the elders of the people, the Pharisees—for their behavior. To make them understand, He tells the story of two sons, the first of whom, asked by his father to go work in the vineyard, says yes but does not go, while the second refuses initially but then

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<sup>87</sup> *Mk* 2:17.

<sup>88</sup> *Mt* 21:31.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Mt* 11:28.

<sup>90</sup> Fr. Mariano Herranz (1928-2008) taught Biblical Languages and Exegesis of the New Testament at the seminary of Madrid, and was the editor of the “*Novi Testamenti Semitic Studies*” series.

<sup>91</sup> *Mt* 21:23.

goes. Jesus asks them, “Which of the two did the will of his father?” Not understanding the trap laid for them, the Pharisees answer innocently, “the son who went in the end.” And Jesus, following their own logic, concludes in an absolutely unexpected way. “Amen, I say to you, tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you.”<sup>92</sup> The noted German biblicist Joachim Jeremias explains well the meaning of this peremptory judgement. “The publicans, for whom you regard penitence as almost impossible, are nearer to God than you! For they may have disobeyed the call of God, but they have shown sorrow and repentance. Therefore they are admitted into the Kingdom of God, not you.”<sup>93</sup> How did the publicans say *yes* when they said *yes*? By saying *yes* to Jesus. “Therefore they are admitted into the kingdom of God, not you.” The reason the Pharisees, who deemed themselves wise, were excluded, is that they refused to follow Jesus, to believe in Jesus. This is the crucial point. Those like the Pharisees who believe they are in the right and “coherent” are excluded. “When John came to you in the way of righteousness, you did not believe him; but tax collectors and prostitutes did. Yet even when you saw that, you did not later change your minds and believe him.”<sup>94</sup> If faith in Christ is the condition for entering the kingdom, then rejecting Jesus means excluding yourself from the kingdom. Thus the chief priests and Pharisees will not enter, while the publicans and sinners, who converted, that is, who listened to Jesus and believed in Him, will be admitted.

This same attitude of Jesus emerges in the episode of the healing of the centurion’s servant.<sup>95</sup> Profoundly struck by the faith of the centurion, who is a pagan and thus according to the canons excluded from salvation, Jesus affirms, “I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be driven out into the outer darkness, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.”<sup>96</sup> There is a jarring contrast between those who will sit at the banquet of the kingdom and the “children of the kingdom” who instead will be cast out. The sentence is pronounced in obvious reference to the centurion, one of the many from the east and the west who will be admitted to the final banquet, not because they have

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<sup>92</sup> *Mt* 21:31.

<sup>93</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, Charles Scribner’s Sons, New York, 1972, p. 125.

<sup>94</sup> *Mt* 21:32.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. *Mt* 8:5–13.

<sup>96</sup> *Mt* 8:11–12.

achieved moral perfection or because they belong to an ethnic group, but because of their faith in Jesus. This faith is exactly what Jesus praises in the pagan centurion. “Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith!”<sup>97</sup>

This and other gospel stories show the newness introduced by the presence of Jesus in history. Those who “will recline at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven,” and who already are beginning to participate in its blessings (“You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you,” Jesus tells the centurion. “And at that very hour (his) servant was healed,”<sup>98</sup> the evangelist Mark records), are those who acknowledge Him, who believe in Him. No other condition is required.

The “wise and the intelligent” of the era—the scribes and the Pharisees—placed multitudinous conditions on the mercy of God. Jesus’s announcement of the kingdom of God and the advent of mercy clashed headlong against this fact, and so offended them that they were provoked to put Him to death, condemning Him to crucifixion, because Jesus’s way of acting implied that He conceived of Himself as God.

In the conflict with the scribes and the Pharisees, Jesus was forced to defend His behavior in front of everyone. The parables that we find in the fifteenth chapter of Luke’s Gospel constitute Jesus’s response to their accusations. Contrary to our assumptions, they are not ahistorical tales. The parables are always inserted into the precise historical context of the conflict with the Pharisees. Let’s look at this conflict as represented in one of the most beautiful parables, which we have discussed many times, but in the context of these Spiritual Exercises, perhaps we may understand it more deeply.

### **3. The prodigal son**

Luke reports that Jesus, in response to the murmurings of the scribes and Pharisees, who say “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them,”<sup>99</sup> proposes the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. With the latter, Jesus explains that He treats sinners like the father of the story. One son represents the publicans and the other the Pharisees.

Jesus uses this parable to defend the good news of mercy. In order to understand the language of the parable, you must bear in mind that

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<sup>97</sup> *Mt* 8:10.

<sup>98</sup> *Mt* 8:13.

<sup>99</sup> *Lk* 15:1 ff.

according to the Jewish mind-set, in addition to Jews who failed to obey the commandments of God and “sinful” gentiles (as we have just noted), there was a third group of people who were in the worst position concerning forgiveness: the Jews who had become pagans in their practical life. Among them, Jewish sources identify those who had professions or activities that strongly exposed them to suspicions of theft, among them that of shepherd. The *Sanhedrin* treatise of the *Mishnah* included in the list of those who could neither participate in a tribunal nor bear witness “a dice player, a usurer, pigeon racers, or traffickers in Seventh Year produce (which according to the law—*Lev* 25:1 ff—did not belong to anyone).”<sup>100</sup> Another text adds “shepherds, publicans, and those who compel a sale.”<sup>101</sup> And another one likens these categories of men to gentile slaves.<sup>102</sup> A passage of the *Mishnah* even states that a publican or a pagan who enters a house makes everything inside unclean.<sup>103</sup> For these categories of people, penitence was very difficult, if not impossible.

In contrast to this attitude of orthodox Judaism, Jesus declares in front of the Pharisees that the publicans and pagans have not been abandoned by God. Rather, He said that “of these is the kingdom of God,” and He came specifically to invite them to the banquet of the kingdom. Welcoming them at table, He makes it clear that they have received the gift of God’s forgiveness. Let’s see, then, how Jesus defends this position in the parable of the prodigal son.

The first part of the story centers on the father and the younger son, that is, the prodigal son, while the second focuses on the father and the elder son. As always happens in the two-part parables, the “moral” here is contained in the second part, where the father explains to the elder son why he acted as he did with the younger son who had left home. Now, since also Judaism had the idea of a God who, inasmuch as He is father, is always ready to forgive, in order to grasp the newness contained in the parable we must pay attention to an aspect that may seem minor but actually is very significant: the prodigal son, reduced to poverty, is forced to hire himself out to tend swine. We have already seen how the work of a shepherd was regarded as sinful. The situation of the prodigal son was much worse, because he was tending swine, animals

<sup>100</sup> *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 3,3.

<sup>101</sup> *b. Sanhedrin* 25b.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. *Mishnah, Rosh Ha-Shanah* 1,8.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. *Mishnah, Tahorot* 7,6.

which the Jews considered the most unclean of all. Just imagine Jesus's listeners when they heard that the son had become a swine herder. They understood immediately the meaning of those words—that young Jew had become a pagan, and for any Jewish father, such an apostasy meant his son was dead to him. A conscientious Jew of his position would have closed his door forever to a son who had fallen so low.

But Jesus, upending the expectations of His audience—the scribes and the Pharisees who are listening to him—speaks repeatedly and insistently of a father who behaves entirely differently with the son who had become pagan and was lost forever, according to the logic of the times, but had returned home. He did not deny that his son had sinned, and in the worst of ways. In fact, he says “he was dead,” “he was lost.”<sup>104</sup> And yet, inexplicably, he forgives him and manifests this forgiveness in a truly eccentric way (doubtlessly the strangeness in Jesus's description of the father's forgiveness is intentional): the father runs to meet the son as soon as he sees him in the distance, a very strange gesture for an elderly, Middle Eastern man. The strangeness increases if we consider the orders that he gives almost frenetically to the servants—he tells some to bring the new robe, others the ring and sandals, while others must kill the fatted calf, and still others must prepare the banquet and music. None of this was proper for a father who was proud of his Jewish faith and who had been so gravely dishonored by a son; above all, it was the polar opposite of the ideals of the zealous defenders of the cause of God—those who were listening to the parable recounted by Jesus.

The second part of the parable describes the harsh protest of the Pharisees, represented by the elder son. He does not complain about the return of his brother, but rather because his father organized a huge celebration in honor of the occasion, stressing unequivocally the fullness of his forgiveness. The elder son protests and refuses to participate in the feast, and does so in the name of justice. “Look, all these years I served you and not once did I disobey your orders; yet you never gave me even a young goat to feast on with my friends. But when your son returns who swallowed up your property with prostitutes, for him you slaughter the fattened calf.”<sup>105</sup> In this case as well, the father's reaction is unexpected: he grants that his son's response is reasonable, to a point. As we know, without a minimum of justice, relations among

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<sup>104</sup> *Lk* 15:24.

<sup>105</sup> *Lk* 15:29–30.



people would be impossible, including those in the family. But the father explains the reasonableness of his behavior in light of the very particular condition of his younger son. In fact, without the generous love of the father, that son, who was dead, would not have been resurrected—he would have been lost forever.

With this parable and the others on forgiveness, Jesus tells us that God is mercy for sinful humanity, that is, for you and for me. His forgiveness is so full and unconditional that it can appear unjust to those who consider themselves the guardians of the rights of God. Actually, in some way, those who forgive cede a right, because forgiveness is radical grace, pure grace.

In front of this pure grace there are only two possibilities: to feel boundless gratitude or to be offended or scandalized, yesterday as today—it is not different.

Christ sets no preconditions on the exercise of His forgiveness. And yet, as the Pope reminds us in *Amoris Laetitia*, “At times we find it hard to make room for God’s unconditional love [...]. We put so many conditions on mercy that we empty it of its concrete meaning and real significance. That is the worst way of watering down the Gospel. It is true, for example, that mercy does not exclude justice and truth, but first and foremost we have to say that mercy is the fullness of justice and the most radiant manifestation of God’s truth. For this reason, we should always consider ‘inadequate any theological conception which in the end puts in doubt the omnipotence of God and, especially, His mercy.’”<sup>106</sup>

Aware of the radical break introduced into history by the good news of forgiveness that He came to announce to all, Jesus proclaims blessed those who do not take offense at Him.

In the light of these observations, we can re-read Fr. Giussani’s passage on mercy, well-known to many of us: “In Rembrandt’s famous painting, the prodigal son is the mirror image of the Father. The Father’s face is full of sorrow at the son’s error, at his denial, full of a sorrow that flows back into forgiveness. Human imagination can reach this point. But the most spectacular and mysterious thing is that the Father’s face is the mirror image of the prodigal son. In Rembrandt’s painting the Father is in a position that mirrors the son: in Him is reflected the son’s sorrow, the despair overcome, the destruction prevented, the happiness about to rekindle, in the instant in which it is about to rekindle, when

<sup>106</sup> Francis, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family, *Amoris laetitia*, p. 311.

goodness triumphs. Goodness triumphs in the prodigal son because he weeps for his mistake. But goodness triumphs in the Father: this is the concept of mercy which man cannot manage to understand or to speak of. The Father's face is the reflection of the son. And the Father's face is mercy, because it is pity for the one who has gone wrong and is there turned towards the one who is coming back. But if mercy is such an important part of the Mystery, it is through the Son, Word of God, Mirror of the Father, that this is revealed to man. For it is the Word of the Father who puts on human nature so as to reveal to man all that the Mystery is for him. So in history mercy has a name: Jesus Christ.<sup>107</sup>

The awareness that mercy is mystery leads Fr. Giussani to affirm, "The word 'mercy' should be removed from the dictionary because it does not exist in the world of man, there is nothing that corresponds to it. Mercy is at the origin of forgiveness, it is forgiveness affirmed at its origin, which is infinite. It is forgiveness as Mystery." He insists: "Mercy is not a human word. It is identical with Mystery; it is the Mystery from which everything comes, upon which everything is supported, and in which everything will end, inasmuch as it is communicated to human experience. The description of the prodigal son is the description of mercy that invades and penetrates the life of that young man. The concept of forgiveness, with a certain proportion between mistakes and punishments, is in some way conceivable for human reason, but not this limitless forgiveness that is mercy. Being forgiven arises here from something absolutely incomprehensible to man, from the Mystery; in other words, from mercy. It is what cannot be understood that ensures the exceptionality of what can be understood, because God's life is love, *caritas*, absolute free giving, love without profit, humanly 'without reasons.' Humanly, it appears almost as an injustice or something irrational—precisely because we do not see any reasons for it; because mercy is proper to Being, to the infinite Mystery."<sup>108</sup>

Here is the origin of hope for each of us, well aware of our boundless need for salvation: "The reality of mercy is the supreme opportunity that Christ and the Church have for making His Word reach man, not just as a mere echo of this word in man. How does the infinite Mystery behave towards us? By comprehending and forgiving everything! [...] But His being good to all makes our thoughts explode. It would be

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<sup>107</sup> Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2010, pp. 134-35.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

better if He were to make us children, it would make us understand at the age of fifty the taste of being children, of being children before their father and mother.”<sup>109</sup>

#### **4. “I have loved you with an everlasting love, I have had pity on your nothingness”**

Let’s try to enter into Fr. Giussani’s contemplation of the mystery of mercy, which never ceases to amaze him and causes him to wonder, “Why does God dedicate Himself to me? Why does He give Himself to me, in creating me, giving me being, that is, Himself (He gives me Himself, that is, being)? Moreover, why does He become man and give Himself to me to make me innocent once again [...] and die for me (which there was absolutely no need for: a snap of the fingers and the Father would have certainly done it)? Why does He die for me? Why this gift of self, up to the conceivable extreme, beyond the conceivable extreme?”<sup>110</sup>

In order to have us enter into the heart of the answer, Giussani invites us to read, or rather, to “memorize” the words of the prophet Jeremiah that we have chosen as the title of our Spiritual Exercises, “in the thirty-first chapter, from verse 3 onwards. Through the voice of the prophet that is fulfilled in Christ (think of the people who were there together with that man, that young man who fulfilled these things), God says: ‘With eternal love I have loved you, for this I have attracted you to me [that is, I let you share in my nature], having pity on your nothingness.’ I have always translated this sentence in this way. What does ‘having pity on your nothingness’ mean? What is it about? A feeling, a feeling! It is about a value that is a feeling, because affection is a feeling. To have ‘affection for’ is a feeling, yet it is a value. To the degree that it has reason, it is a value; if it does not have reason, no type of affection is a value because it is missing half of the I, the I is truncated: only what is below the navel remains.”<sup>111</sup>

Therefore, “God’s charity for man is being moved, a gift of self that vibrates, agitates, moves, is fulfilled in emotion, in the reality of being moved: it is moved. God who is moved! ‘What is man that you should be mindful of him?’ says the psalm.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>110</sup> Giussani, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Vol. 3: *Charity*, p. 12 (see note 34).

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Fr. Giussani continues, “Note, then, the point: God was moved by our nothingness. Not only that. God was moved by our betrayal, by our crude, forgetful, and treacherous poverty, by our pettiness. God was moved by our pettiness, which is even more than being moved by our nothingness. ‘I have had pity on your nothingness, I have had pity on your hatred of me. I was moved because you hate me,’ like a father and mother who cry with emotion because of their child’s hatred. They don’t cry because they’re struck, they cry because they are moved, which means a cry that is totally determined by the desire for the child’s good, the child’s destiny: that the child may change, for his destiny, for the child to be saved. It’s compassion, pity, passion. He had pity on me, the one who was so forgetful and petty. If our life is normal, with what we’ve had, it is difficult to be able to find particular sins during the day, but *the sin* is the sin of pettiness of distraction and forgetfulness. The sin is the pettiness of not translating what we do into something new, not making it shine like the new dawn. Instead, we leave it opaque, we leave it as it is, without striking anyone, yet without giving it over to the splendor of Being.”<sup>113</sup>

This then is the source of our certainty: “He had pity on me and on my nothingness and He chose me. He chose me because He had pity on me. He chose me because He was moved by my pettiness! What marks the devotion with which the Mystery—the supreme Mystery and the Mystery of this man who is Christ, God made man—what marks the Mystery’s devotion to us, the devotion with which the Mystery creates the world and forgives man’s pettiness, and forgives him while embracing him, embracing him who is petty, disgusting, is an emotion, is like an emotion; it is being moved, it has being moved within it. It is precisely this that exalts the maternity of God.” Instead, “in all the other conceptions, this unity of God with the world and with man is stated in an arid and mechanical way. As with Dr. Schweitzer: you must dedicate yourself, it is ‘your duty.’ This is like the champions of the Third World cause in the post-conciliar, post-World War II era: to go, to sacrifice yourself for humanity; it is your duty to go, it is not a case of being moved.”<sup>114</sup>

However, we must pay attention to a detail, in order to avoid misunderstanding. “This being moved and this emotion bear, bring with them, a judgment and a beat of the heart. It is a *judgment*, therefore a

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<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

value, a rational value, let's say; not inasmuch as it can be boiled down and reduced to a level that only our reason is capable of, but rational in the sense that it gives a reason, it carries its reason within it. And it becomes a *beat of the heart* for this reason. If emotion or being moved doesn't carry this judgment and this beat of the heart within it, then it is not charity. What is the reason? 'I have loved you with an eternal love, therefore I have made you part of Me, having pity on your nothingness.' The beat of the heart is pity on your nothingness—but the reason is that you might participate in being. In talking about nothingness, as with an animal, you can use the term compassion. But when dealing with man—we'll conclude what I said before this way, by coming back to it—it can't be called anything but being moved, because man is called to happiness, man is great and is called to happiness; man is great like God and is called to God's happiness. The fact that he is crushed by pettiness, destroyed by distraction, emptied and turned into nothing again because of unlimited laziness, this generates compassion."<sup>115</sup>

You tell me if there is anything more urgent than this gaze upon us. Through it God wants to evoke our *yes*. For this reason Simone Weil said, "God waits patiently until at last I am willing to consent to love Him. God waits like a beggar who stands motionless and silent before someone will perhaps give him a piece of bread. Time is that waiting. Time is God's waiting as a beggar for our love."<sup>116</sup> We can respond to this with the song we sang at the beginning, "I know, I know, who you are to me. Come what may, I will wait for you."<sup>117</sup>

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>116</sup> Simone Weil, *First and Last Notebooks, Supernatural Knowledge*, transl. Richard Rees, Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2015, p. 141.

<sup>117</sup> *Haja o que houver*, words and music by P.A. Magalhães: "Haja o que houver eu estou aqui, / haja o que houver espero por ti; / volta no vento, ó meu amor, / volta depressa, por favor. // Há quanto tempo já esqueci / porque fiquei longe de ti; / cada momento é pior, / volta no vento por favor. // Eu sei quem és para mim / haja o que houver espero por ti. // Há quanto tempo já esqueci... // Eu sei quem és para mim..." ("I am here, / come what may, / I will wait for you. / Return on the wind, / Oh my love, / return quickly / if you please. / How long has it been? / I have forgotten / why I remained far from you. / Each moment is more painful. / Return on the wind / if you please. // I know, I know / who you are to me. / Come what may, / I will wait for you.").

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Acts 16:1–10; Psalm 100 (99); Jn 15:18–21*

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL GUALTIERO BASSETTI  
METROPOLITAN ARCHBISHOP OF PERUGIA - CITTÀ DELLA PIEVE**

## **GREETING AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CELEBRATION**

Dearest sisters and brothers,

Had I heard the meditation of our brother and father Carrón before this morning, I might have changed today's homily, but I am sure you will adapt and listen to what the Spirit has suggested to me as well. In any case, I truly participated with deep attention and I am intimately moved by the category of God's mercy, which truly takes hold of us for what we are. So then, this morning we present ourselves to the Lord and we want to open our hearts to Him with joy, because mercy is an experience of profound joy.

## **HOMILY**

Dearest Julián Carrón, Fr. Ambrogio, priests, and all of you, sisters and brothers, I want to express my most cordial and affectionate greeting to all of you. With joy I celebrate this Eucharist during the Spiritual Exercises you are holding here in Rimini, a true time of grace for your Fraternity, a time dedicated to God, but also to yourselves, as I was able to hear this morning as well, as you examine your lives in the light of His word, which always inspires the resolution to seek holiness. My wish for you is that your hearts may be penetrated more and more by the awareness of God's love for each of you, a boundless love, that knows no limits of space or time, as the Psalm reminded us: "Indeed, how good is the Lord, eternal His merciful love. He is faithful from age to age." These words must become alive in our lives.

Dearest ones, two words in today's readings summarize well the sense of this celebration: testimony and persecution. These two equally important words nourish each other ceaselessly, and it is impossible to say exactly which of the two has priority. They point to concrete facts which every Christian—and I can tell you from experience, at the age of 74—sooner or later is called to contend with in the faith.

We have a concrete fact in Saint Paul's testimony in the Acts of the Apostles, when he continues to announce the Good News with love and tenacity, notwithstanding difficulties and persecutions, in Derbe and Lystra, then in Mysia and Troas, and finally, through that miraculous dream, in Macedonia. From Asia he would pass into Europe. Equally, we have a concrete fact in the persecution that Jesus announces to His disciples: the world hated Him first and will continue to hate all those who speak in His name. At the same time, we have a concrete fact today in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, which the Pope invites us to live authentically so that "the witness of believers," that is, our witness, "might grow stronger and more effective."

I was struck by the beautiful way Fr. Carrón drew upon the culminating moment of the mercy of God, the vocation of Moses. Maybe Moses was going through an existential crisis, like many that happen in our lives. But God is there. God sees. God feels. God is near. God sees the suffering of the people of Israel. And here is the mercy of God, which is concrete, as was underlined well a short time ago. Here comes God's answer: "I have heard the cry of my people. I have seen how they are mistreated, and so I have decided with a strong and powerful hand to free My people from slavery. You will be the author of this liberation." (cf. *Ex* 3:7–12) The mercy of God is always expressed in a call, in a specific and precise vocation.

Returning to the theme of persecution—because the word of God is current, and Jesus's words, "They will persecute you," have been said to us this morning—there are concrete facts, news stories reaching us from many parts of the world, where our fellow Christians are persecuted, humiliated, expelled from their homes, imprisoned and even killed, just because they silently testify to their love for Christ. During the Synod on the Family and again yesterday, I had the opportunity to meet two eminent figures from Syria, the Patriarch Gregory III of the Melkites and the Chaldean Bishop of Aleppo. I could see in the faces of these two brothers in the episcopate all the suffering of their peoples and of the Christians. But I also think of the Christians of the Plain of Nineveh—the Chaldean Church is one of the most ancient in the world, its origins going all the way back to Abraham—completely crushed. And I think of the Nigerian Christians killed by suicide bombers as they participated in worship in their churches, and of the sisters and brothers of Pakistan. You can see that Jesus's word is happening in our times.

But none of this is happening by chance. We should not wonder at what is happening and above all we should never lose hope, because all

this was already predicted by Jesus, who was hated by the world and yet “overcame the world” and in virtue of this victory, saved it. Today we, too, are exhorted to enter into this dimension and follow this road that the man of Nazareth indicated for us. We are not of the world, but we live in the world, as John teaches us.

And today Jesus comes to tell us another very important thing, dear sisters and brothers. I see many young people among you and it gladdens my heart. It means that He is the One who has chosen us! There would not be 22,000 of you here if in some way or another you had not responded to a call. It is He who has chosen you. We are not the ones, with our wisdom or intelligence, who have chosen Him. It is He who has come into the world and has called us to Himself, to be the salt of the earth and the yeast for the current generation of women and men.

“In a world where everything pointed in the opposite direction,” Fr. Giussani stated that it is fundamental “to show how faith could be relevant to life’s needs,” to testify that “faith corresponds to some fundamental, original need that all men and women feel in their hearts.” (*The Risk of Education*) And here he based his remarks on the words of Péguy.

How true are these words of Giussani’s! Once again today, we see that central to our experience of being Christians is the call to announce Christ as “a present fact,” an event repeated ceaselessly in the history of humanity, not something that only occurred in the past. The announcement of Christ is *today*, in every period of history, in every cultural context and at every latitude. This announcement flows from the inexhaustible fountain of the faith that goes beyond our concept of space and time. “What I have to tell you is the result of a long experience, of a past that is two thousand years old.” (*The Risk of Education*) This “two thousand years” is today, and these things hold true today and will hold true without fail in the future as well.

Therefore, Jesus’s words of warning to the disciples should not be read as a sad presage of misfortune, but should be embraced as a great teaching that gives every believer full awareness of what it truly means to be a disciple of the Lord. Thus, what awaits the Christian of every time and place is not the consensus of the crowd or the world’s applause; often it is exactly the opposite. “If they have persecuted Me,” Jesus told us, “they will also persecute you.” However, these words never discourage us, because the Lord always gives us His grace, even in the darkest moments, and persecution is never a sterile fact, because through it the power of the Holy Spirit always manifests itself, granting the power



to testify. The Son of God prepares these poor men of Galilee for a great mission. In fact, all those who will be disciples of Christ will be hated by the “world,” but it is equally true that only through this persecution can the power of the Holy Spirit be manifested, guiding them in their testimony. It is striking to read Luke’s comment in the Acts of the Apostles, precisely at the start of their preaching, “*ibant gaudentes apostolic.*” Why were they joyful, if they had been beaten, flogged, and imprisoned?! What was there to be joyful about? They were joyful because they had suffered for the name of Jesus. May this be the reason for our joy, too, if we must suffer. We are joyful because we suffer for Jesus.

Therefore, Jesus did not limit Himself to foretelling the hatred of the world—He indicates the deeper reasons for it. The world hates the disciples for a very simple reason: because they do not belong to the world, but to Christ. Therefore, the hatred of the world should not scandalize us, but should have the opposite effect, as an unavoidable sign of belonging to Christ. Persecution is without fail the sign that the faithful are the light of the Lord. As long as there are persecuted women and men, the world will see the light of the Lord. We belong to Christ, and Christ has redeemed this world with His sacrifice and with His eternal love for all people. Persecution is a constitutive part of the history of salvation: it is the way of the cross incarnate in the daily life of each of us. Accepted with love, it is a source of salvation for everyone.

The Jubilee of Mercy proclaimed by Francis reminds us of this, too, and is a unique opportunity to heal “the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity” and to “open our eyes and see the misery of the world,” as the Pope told us. In fact, modern people seem to have fallen into a sort of quagmire of the soul from which they can no longer raise themselves or emerge through their own efforts alone. The terrorist attacks and the terrible situation of the refugees are two sides of the same coin: they represent that quagmire of hate and indifference into which modern people have sunk.

And precisely here, in this very delicate turning point of history, the salvific action of mercy intervenes. In fact, the mercy of God is not a syrupy word for living-room Christians, nor is it a term that evokes ancient pietisms. To the contrary, mercy is the virile testimony of the Presence of God in the life of people, a testimony manifested as a propensity to hospitality and forgiveness, showing us unequivocally the road of Christian love. Ultimately, mercy is the channel of God’s grace

to the human person. It is an extraordinary fact, active in the life of women and men today.

Dearest sisters and brothers, in 1998 in Saint Peter's Square—I remember it as if it were yesterday—Fr. Giussani said, “The real protagonist of history is the beggar.” Remind each other of these words! Fr. Giussani asked, “Who is this beggar?” He answered, “Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ.” My wish for all of you is to live this full existence that is expressed, to use the words of the founder of your Fraternity, “as ultimate ideal, in *begging*.” Being beggars of Christ, this is the greatest ideal! This is the great provocation for our, allow me to say, superficial and hedonistic world. Precisely because the world is superficial and hedonistic, we want, to use Fr. Giussani's words, to be true beggars of Christ. Open your hearts and ears. Remove the glasses of the world from your eyes, because only in doing so is it possible to make out the face of Christ, as Pope Francis tells us, the one face that gives a meaning to persecution and gives us the strength to be authentic witnesses of God's merciful love for humanity.

Praised be Jesus Christ.

#### BEFORE THE BLESSING

***Julián Carrón.*** Dearest Cardinal Bassetti, I would like to thank you in the name of all my friends, all of you, for presiding at this Eucharistic celebration during our Spiritual Exercises, in this Jubilee Year of Mercy. Thank you for the attention with which you have always followed our history, since the time you were the Rector of the Seminary in Florence, where many friends had the opportunity to enjoy your friendship and companionship, and for how you follow us now, in your closeness to Pope Francis. I would also like to thank you because your presence here is a sign of the mercy the Lord always shows us, bending over our need. Thank you, dearest friend!

***Cardinal Bassetti.*** Dearest Fr. Julián, this morning as I followed this very beautiful family the Lord has entrusted to your care through the Church, my heart was full of great tenderness, also because I recognized many priests, from the Seminary of Florence, then from Massa Marittima, Arezzo, and finally Perugia. So I've been an itinerant priest, or rather, an itinerant bishop, always with my backpack on my back to do what the Pope asked me, so also having the opportunity to know

many of them. For these reasons great tenderness wells up in my heart. I also feel a bit fatherly towards all of you, and I'm sure Fr. Julián is absolutely not jealous, considering what he said. Right?

**Carrón.** Absolutely not!

**Cardinal Bassetti.** Also because, another time, I'll tell you a few things Fr. Giussani told me privately, but now is not the moment.

I'll conclude. For all the reasons we have underlined and also because of what I have heard in the very beautiful meditation, which truly was a moment of contemplation for me. You know, the life of a bishop is always carried out in the midst of many difficulties of all kinds, and spending an hour here, seated, seeing Fr. Carrón's face well, because I had him right in front of me, and listening to his words, was like a balm for my life: thank you for this as well. Putting together all these reasons, I think of the words of Christ to His disciples after He called them together and constituted them as a group, when He told them, "Go, bear fruit, and may your fruit remain." Dear children, may you bring into the Church and the world all those fruits that the Lord expects from each of you!

With these sentiments, I give you my blessing.

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*Regina Coeli*

## *Saturday, April 30, afternoon*

*During entrance and exit:*

*Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Concerto for piano and orchestra n. 23 in A major, KV 488*

*Marija Yudina, piano*

*Aleksandr Gauk – Symphonic Orchestra of the USSR National Radio*

*Recorded in 1948*

*Vista Vera, Moscow 2005*

### ■ SECOND LESSON

**Julián Carrón**

### ***“Yes, Lord, You know You are the object of my supreme ‘sympathy’”***

In Jesus we see revealed what it means that God is mercy, as we said this morning. This new thing is so unprecedented that it seems unjust; it is so far beyond our wildest imaginings that it turns our world upside down. Christ is the culmination of mercy, of that divine style Benedict XVI spoke of and Pope Francis reminded us of in his great speech in Florence, referring to the fresco of the *Ecce homo* in the cathedral of the city: “In looking at His face, what do we see? First of all the face of an ‘emptied’ God, of a God who has taken on the condition of servant, humbled and obedient unto death (cf. *Phil 2:7*).”<sup>118</sup> In this emptying of all power we see revealed the divine style of which Benedict XVI spoke, which is “not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love.”<sup>119</sup>

One might think that everything ended here. Instead, as we said yesterday following Benedict XVI, we still need to verify whether this revelation of mercy, emptied of all power according to the divine style, truly has taken hold of the “I” and continues to do so. If this is not true, God would not be justified in front of the human heart, because the goal constantly pursued by God throughout history has been that of generating a person who loves Him freely. “To that liberty, [...] I have sacrificed everything,

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<sup>118</sup> Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, November 10, 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 276 (see note 8).

God says, to that taste I have for being loved by free men, freely.”<sup>120</sup> This was the promise of the “New Covenant” announced by the prophets.

So then, here is the question. Did God’s effort succeed? In Jesus, did God succeed in generating this love, this freedom, this adhesion? Has He managed to evoke a free “I,” capable of acknowledging Him? In other words, has God justified Himself in front of the reason and the heart of the human person? If we can respond affirmatively, if He has succeeded in His effort, then there is hope that this outcome can happen in us, too. We will not be condemned to remain prey to ourselves, to the precariousness of our whims and our powerlessness.

## 1. Peter’s *Yes*

“The greatest thing that God has made known to us in our history in the past twenty years is the *yes* of Saint Peter,”<sup>121</sup> Fr. Giussani said in 1995. In fact, his pages about the *yes* of Peter are among the most original and spectacular ones he left us, and at the same time, among the least understood because they are so shocking, so beyond our ken. We need to let ourselves be taken up in his testimony, his accent, in order to experience the meaning on the gut level, to be able to understand, because only an experience, not detached reflections, enables us to understand.

Fr. Giussani starts surprising us with the first sentence. “The twenty-first chapter of John’s Gospel is a fascinating documentation of the historical birth of the new ethic. The particular story narrated there is the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality, in his relationship with God, with life, and with the world.”<sup>122</sup>

Let’s try to grasp the full revolutionary import of this introduction: that the keystone of the Christian conception of the human person, that is, of a conception that is more comprehensive and corresponds better to the human person, to morality, to our relationship with God, is a fact in history. To put it another way, the keystone of a gaze upon ourselves and others that is finally adequate, is not a lesson in Christian anthropology, but a particular history, without which I would not understand the anthropology either. Following the common mind-set, the thing we consider almost irrelevant, because it is not replicable by our own efforts—a

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<sup>120</sup> Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents, and Other Poems*, p. 121 (see note 11).

<sup>121</sup> Notes from a meeting of the Diaconia of CL in Spain with Fr. Giussani, Milan, May 15, 1995, conserved in the General Secretariat of CL, Milan.

<sup>122</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 59.

particular history cannot be translated into a “model” and thus cannot be repeated according to the scientific method—and because we deem it too fragile to be a weapon against the ideologies that reduce the human person, and thus we are tempted to eliminate from consideration, for Fr. Giussani is the keystone of everything. As Jesus says of Himself, “the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”<sup>123</sup>

If we want to understand these things thoroughly, we must necessarily return to how this new intelligence and new morality entered into the world. In this sense, Fr. Giussani’s appreciation of the value of the gospel stories as method never ceases to amaze. He allows himself to be taught by them constantly and never stops learning. Instead, the second time we read them we think we already know them! If we want to avoid repeating our mistake, let’s try to follow Fr. Giussani as he immerses himself in the gospel story. Let’s not treat what we hear as something “we already know,” but let’s be open to being struck by each detail, as if we were hearing it for the first time.

“The disciples were on their way back, at dawn, after a terrible night’s fishing on the lake, in which they had caught nothing. As they approach the shore, they see a figure on the beach preparing a fire. Later they would notice that there were some fish on the fire collected for them, for their early morning hunger. All of a sudden, John says to Peter, ‘That’s the Lord!’ They all open their eyes and Peter throws himself into the water, just as he is, and reaches the shore first. The others follow suit. They sit down in a circle in silence; no one speaks, because they all know it is the Lord. Sitting down to eat, they exchange a few words, but they are all fearful at the exceptional presence of Jesus, the Risen Jesus, who had already appeared to them at other times. Simon, whose many errors had made him humbler than all the others, sat down, too, before the food prepared by the Master. He looks to see who is next to him and is terrified to see that it is Jesus Himself. He turns his gaze away from Him and sits there, all embarrassed. But Jesus speaks to him. Peter thinks in his heart, ‘My God, My God, what a dressing-down I deserve! Now He is going to ask me, ‘Why did you betray Me?’ The betrayal had been the last great error he had made.” But, as each of us knows, when we commit a big mistake, all our mistakes from the past appear before our eyes. It was the same for Peter, because all his life “had been a stormy one, because of his impetuous character, his instinctive stubbornness, his tendency to act on impulse. He now saw himself in the light of all his defects. That

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<sup>123</sup> *Mk* 12:10.

betrayal had made him more aware of all his other errors, of the fact that he was worthless, weak, miserably weak. ‘Simon,’—who knows how he must have trembled as that word sounded in his ears and touched his heart?—‘Simon’—here he would have begun to turn his face towards Jesus—‘do you love Me?’ Who on earth would have expected that question? Who would have expected those words? Peter was a forty- or fifty-year-old man, with a wife and children, and yet he was such a child before the mystery of that companion he had met by chance! Imagine how he felt transfixed by that look that knew him through and through. ‘You will be called *Kefas*.’ His tough character was described by that word ‘rock,’ and the last thing he had in mind was to imagine what the mystery of God and the mystery of that Man—the Son of God—had to do with that rock, to that rock. From the first encounter, He filled his whole mind, his whole heart.” How powerful was Peter’s first encounter with Jesus! It decided his whole life. “With that presence in his heart, with the continuous memory of Him, he [Peter] looked at his wife and children, his work-mates, friends and strangers, individuals and crowds, he thought, and he fell asleep. That Man had become for him like an immense revelation, still to be clarified.”<sup>124</sup>

Fr. Giussani continues to relive the scene. “‘Simon, do you love Me?’ ‘Yes, Lord, I love You.’” How is it possible? “How could he say such a thing after all he had done,” with all the mistakes that came to mind? “That *yes* was an affirmation acknowledging a supreme excellence, an undeniable excellence, a sympathy that overwhelmed all others. Everything remained inscribed in that look. Coherence or incoherence seemed to fall into second place behind the faithfulness that felt like flesh of his flesh, behind the form of life which that encounter had moulded.”<sup>125</sup> This “sympathy” is not a word we would expect to find in discussions of morality, especially if this word puts the problem that so afflicts us, that of coherence or incoherence, in second place. But those who have experienced it can understand: a presence like that of Jesus, an instinctive attraction like that evoked by Jesus prevails over all the misdeeds we may have committed.

“In fact,” Giussani continues, “no reproof came.” Jesus simply asked him again, “‘Simon, do you love Me?’ Not uncertain, but fearful and trembling, he replied again, ‘Yes, I love You.’ But the third time, the third time that Jesus threw the question at him, he had to ask confirmation from Jesus Himself: ‘Yes, Lord, You know I love You.’ All my human

<sup>124</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 60.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

preference is for You, all the preference of my mind, all the preference of my heart; You are the extreme preference of life, the supreme excellence of things. I don't know, I don't know how, I don't know how to say it and I don't know how it can be but, in spite of all I have done, in spite of all I can still do [now, right now], I love You."<sup>126</sup>

As we see, there predominated in Simon this instinctive affection, this preference, and he himself was the first to be amazed by it. "I don't know how." He cannot explain how this is possible, but he cannot help but discover it within, as something more decisive than all the mistakes he had made.

Fr. Giussani's genius is seen in the simplicity with which he lets himself be taught by the story, not reducing Peter's *yes* to a sentimental feeling, an exciting moment, lyrical and moving, but grasping all its importance, as it generates and establishes a new thing in life. "This *yes* is the birth of morality, the first breath of morality in the dry desert of instinct and pure reaction. Morality sinks its roots into this Simon's *yes*, and this *yes* can take root in man's soil only thanks to a dominant Presence, understood, accepted, embraced, served with all the energy of your heart; only in this way can man become a child again. Without a Presence, there is no moral act, there is no morality."<sup>127</sup>

Just one line like this would suffice to demolish entire books on morality and many of the strategies that seem so intelligent to us. What can sink its roots into us, what can take root in our innermost depths, is not a law or a precept, a discourse or a lesson, but, as Fr. Giussani says, only a Presence, "a dominant Presence, understood, accepted, embraced."<sup>128</sup> This is liberating. Without this Presence, the *yes*—therefore morality—cannot take root in the soil of our hearts. It would be useless to complain. It is not possible, no matter how hard we try—the *yes* cannot take root without that dominant Presence. "Without a Presence, there is no moral act, there is no morality." Christ Himself said so. "Without Me you can do nothing."<sup>129</sup> The mercy of God had to become flesh, presence, carnal presence, historical presence, to succeed in drawing all of the human person, to enable the *yes* to take root in the heart of the human person.

What is so particular in this Presence, that it evokes the *yes* and thus the new morality?

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> *Jn* 15:5.



Fr. Giussani has written: “This man, Jesus, has a very simple human characteristic: He is a man from whom emanates a human *vibration of affection*” that can never issue from a law, a lesson, a list of things to do. It is a human attraction provoked by that flesh. And “morality, that is, the victory over nihilism,” over dissolution, over ending up like a floating mine, “does not mean never making mistakes, never erring, but, even when you make mistakes, even when you err, in the end you hear, ‘Simon, do you love Me?’ and you answer, ‘Yes, Lord, I love You.’” I can err a thousand times but still say “Count me in. I want to be with You and the human affection that emanates from You, Jesus of Nazareth. Count me in. And within this affection that emanates from You I learn, I learn to live, I learn to be a human being. Morality is very simple: it means choosing to go with an affection, a human affection, human, like the affective vibration a mother feels for her child and the child feels for her.” The issue is not that the child never messes things up—this would be impossible—but that she learns to live. All that is needed is for her mother’s instinctive affection to attract her and draw forth all her own affection. A mother’s affection is gut-felt; it comes from her inner depths, like the affection of that Man for Peter. “Jesus has this human affection for you, for me and, notwithstanding my mistakes, I say, ‘Yes Lord, I choose You, this affection.’ This affirmation is the ultimate possibility for overcoming the nihilism that we ‘catch’ through contagion from the society in which we live.” Fr. Giussani continues, “It is very important to me that you reflect on what I just said at the end, that morality—responding *yes* to Christ who asks us, ‘Do you love Me?’—has a very simple beginning, which is the simplicity of opting for staying with this affection. Being there with this affection has a very simple beginning, which is *looking*; a gaze upon Christ.”<sup>130</sup>

As if he himself were struck by how new his thought was compared to the dominant opinion, almost perceiving our disorientation in front of his words, Giussani brings up the question that so troubles each of us. “But why is Simon’s *yes* to Jesus the birth of morality? Don’t the criteria of coherence and incoherence come first? Peter had done just about all the wrong he could do.” It is not a matter of painting reality differently. Yes, “Peter had done just about all the wrong he could do, yet he lived a supreme sympathy for Christ.” For us, these two things are almost incompatible; we cannot keep them together. Instead—what a freeing thing to hear this!—Peter discovered himself tending toward Christ. “He understood that

<sup>130</sup> Luigi Giussani, “La virtù dell’amicizia o: dell’amicizia di Cristo” [The Virtue of Friendship, or Of the Friendship of Christ], *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, n. 4, April 1996, pp. IV-V.

everything in him tended to Christ, that everything was gathered in those eyes, in that face, in that heart. His past sins could not amount to an objection, nor even the incoherence he could imagine for the future. Christ was the source, the place of his hope. Had someone objected to what he had done or what he might have done, Christ remained, through the gloom of those objections, the source of light for his hope. And he esteemed Him above everything else, from the first moment in which he had felt himself stared at by His eyes, looked on by Him. This is why he loved Him.”<sup>131</sup> Just as happened with Mary Magdalene. Do you understand why she sought Him day and night? Not because it was her duty, but because she could not help but seek Him day and night.

“‘Yes, Lord, you know You are the object of my supreme sympathy, of my highest esteem.’ This is how morality is born [of the relationship with Christ]. The expression is very generic: ‘Yes, I love You.’ But it is as generic as it is generative of a new life to be lived.”<sup>132</sup> Have you ever needed to read these things to be able to look at yourselves? I confess, I do not think I have read anything more times than I have read these pages, in order to look at myself, to be able to embrace myself, to be able to look at myself the way He looks at me, to be able to discover that affective vibration that attracts everything. We will never be able to thank Fr. Giussani enough for enabling us to have this way of looking at ourselves, no matter what we have done, returning constantly to these pages to rediscover what enables us to look at ourselves in this way.

With unique solicitude for us, to avoid leaving anything out, to keep Peter’s *yes* from becoming a trap, a suffocating measure, Fr. Giussani asks the question that the moralism we have inside moves us to ask: “Is Peter’s *yes* automatically translated into coherence?” He answers, “Not in the least! I refuse to believe it! That *yes* exists and has an ultimate mysterious substance in its nexus with that Presence, with the attraction and the humanity of that Presence.”<sup>133</sup> That *yes* has such substance that it disconcerts those who demand an accounting from themselves or others. It has much more substance than any balance sheet.

And so? If the *yes* does not guarantee that we will not make mistakes, how should we stay in front of our all-too-predictable errors? In this regard, Fr. Giussani often quoted a passage from St. John’s first letter: “Everyone

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<sup>131</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 61.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> Notes from a meeting of the Diaconia of CL in Spain with Fr. Giussani, Milan, May 15, 1995, conserved in the General Secretariat of CL, Milan.

who has this hope based on Him makes himself pure, as He is pure.”<sup>134</sup> What does that mean? It means that “our hope is in Christ, in that Presence that, however distracted and forgetful we be, we can no longer (not completely anyway) remove from the earth of our heart because of the tradition through which He has reached us.” Christ is a presence that we can no longer uproot from our soil, from the soil of our heart. “It is in Him that I hope, before counting my errors and my virtues. Numbers have nothing to do with this. In the relationship with Him, numbers don’t count, the weight that is measured or measurable is irrelevant, and all the evil I can possibly do in the future has no relevance either. It cannot usurp the first place that this *yes* of Simon, repeated by me, has before the eyes of Christ. So a kind of flood comes from the depths of our heart, like a breath that rises from the breast and pervades the whole person, making it act, making it want to act more justly. The flower of the desire for justice, for true, genuine love, the desire to be capable of acting gratuitously, springs up from the depths of the heart. Just as our every move starts off not from an analysis of what the eyes see, but from an embrace of what the heart is waiting for, in the same way perfection is not the keeping of rules, but adhesion to a Presence.”<sup>135</sup>

Forgiveness certainly does not prompt the desire to err again. Only those who have never been forgiven can think this way. “Since I’ve been forgiven, I’ll do it again.” You might do it, but you do not truly desire to do so. Rather, you discover you desire to act in a more just way. “Only the man who lives this hope in Christ lives the whole of his life in asceticism, in striving for good. And even when he is clearly contradictory, he desires the good. This always conquers, in the sense that it is the last word on himself, on his day, on what he does, on what he has done, on what he will do in the future. The man who lives this hope in Christ keeps on living in asceticism. Morality is a continual striving towards ‘perfection’ that is born of an event that is a *sign* of a relationship with the divine, with the Mystery.”<sup>136</sup>

Therefore, Christian morality cannot in any way constitute an endorsement of our mistakes. But neither does it mean suffocating under the number of our errors, as Fr. Giussani says. “In the relationship with Him, numbers don’t count.” They are irrelevant. Christian morality is a striving that is born of wonder at Christ’s love.

So, Fr. Giussani asks, what is the true reason for Simon’s *yes* to Christ? “Why does the *yes* said to Christ matter more than listing all your errors

<sup>134</sup> *1 Jn* 3:3.

<sup>135</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 62

and the possible future errors that your weakness forebodes? Why is this *yes* more decisive and greater than all the moral responsibility expressed in its details, in concrete practice? The answer to this question reveals the ultimate essence of the One sent by the Father. Christ is the One ‘sent’ by the Father; He is the One who reveals the Father to men and to the world. ‘This is true life: that they may know You, the only true God, and the one You have sent, Jesus Christ.’ The most important thing is that ‘they know You,’ and that they love You, because this You is the meaning of life. ‘Yes, I love You,’ Peter said. And the reason for this *yes* consisted in the fact that in those eyes that had set on him that first time, and had set on him so many other times during the following days and years, he had glimpsed who God was, who Yahweh was, the true Yahweh: *mercy*.” This is what Peter saw and experienced. “God’s relationship with his creature is revealed in Jesus as love, and therefore as mercy. Mercy is the attitude of the Mystery towards any kind of weakness, error and forgetfulness on man’s part: in the face of any crime that man commits, God loves him. Simon felt this. This is where his ‘Yes, I love You’ comes from.”<sup>137</sup>

I have always been struck by the story of that man who went to Giussani for confession, when Giussani was a young priest in a Milan parish. “A man came into the confessional. He stood there, and didn’t speak. So I looked at him. Provoked by this, he said, ‘I have killed.’ I don’t know why, but I asked him, ‘How many times?’ He sensed that he could have said ‘a thousand times’ and I would have had the same attitude as if he had answered ‘once.’ He burst into tears and bent over to hug me, crying. He sensed the forgiveness.”<sup>138</sup> Just think of the awareness Giussani had even as a young priest of the newness that Christ brought into history, to be able to act that way in front of a murderer. There was nothing to justify. We have nothing to justify, but—like Fr. Giussani—we can look at everything, acknowledge everything, because there is a gaze, a capacity for forgiveness, a mercy that exceeds all measures. Those who deny what they have done may delude themselves that they can resolve the problem (even a murderer!). But the problem remains, even if you hide it from yourself. Thank goodness You are here, O Christ, and that You have revealed Yourself as mercy, because otherwise we would have to bear the terrible burden of our sins.

“The meaning of the world and of history is the mercy of Christ, Son of the Father, sent by the Father to die for us. In Milosz’s play Miguel Mañara,

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<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>138</sup> Luigi Giussani, *L'autocoscienza del cosmo [The Self-Awareness of the Cosmos]*, Bur, Milano, 2000, p. 63.

Miguel was going to the Abbot every day to weep over his past sins. One day the Abbot tells him, somewhat impatiently, ‘Stop weeping like a woman. All this never existed.’ What does he mean by ‘never existed’? Miguel had murdered, raped, he had done all kinds of things. ‘All this never existed. Only He is.’ He, Jesus, addresses us, becomes an ‘encounter’ for us, asking us only one thing: not ‘What have you done?’ but ‘Do you love me?’ To love Him above all things, then, does not mean that I have not sinned or that I will not sin tomorrow. How strange! It takes an infinite power to be this mercy, an infinite power from which—in this world, in the time and space given to us to live, whether for few or many years—we obtain, we draw gladness. Because, in the awareness of all his lowliness, a man is happy at the announcement of this mercy. Jesus is mercy. [...] ‘You have bent down over our wounds and have healed us,’ says a Preface in the Ambrosian liturgy, ‘giving us a medicine stronger than our scars, a mercy greater than our fault. Thus even sin, in virtue of your invincible love, served to raise us up to divine life.’”<sup>139</sup>

Pope Francis told us the same thing on March 7, 2015. This is the origin of Christian morality: “The will to respond and to change, which can give rise to a different life, comes thanks to this merciful embrace. Christian morality is not a titanic, voluntary effort of one who decides to be coherent and who manages to do so, a sort of isolated challenge before the world. No. This is not Christian morality, it is something else. Christian morality is a response, it is the heartfelt response before the surprising, unforeseeable—even ‘unfair’ according to human criteria—mercy of One who knows me, knows my betrayals and loves me just the same, appreciates me, embraces me, calls me anew, hopes in me, has expectations of me.”<sup>140</sup>

In the same sense, Fr. Giussani underlines that the beginning of human morality—*of a fully human morality*—is an act of love, not a law or a sense of duty. “Simon’s *yes* to Jesus cannot be considered the expression of a mere feeling [to which we sometimes reduce it]; it is the beginning of a moral road that either opens with that *yes* or does not open at all. The beginning of a human morality is not the analysis of the phenomena that fill the self’s existence, nor the analysis of human behavior in view of a common good.” Not even one line should be skipped. “This could be the beginning of an abstract secular morality, but not of a human morality.”<sup>141</sup> If we do not recognize this, in the name of

<sup>139</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 63.

<sup>140</sup> Francis, *Address to the Communion and Liberation Movement*, Saint Peter’s Square, March 7, 2015.

<sup>141</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 64.

Christianity we will pass off as Christian morality what actually is just abstract secular morality. Instead, the beginning of a “human morality” is an act of love. “The life of man consists in the affection that principally sustains him and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction,”<sup>142</sup> which is the way by which Christ justifies Himself to us. In fact, the greatest satisfaction is a correspondence to the needs of the heart. Only because I find in Christ the greatest satisfaction, an affection for Him is generated in me—in me! In each of us!—that can sustain our whole life. “The beginning of human morality is an act of love. This requires a presence, the presence of someone who strikes us, who gathers all our powers and stirs them, attracting them to a good that is unknown, but is desired and awaited, that good which is Mystery.”<sup>143</sup> Without this Presence we are not able to be united within ourselves. “Christ in His beauty draws me to Him!”<sup>144</sup> Christ attracts all of me, attracts my entire being.

“The dialogue between Jesus and Peter ends in a strange way. Peter, who is about to follow Jesus, is concerned about the youngest, John, who was like a son to him. ‘And seeing him, he said to Jesus, ‘What of him, Lord?’ Jesus replies, ‘Do not worry about him, just follow Me.’ That *yes* is directed to a Presence that says, ‘Follow Me, leave your life behind.’ ‘Jesu, tibi vivo, Jesu, tibi morior, Jesu, sive vivo sive morior, tuus sum.’ Whether you live or die you are Mine. You belong to Me. I made you. I am your destiny. I am your meaning and the meaning of the world.”<sup>145</sup> Nobody else satisfies us like He does.

It is striking to see Fr. Giussani’s awareness of what moves the human person deep down. We may think we are “realistic,” but only a Presence is able to grasp us in our innermost depths, set us in motion, and cause us to desire to change. If this does not happen, all the rest is chatter, the babble of ineffective attempts. An instant of this movement, an instant of this instinctive affection that Christ kindles in us is worth more than all the good intentions we can formulate; an instant of gut-felt preference for Christ is worth more than anything else. In fact, without a dominant Presence that can be embraced by us, the *yes* cannot take root in us. Only the powerful attraction of His Presence can awaken an instinctive affection that takes precedence over our coherence or incoherence, even over numerical calculations. Only a Presence full of mercy can awaken love, which is the beginning of morality.

<sup>142</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa, IIae, q. 179, a.1.

<sup>143</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 64.

<sup>144</sup> Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, transl. S. Hughes and E. Hughes, Paulist Press, New York, 1982, p. 260.

<sup>145</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, pp. 64-65.

So then, Fr. Giussani continues—let’s pay attention to what is born of a particular history. “The protagonist of history is the whole person, the whole ‘I,’” not a part of us, not an “I” that says “I do this out of duty, but what I actually would like to do is something else.” No, the protagonist of morality is the whole “I.” “And the person has for its law a word that we all think we know and whose meaning, after a long time, if we are minimally faithful to what is original in us, we begin to glimpse: the word is love. The person has love for its law. [Because] ‘God, Being, is love,’ St. John writes. Love is a judgment that is ‘moved’ because of a Presence connected to destiny. It is a judgment, such as when you say, ‘This is Mont Blanc,’ or ‘This is a friend of mine.’ Love is a judgment filled with emotion because of a Presence connected with my destiny, that I discover; I glimpse, I sense that I am connected with my destiny,” with my fulfillment. “When John and Andrew saw Him for the first time and heard Him say, ‘Come home with Me. Come and see,’ and then spent all those hours listening to Him talking, they didn’t understand, but they sensed that that person was connected with their destiny. They had heard all the public speakers, all their opinions and all the party slogans. But only that man was connected with their destiny,”<sup>146</sup> corresponded to their expectation. What a freeing thing! Love is a judgment that is born of this correspondence. Even if I err, I know well what corresponds to me: Christ. Even if at times I prefer something else, I know where my fulfillment is. I love You for this, O Christ. I can stray from You, but I cannot leave You without losing myself.

For this reason, “Christian morality is a revolution on earth, because it is not a list of laws, but love for being. You can do wrong a thousand times and you will always be forgiven, you will always be picked up and you can start your journey again, if [pay attention, he says ‘if’!] your heart takes up that *yes* again.” Christian morality is not mechanical or automatic; it does not mean that everything is equal, because it demands a condition: that your heart take up that *yes* again. “What is important in that ‘Yes, Lord, I love You’ is a striving of my whole person, determined by the awareness that Christ is God and by love for this Man who came for me. My whole awareness is determined by this, and I can go wrong a thousand times a day, and be afraid to lift up my head, but no one can take this certainty from me. I just pray the Lord, pray the Spirit to change me, to make me an imitator of Christ, so that my presence may become more like the presence of Christ Himself. [...] I can be scolded for a hun-

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

dred thousand errors, they can take me to court, the judge can send me to prison even without a trial, with blatant injustice, without asking whether or not I am guilty, but they cannot take this attachment from me, which keeps thrilling me with the desire for good; in other words, attachment to Him. Because the good is not ‘the good,’ but attachment to Him, [He is the good] following that face, His Presence, carrying His Presence everywhere, telling it to anyone and everyone, so that this Presence may dominate the world; for the end of the world will be the moment in which this Presence becomes evident to everyone.”<sup>147</sup>

Given the centrality of the point, and knowing that we, too, are stiff-necked, Fr. Giussani repeats, “This is the new morality. It is a love, not rules to follow. And evil is to offend the object of love or to forget it. You could humbly analyze all the pathways of a man’s life, and could quite rightly say, ‘this is bad, this is good,’ make a list of all the errors a man can make and put them in order, and then you would have a textbook on morality. But morality is in me, morality is that I love Him who made me and is here present. If this weren’t the case I could use morality exclusively for pressing my own advantage, and in any case it would lead to despair. You have to read the works of Pasolini or Pavese to understand this. But, there again, on the other hand, you only need to remember Judas.”<sup>148</sup>

But morality is in me, morality is that I love Him who made me and is here present; it is in me, in my whole “I.” It is stunning to see the radical and at the same time simple way Giussani shows how Christ fulfills the promise of a New Covenant announced by the prophets, of whom we spoke this morning. Let’s re-read Jeremiah. “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts [up to this point they were unfaithful, as if the law did not really live in their hearts]; I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”<sup>149</sup> Or Ezekiel, “I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.”<sup>150</sup>

At this point, an objection could arise. Fr. Giussani loves Jesus, but unfortunately I do not love Jesus the way he loves Him, as some have said.

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>149</sup> *Jer* 31:33.

<sup>150</sup> *Ez* 36:26-28.



“It is obvious that Giussani loves Jesus and I, instead, do not love Him this way.” Fr. Giussani responded, sweeping away all their excuses “Why do you object? What objection can you make? Why do you object, talking about what you may not have and what I may have? Why, what do you think I have? I have this *yes*, that’s all. It would not cost you an iota more than it costs me. Your objection misses the mark, or better, shows that you are just looking for an excuse, a pretext. Your self-evident, publicly acknowledged defects and errors [...] are only a pretext for not saying *yes* to Jesus. Saying *yes* to Jesus. [...] There is nothing simpler. ‘I don’t know how it is; I don’t know what it’s like. I know that I have to say *yes*. There is no way around saying *yes*.’ I could say *no*. I could have said it when I was seven years old. At the age of seven you can be so proud as to refuse to say *yes*. (When you are seven you can refuse.) It is even worse when you are fifteen. When you are twenty, *comme ci comme ça*. But afterwards, that is enough. You are simply, openly, consciously an impostor, or you say *yes*.”<sup>151</sup>

We have all sorts of misleading images of this *yes*. But to say it, no particular courage or ability are needed: you just have to give your consent to that affection that is born of Him. The *yes* is born of the unmistakable experience of correspondence. It flows from the acknowledgement of a Presence connected to your destiny. You just need the sincerity to acknowledge the experienced correspondence, to yield to the evidence of a unique gaze on your life. This is how God justifies Himself to our heart.

Having traveled this journey, now let’s try to compare God’s method testified to in the *yes* of Peter, and the method we use more or less consciously with ourselves and others. What do we think is the source of change in ourselves and others? What method do we use? What method do we discover ourselves using when we act? God’s method? If this is not the case, if this method does not prevail, we succumb to a dualism in which Peter’s *yes*, however admirable we may find it, is reduced to piety, devotion, religious sentimentalism, even spiritual isolation, and instead we use something “else” to live, to face the situation, relationships, and social and cultural life.

Giussani warned us about these things long ago, in 1977!: “For many of us, saying that salvation is Jesus Christ and that the liberation of life and of humanity here and beyond is continually bound to the encounter with Him has become a ‘spiritual’ concept.” “The concrete reality would be something else.”<sup>152</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Luigi Giussani, *L’attrattiva Gesù [The Attraction of Jesus]*, Bur, Milano 1999, pp. 203-05.

<sup>152</sup> L. Giussani, *Il rischio educativo [The Risk of Education]*, p. 63. (The Viterbo 1977 section was printed in the original Italian book, but not selected for the English translation.)

The dualism is seen in the change of method: we do without the particular history generated by Christ as method for transmitting the Christian conception of human beings, to kindle their adherence, their morality; and instead, we depend on something else. In other words, on the one hand we reduce the import of the encounter with Christ and on the other, we consequently entrust ourselves, with anxiety or presumption, to what we know, according to widely accepted ways of thinking.

In this way, it is as if the source of a new culture is our intelligent efforts at analysis and development, which can in no way be a particular history, or the *affectus* for a fact, for the event of Christ present. And when this happens, inevitably the criteria and the perspectives of judgment are altered by what the “supermarket” of the world offers us, even if we are not conscious of it. Having reduced the encounter to a spiritual inspiration or an emotion, we draw upon other sources for our gaze upon reality: this is how dualism works its way into our hearts.

Instead, “new knowledge and new morality,” insists Fr. Giussani, “have the same origin. For Simon, son of John, and for Paul, the origin of the new knowledge is identical to the origin of their new morality—a present Event.”<sup>153</sup>

The origin of a true culture and a new morality is an event, a particular point, a Presence full of attraction, and the attachment to it. To begin to realize this, just look with a minimum of sincerity at what has happened to each of us. It was not because of an effort we applied that we found ourselves acknowledging dimensions and depths of the human that we had not seen or we had rejected before. No effort of our own has made us capable of gestures we would not even have imagined before—it was because of an encounter, renewed over time, to which we have adhered.

The encounter with Christ through a certain human reality is what opened our eyes, expanded our reason, breaking through measures and prejudices, changing our way of treating everything. What has happened to us is the only way for those outside our companionship as well. Today we see clearly that insistence on Christian anthropology does not suffice to change our way of looking at people; simple repetition of the content of Christian morality does not suffice for changing our way of relating with reality. We had to wait for the Mystery to become flesh, for an encounter to happen in our life, because without His Presence, without the Presence of Christ here and now, Christian anthropology and Christian morality do not take root in us. Here it is decided whether we

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<sup>153</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 56.

follow what Christ has shown us or not. Often, ignoring how Christ does things, we think we can reach others in another way. Instead, the same fact that happened to us, that happened to Peter, has to happen to them, and they have to recognize and embrace it, as we did at the beginning of the journey. It cannot be different at any point on the path. This is the starting point for the imitation of God.

## 2. Imitating God

The experience of forgiveness and mercy that changes the features of our life, causes us to desire to do good. Fr. Giussani recounts, “When I did something wrong, my parents, God rest their souls, did not scold me or punish me. They forgave me. When this happens, whether you are a child or an adult, you feel the desire to do good.” You feel the desire! “The forgiveness that we already have within must manifest itself. It manifests itself from within us, from that depth in which we are born from Him, are born as freedom; it must manifest itself in my love for you. This will be the last day, when an unfathomable evidence will persuade everyone: immense pain will become eternal love.”<sup>154</sup>

The testimony of a friend in prison shows us that this is possible. “Dear friends, you have no idea how much you helped me one morning when I was returning to prison. I went in and like always, they searched me, a search that has little to do with being human, with dignity. They stripped me. What enabled me to stay in front of this trial was also your face, your good, and I told myself, ‘If what you shared with your friends is true, then even this trial, or better, this circumstance, is for me. There can be no circumstance that can rob me of the most important thing I carry inside me, that is, a gaze of gladness.’ So, in that moment you were my salvation. I embraced all of reality, even if it made me sad, not just for me, but above all for those who did it to me. But I understood that it wasn’t their fault. Where’s the fault in someone who has not had an encounter, who has not had someone to love him gratuitously and consequently taught him to love? How can he manage without a guide like this?! Where’s the fault in someone who doesn’t have a witness to follow who makes him understand what man is and above all why life is worth

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<sup>154</sup> *Guardare Cristo*, “Esercizi Spirituali della Fraternità di Comunione e Liberazione. Appunti dalle meditazioni” [di Luigi Giussani] [*Looking at Christ. The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Notes from the Meditations (by Luigi Giussani)*], suppl. To *Litterae communionis-CL*, n. 4, 1990, p. 28.

living? I looked at them with great tenderness, not because I liked being strip-searched or treated this way, no, not this. I looked at them with tenderness because if someone is always treated this way, he will consequently treat others the same way. His dignity was hurt first, and he acts accordingly with those he encounters!”

This is what happens, Fr. Giussani observes. “Through our astonishment at His mercy, He makes us desire to be like Him.” The Pope has invited us to live a Year of Mercy so that we will desire more and more to be like Christ. Fr. Giussani continues: “Even people who have no interest in the Church or in morality desire to be like Him! They begin really to forgive their enemies, those who do them harm; so we can understand how Job, before the enemies who had destroyed everything he had, could say, ‘The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ When we get up in the morning, feeling the forgiveness that renews our lives, we also feel like saying, ‘Lord, help me to be like You!’ For Jesus had already told His disciples, ‘Be merciful, as your heavenly Father is merciful.’ [This is the theme that the Pope has chosen for this Holy Year of Mercy—“Be merciful as your Father is merciful.”] This seems to go against good sense, but only up to a certain point, because it is desire that defines the soul of the new man. We are not truly human if we do not wish to be merciful like our heavenly Father. The question is whether or not we really desire it.” It is not whether we make mistakes or not: it is whether we desire to be merciful like our heavenly Father. “So the miracle of mercy is the desire to change. And this implies acceptance, because otherwise it would not be desire for change, but pretension and presumption, and it would never become entreaty to an Other, it would not be trust in an Other. This desire defines the present, the instant of the man who is a sinner. The miracle is accepting oneself and entrusting oneself to an Other present so as to be changed, standing before Him and begging.”<sup>155</sup>

For this reason, Fr. Giussani concludes, “Entreaty is the whole expression of man [...]. So there is no need to be afraid of anything, not even of yourself. And we feel like children whom the Father bends down to pick up. Man becomes truly a child held in his Father’s arms. A person in his poverty, astonished by the mysterious perfection of God, Father, Son and Spirit, asks to be like Him. And this is not a bold presumption, but a realistic, simple supplication like that of a child that is fully aware of itself.”<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, pp. 137-38.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

### 3. Our task: “To be for”

How do those who have lived an experience like that incarnated and described by Fr. Giussani understand their being in the world, their task in history?

In 1993, in the midst of the political and social crisis provoked by the *Tangentopoli* phenomenon, in which it seemed that everything in Italy was collapsing, Fr. Giussani was asked, “*What is the task of the Christian today? Rebuilding the world in the name of Christ?*” He responded, “The task is to communicate to the human nature that surrounds us the mercy with which Christ treats us.”<sup>157</sup>

It is surprising to see how Pope Francis’s attitude agrees completely with this. “Mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life. All of her pastoral activity should be caught up in the tenderness she makes present to believers; nothing in her preaching and in her witness to the world can be lacking in mercy.” And again, “The Church’s very credibility,” that is, the possibility of justifying herself to the world and us, “is seen in how she shows merciful and compassionate love. The Church has an endless desire to show mercy.” Perhaps “we have long since forgotten how to show and live the way of mercy. The temptation, on the one hand, to focus exclusively on justice made us forget that this is only the first, albeit necessary and indispensable step. But the Church needs to go beyond and strive for a higher and more important goal. On the other hand, sad to say, we must admit that the practice of mercy is waning in the wider culture. In some cases the word seems to have dropped out of use. However, without a witness to mercy, life becomes fruitless and sterile, as if sequestered in a barren desert. The time has come for the Church to take up the joyful call to mercy once more. It is time to return to the basics and to bear the weaknesses and struggles of our brothers and sisters. Mercy is the force that reawakens us to new life and instills in us the courage to look to the future with hope.”<sup>158</sup> As we can see, the Bull of Indiction of the Jubilee of Mercy offers a wealth of instruction for achieving our task in the world, according to the nature of Christianity.

Benedict XVI, in the interview quoted yesterday, mused on the deep reasons for this task, which Pope Francis senses so urgently today: “While the fathers and theologians of the Middle Ages could still be of

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<sup>157</sup> Luigi Giussani, *L’io, il potere, le opere* [The “I,” Power, Works], Marietti 1820, Genova, 2000, p. 227.

<sup>158</sup> Francis, *Bull of Indiction*, April 11, 2015, ¶ 10.

the opinion that, essentially, the whole human race had become Catholic and that paganism existed now only on the margins, the discovery of the New World at the beginning of the modern era radically changed perspectives. In the second half of the last century it has been fully affirmed the understanding that God cannot let go to perdition all the unbaptized and that even a purely natural happiness for them does not represent a real answer to the question of human existence. If it is true that the great missionaries of the 16th century were still convinced that those who are not baptized are forever lost—and this explains their missionary commitment—in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council that conviction was finally abandoned. From this came a deep double crisis. On the one hand this seems to remove any motivation for a future missionary commitment. Why should one try to convince the people to accept the Christian faith when they can be saved even without it? If you can be saved without faith, it is no longer obvious why we should continue engaging in missionary activity. “But also for Christians an issue emerged: the obligatory nature of the faith and its way of life began to seem uncertain and problematic. If there are those who can save themselves in other ways, it is not clear, in the final analysis, why the Christian himself is bound by the requirements of the Christian faith and its morals. If faith and salvation are no longer interdependent, faith itself becomes unmotivated.”<sup>159</sup>

Only the audacity of Benedict XVI can pose questions of this caliber. Let’s begin with the last question: why is it worthwhile to be Christians today, if salvation can be achieved in other ways? What justification of our faith can we give ourselves? This is the biggest challenge we can receive.

We must verify the reasons we have for remaining Christian now, in this moment of history. This is what Fr. Giussani told us: if Christian faith is not a present experience, confirmed by it, if I cannot find in my experience the confirmation that it is worth my while in human terms to be Christian, my faith will not be able to survive in a world where everything points in the opposite direction.<sup>160</sup> Has an encounter happened in our lives in which Christ showed Himself as the answer to the urgent

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<sup>159</sup> “Interview with His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in Italian in *Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali* [Through Faith: Doctrine of Justification and Experience of God in the Preaching of the Church and the Spiritual Exercises]. Available in English translation online at <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/full-text-of-benedict-xvis-recent-rare-and-lengthy-interview-26142/>

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, p. 11 (see note 16).

needs of our humanity? Can we say because of this, that without Christ we lack the crucial thing for living, the dearest thing? Do we have an adequate reason for adhering to Christ? We need to discover that we are free in front of Him, free to love Him freely as Péguy said: “To that liberty, [...] I have sacrificed everything, God says, to that taste I have for being loved by free men, freely.”<sup>161</sup>

At this point we can ask the other question: what is our mission, our task in the world? The historical circumstance we are living in demands that we try to understand better the nature of our being Christians in the world. Benedict XVI reminds us that “the *pro-existence* (“being for”) of Christ is the expression of the fundamental figure of the Christian existence and of the Church as such. [...] Christ, as the unique One, was and is for all, and Christians, who in Paul’s awesome imagery make up Christ’s body in this world, thus participate in this ‘*being-for*.’” Christians, Benedict continues, “are not so for themselves, but are, with Christ, for others. This does not mean having some sort of special ticket for entering into eternal happiness, but rather the vocation to build the whole. What the human person needs in order to be saved is a profound openness with regards to God, a profound expectation and acceptance of Him, and this correspondingly means that we, together with the Lord whom we have encountered, go towards others and seek to make visible to them the advent of God in Christ.”<sup>162</sup>

This makes clear God’s design and why He chose us, giving us His grace: He brought about all that we spoke of today through the history of Israel to the coming of Christ, so that already now, in the present, we might live the fullness to which our hearts aspire, and so that through this fullness we make His Presence known in the world. Maybe now it is clearer to us why Giussani considered Peter’s *yes* to be crucial for building a new protagonist in the world. All of God’s, all of Christ’s, effort is to generate Peter, a man who with his *yes* could testify to Him in the world, an “I” that could “be for” all the others. Without this there would not

<sup>161</sup> See text above, at note 11.

<sup>162</sup> “Interview with His Holiness Emeritus Pope Benedict XVI on the Doctrine of Justification by Faith,” in Italian in *Dottrina della giustificazione ed esperienza di Dio nella predicazione della Chiesa e negli Esercizi Spirituali* [Through Faith: Doctrine of Justification and Experience of God in the Preaching of the Church and the Spiritual Exercises], ed. Daniele Libanori, pp. 135-36 (italics added). The quotations in this paragraph are from a paragraph of the interview that was omitted in the *Osservatore Romano* translation. The translation offered here was published by Catholic World Report and approved by the interviewer, Fr. Servais. [http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/4656/english\\_translations\\_of\\_benedict\\_xvis\\_recent\\_interview\\_missing\\_important\\_section.aspx](http://www.catholicworldreport.com/Blog/4656/english_translations_of_benedict_xvis_recent_interview_missing_important_section.aspx).

be the human face of mercy in history. The goal of God's initiative is to generate an "I" that can make Him present, then as now. Consequently, the task of the Church can be none other than what we have seen God do throughout history.

"This great friendship [of ours], in which the truth planted in the world by the mystery of the death and resurrection of the Lord is actualized, reaches out toward the world. The destiny, the deep intention of the Christian community is the world, 'for women and men' [Fr. Giussani says]: a profound and passionate dedication to women and men and their destinies, a striving to make present the Fact of Jesus Christ, the one salvation of the human person, within the fabric of normal shared living, in which people suffer, hope, strive, deny, and await the ultimate meaning of things. Being 'for women and men' is the exhaustive reason for the life of the Christian community in history. The unconditional openness to mission is the guarantee of the truth and authenticity of the very life of the Christian community. 'And I consecrate Myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.'"<sup>163</sup>

Fr. Giussani names two fundamental factors affecting Christians' "*being for the world*." "The first is love of the Fact of Jesus Christ as the one true motivation for every attempt and every presence. 'But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us.'" And the second is, "the love of our sisters and brothers, given by the Father. The community has a great law in its relationship with the people it encounters: to give itself to them in order to free them from all misery, and enable them to hope only in the salvation that comes from God. The historicity of the Christian reality, which lives her mission in the world, is accomplished through a profusion of opportunities. [...] But it is not possible to be on the road of the people of our times, to be an echo of this presence and a place for this encounter and for this deep liberation from limit and from evil, except through untiring *sharing* of the situation of need in which people find themselves, because the authentic basis of all need is the cry, more often than not unaware of its desire, to God who has become man like us, to rip us away from the power of our evil."<sup>164</sup>

Fr. Giussani concludes, "Knowledge of the power of Jesus Christ is the profound reason for all our gestures of social presence and communication to the world. But this unique and very original motivation only

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<sup>163</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar and Luigi Giussani, *L'impegno del cristiano nel mondo [The Christian's Commitment in the World]*, Jaca Book, Milano, 1978, pp. 167-68.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 168-70.



becomes evident in the testimony of a passion for the human person, charged with acceptance of the concrete situation, and thus ready for any risk and effort.”<sup>165</sup>

This morning we reviewed the great and long road that God designed in time—from the choice of Abraham to the coming of Christ, passing through the continual stumbles of His people—to generate the *yes* of Peter. This “being for” that is born of Peter’s *yes* is captured in an effective and persuasive way in the *Letter to Diognetus*. Imagine the early Church in the first centuries, spreading throughout the vast Roman Empire: “The Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. [...] But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined, and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life. [...] To sum up all in one word—what the soul is in the body, Christians are in the world. The soul is dispersed through all the members of the body, and Christians are scattered through all the cities of the world.”<sup>166</sup>

As we have seen in *Why the Church*, the early Christians, living in the context of the Roman Empire, had a lively awareness of being without any pretense to hegemony. This awareness was not based on any merit of their own and became the sign that made the newness of Christ present in the world!

With an acute perception of the epochal challenge facing the faith, then-Cardinal Ratzinger said in 1991—the Berlin Wall had fallen just two years before—“So then, what must the Church or the Churches do in this context? I would say that they should first of all be truly themselves, once and for all.” To carry out this task, he concludes, “the Church must be willing to suffer, must prepare the road to the divine not with instruments of power but in obedience to the Spirit, not with the efficacy of its institutional structures, but [pay attention!] through testimony, love, her own living and suffering, and so help society to find its authentic moral physiognomy.”<sup>167</sup> Impressive! Isn’t this perhaps the same task Pope Francis indicated to us at the Florence Conference?

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>166</sup> “Letter to Diognetus,” V, VI, in *The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus*, available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0101.htm>

<sup>167</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Svolta per l’Europa. Chiesa e modernità nell’Europa dei rivolgimenti [A Turning Point for Europe. The Church and Modernity in Europe in a Phase of Upheaval]*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi), 1992, pp. 142, 144.

Fr. Giussani was a father to us and continues to accompany us in the increasingly conscious experience of a great joy that we cannot keep to ourselves but rather want to share with our sisters and brothers. “Testifying to the faith is the task of our life,” he says. “Because the Christian has a specific task in life, which is not the exercise of a given profession, but faith: to testify to the faith, to testify to it in our own state of life. You have your family, your profession, but ‘the’ task is to testify to your faith. For this we have been chosen. [...] In this way we express our personality, not as priests, not as nuns, not as workers, or as professionals, or as parents, but as Christians, no matter what activity we do: affirming that salvation is already present, and showing it, testifying to it in front of everyone.”<sup>168</sup>

So then, here is the attitude with which the Christian enters into relationship with everyone and everything. “Only if you are totally possessed by a love [that fulfills life, that makes us experience fullness], only if you acknowledge that you belong to the love of Christ ‘brimming over with peace,’ are we like children who walk without fear in a dark forest. It is the Event of Christ that creates the new culture and gives rise to true criticism. Valuing the good in all things, however little or however much, commits us to create a new civilization, to love a new construction. Thus a new culture is born, as the bond uniting all the fragments of good that are found, in striving to give them importance and to make them work. You stress the positive, despite its limitations, and you leave the rest to the Father’s mercy.”<sup>169</sup>

Is there anything more liberating and peace-giving than this humble certainty, the source of a positive gaze on everything and everyone?

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<sup>168</sup> Giussani, *In Search of the Human Face*, p. 129 (see note 53).

<sup>169</sup> Giussani, Alberto, and Prades, *Generating Traces*, p. 117.

# *Sunday, May 1, morning*

*During entrance and exit:*

*Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, Russian Easter Festival, op. 36*

*Ernest Ansermet - L'Orchestre de la Suisse Romande,*

*"Spirto Gentil" n. 29, Decca*

**Don Pino.** When we get up in the morning, when we prepare—as we are doing now all together or in our homes alone, with our wives, our husbands, our children, maybe in a bit of a rush—to say the *Angelus*, that is, to welcome the annunciation of the Angel, the announcement of this reality in history that in a few hours will return once again to being “family”, in thousands of homes. In order to avoid superficiality and formalism, let’s keep in mind what Julián spoke of yesterday; Giussani’s simple questions in front of the objections that can arise and persist in us. “Why do you object? What objection can you make? Why do you object, talking about what you may not have and what I may have? Why, what do you think I have? I have this *yes*, that’s all. It would not cost you an iota more than it costs me.”

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayer*

## ■ ASSEMBLY

**Davide Proserpi.** Having reached this concluding moment of the Exercises, as we do every year, we will have an assembly based on the numerous questions that we have received—obviously we had to pick just some of them—and begin a work that will continue in the coming weeks and months, this summer, of reflecting on what has been proposed to us this weekend. In these days we have all experienced what has been proposed, which is much more than simple words. For this reason, in introducing the assembly I will allow myself to make a few very brief and succinct observations, some of which are also personal, based on our lived experience of these days.

The first consideration is that the great majority of questions concentrated on the content of the second lesson. This is already a significant fact, to my mind, because normally the first lesson is the one we

have more time to review; we have more of a chance to work on it. This already shows that what happened has struck us deeply. So then, before moving on to these questions, I wanted to say, at least from my point of view, why we are so struck by what has happened. The first thing that emerges is a great and dominating sense of gratitude, not just because we have listened to some useful and deep reflections that are pertinent to what we deem most interesting or that we feel to be more urgent, considering this moment in the Church. I would venture to say the main reason is that we have been accompanied on an incredible journey to enter into the heart of God, into what each of us feels, maybe without actually articulating it, to be the hope for life; that there is a Destiny for us that has a face entirely determined by a gaze of mercy on our nothingness. It is peace given to children. This already corresponds to an experience we have, because if we are here, more or less consciously, it is because this Destiny has reached us with a gaze. He has convinced us, that is, He has bound us to Himself definitively. And this happened freely, not because we merited it—at least I did not merit it.

Obviously, many questions concentrated on the theme of mercy, in particular on the relationship between mercy and justice, which we will deal with shortly. This is significant because it shows us—excuse me for being frank—how we find it difficult to follow, how we remain anchored to our images, because basically, our idea of justice is just like everyone else's: a scale. Instead, in these days we have been invited to start out from our experience, and not an idea. If we look at our experience, paradoxically, we would have to say that God's method is "an injustice," given what we've been told. What is more unjust, according to the human way of measuring, than the Father's preference? In fact, this is the reason for the world's hatred. We are the objects of this preference. We have been chosen, as was said this weekend, to be like Him in the world. What is truer? To prefer the One who prefers us this way, or to remain bound to our idea of justice? So then, it is beautiful to recover the gusto of following, of following this history, because this helps us more than anything else to understand what our task in the world is. So then, let's begin with the questions.

"Why has it become so unbelievable that a particular event can be the salvation of the human person?"

***Julián Carrón.*** Precisely because of what you were saying just now: we forget that the point of departure of any understanding is always experience and that this is the simplest way—the only one, in truth—to

understand. The Mystery made things so well that, to introduce us to the understanding of everything—as I often remind you—He does not give us a lesson: He makes something happen. As Fr. Giussani—a man who followed with eyes wide open the way the Mystery does things—always repeated to us, “Reality makes itself evident in experience.”<sup>170</sup> To make us understand what love is, instead of giving us a theoretical lesson, God causes us to be born in a place where we can experience it: the family. We enter into the reality of love through the experience of being loved. Then He has us fall in love or become friends. Even though this has been the road we have traveled since we were born, we struggle to *truly* experience it, and this is one of the hardest battles Fr. Giussani had to fight with us. We think that to experience something means to try it, in a sentimental, ephemeral—albeit real—way. Instead, as Fr. Giussani told us from the beginning, there is no experience without awareness of what happens to us, and therefore, without realizing that we have grown.

All of us find ourselves immersed in one way or another in relationships and circumstances, involved in a variety of situations, and in this sense we have experience of living. But this is not enough for it to be a fully realized experience. There must be intelligence about what happens to us, so that it enters into building our gaze on reality, has an impact on our mind-set, changes it. This is the meaning of the line by Guitton that we have always quoted, “a reasonable person is one who submits reason to experience.”<sup>171</sup> But this, my friends, I’m sorry to say, is work. I cannot spare you this work. Each of you must do it yourself, otherwise what you live will leave no trace in you and will not make you grow. Through this work we can understand what Fr. Giussani said—which really stunned me—as he began explaining Peter’s *yes*: a particular history is the keystone of the Christian understanding of the human person and of our morality. But if we look at our experience, and this is the point, didn’t exactly this happen? A particular history, a specific encounter, changed our life.

If we had to say what most determined our life, our salvation, all of us here would have to say that it was a particular event, an encounter. However, to the degree to which we have not become aware of it,

<sup>170</sup> Luigi Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo [From Temperament A Method]*, Bur, Milano, 2002, p. 143.

<sup>171</sup> Translated from Jean Guitton, *Arte nuova di pensare*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo, 1991, p. 71. Original edition, *Nouvel Art de Penser*, Paris, Aubier-Montaigne, 1946.

it becomes “unbelievable” for us, as well that a particular event can be the salvation of the human person. It is because we have not realized that that particular event saved us, that is, we have not realized the cognitive importance of the encounter we have had. Those who become conscious of this begin to understand. The experience that I have in the present enables me to comprehend why God behaved as we have recalled during these days. In other words, we can realize all the importance of the design of God through that particular, detailed, and decisive event that happened to us.

We had at our disposition all the books of all the libraries, all the great discoveries—add what you like—but what changed our life was a particular story. Why did God choose this method? Why did He not act differently? This is what amazes us. Why did He not spare us the journey of life, creating us, as it were, directly in eternal life? Because it would have been a salvation that was not freely chosen. Would any of you like a salvation that is not freely chosen? Let’s see, then, how questions begin to emerge that enable us to understand why God behaved in a certain way with the human person: God wants a freely chosen salvation for us, as Péguy said—the quote we heard will remain forever a call to this—“To that liberty, [...] I have sacrificed everything, God says, to that taste I have for being loved by free men, freely.”<sup>172</sup>

Would any of you want to be loved in a way that was not free? Since God has no less taste than we do, He also likes to be loved by free people, freely. But in order to be loved by people freely, there is only one way: a preference, which means loving one by one, challenging the freedom of each person through a particular story. As we have seen, this amazed everyone, beginning with the disciples. “Master, (then) what happened that You will reveal Yourself to us and not to the world?” they asked Jesus. And Benedict XVI added, “Why, indeed, did you not forcefully resist your enemies [...]? Why did You not show them with incontrovertible power that you are the Living One [...]?” Deep down, this is what all of us think. “Why did You not show them with incontrovertible power?” God had every chance to do so. We think we do not impose anything because we do not have the possibility, but if we had it... Instead, He could have done it! And He did not do it, did not impose Himself on us. Maybe He did not love us? He did not love the world? He did not love women and men? On the contrary, out of infinite love for the human person, our freedom, God acted as He

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<sup>172</sup> Péguy, *The Mystery of the Holy Innocents, and Other Poems*, p. 121 (see note 11).

did. “It is part of the mystery of God that He acts so gently, that He only gradually builds up *His* history within the great history of mankind,” we have said with Benedict XVI. It is in the divine style “not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love,”<sup>173</sup> that is, generate a creature who loves Him freely.

Let’s help each other grow in our desire to love Christ freely, motivated by the gusto of loving Him now. “I’ve erred up to a few minutes ago, but now—now!—I say to You, with all my capacity for affection: ‘You, Christ,’ freely.” This is worth more than all the things we could do formally, because saying “You, Christ” is the expression of freedom. But an “I” that is free, that loves freely, is awakened only by a particular event, and this is why God has always started out from this point in His relationship with us. To us it seems too little, too fragile. But, as Benedict XVI asked, doesn’t this show His power?<sup>174</sup> Isn’t this the way God demonstrates that He is certain of His design for us, and that He loves us unconditionally? He awaits us, always awaits us, so that we can reach Him freely.

**Prosperi.** “Can you clarify what it means to say that without presence there is no moral gesture?”

**Carrón.** It is what we said before. Let’s look at some examples from daily life. Think of your children and their relationship with their mother. Without that presence, the child is always at the mercy of his whims. What slowly but surely causes his “I” to emerge and adhere to being (which is the substance of morality)? The presence of his mother. The first gesture that shows the morality of the child is his attachment to his mother. Through the relationship with his mother the child develops attachment to reality, love for being, morality. The deep-rooted love of his mother kindles in the child his original capacity for affirmation of being. So then, it suffices to observe how morality arises in your children to understand that no preaching, no calls to moral behavior, can substitute for the deep-rooted love of the mother, that is, the presence. A presence generates morality and causes us to emerge from our shell, our isolation, our individualism, our perception of being the masters of reality. When people fall in love, they are provoked to adhere again to being. They find a presence so attractive that they cannot avoid an adherence

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<sup>173</sup> See text above, pp. 4-7.

<sup>174</sup> “And if we really think about it, is it not what seems so small that is truly great?” Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: Holy Week*, p. 276.

that then extends in all directions. When God wanted to give the human person a hand, He did not use any method other than the one each of us, from the child to the person in love, has experienced as adequate, the only method that we can understand. What did God do? He became flesh to awaken our love for Him and in this way generate our morality. This is why the story of Peter is so meaningful.

Nothing explains better what morality is than looking at Peter. Peter is the emblem of each of us, so impetuous, so prone to err, so quick to react. But none of this was an obstacle for him, because he met a Presence and became more and more attached to Him. Without that Presence, Peter would have been a floating mine, at the mercy of his own whims, like each of us. Fr. Giussani, knowing full well our nature, knowing how we are made, grasped the true import of this particular story of Peter and set it before our eyes. There is no chance of a true morality, no chance of a fully realized attachment to being, except through a Presence that evokes all our capacity for affection through a preference. The problem of morality concerns the capacity for affection, that is, the capacity to adhere to the presence that is evoked by the Presence itself, as in the example of the child. Therefore Fr. Giussani states that without the Presence of Christ, the *yes* of Peter could not take root. It is crucial to understand this: our good intentions, our self-recriminations, and our rage do not enable us to progress on a moral journey. Returning to that Presence does. Otherwise, even though experience tells us one thing, we yield to the common mentality, and think we will become moral more quickly by following the world and its frameworks, as if the experience we have lived in the relationship with Jesus had not introduced us into a new world.

So then, it is worthwhile to return to that page of Fr. Giussani's dedicated to the *yes* of Peter until it becomes ours, that is, until eternal life! We will never fully plumb its depths: only once we are fully attached to Him will we fully understand it. We need to start from this over and over again, because there is always the temptation to say, "OK, I know this already, but in this circumstance I..." Is there anything simpler than what we said about the child with his mother, which becomes fully and definitively true with Jesus? His Presence is so attractive, from the core of our being attractive, that it necessarily rekindles all our affection. It is simple! But we, too, must be simple! Often it seems we think all this is lovely but insufficient, that it does not work in the vicissitudes of life, and so we return to thinking like everyone else, entrusting ourselves to everyone's illusory solutions.



**Prosperi.** The next question dovetails perfectly with what you just said. “Saying ‘Yes, Lord, I love You’ is simple when the person who asks you the question has the unmistakable features of Jesus. But when you are asked the question by a circumstance or a person that you find difficult, this affirmation no longer springs to your lips. So then, what does it mean that our *yes* is enough? Today, who asks me the question, ‘Do you love Me?’”

**Carrón.** Jesus! Jesus always asks you the question, “Do you love Me?” None of the rest matters. Jesus always asks you the question, “Do you love Me, now?” Think about what our prisoner friend told us. When they strip-search him and treat him in a way that is not human, the affection for Jesus rekindled in him enables him to live that circumstance with an ultimate positivity—it is entirely determined by the way Jesus looks at him. That man looks with tenderness upon the people he has to deal with because he says *yes* to Christ. “Do you love Me?” “Yes.” If it is not true when someone treats me badly, then it is not true. It is not that once this has happened to us, everybody should treat us badly. We certainly do not hope that others will treat us badly, but we have to acknowledge that those who have been reached by Christ’s embrace and accept Him can have a gaze full of tenderness even on those who harm them. And, according to a design that we do not know, it can happen that others are struck by the way a person formed by the Presence of Jesus looks at them and treats them. We may not believe it, but it is true.

What best helps us to love Christ fully and therefore to love others in this way? A place, participating in a place that educates us to this. The Christian companionship, the Movement, exists for this. In this regard, Fr. Giussani’s words about the Fraternity are significant. “How come people join together to form a Fraternity? I have always said that the first criterion for joining together is to facilitate living the experience of faith which the Movement gives us.” This facilitation is not necessarily best fostered where there is nearness or where there are “factors of human attraction so strong that they overturn the call to the ideal (affection or interest, for example).” To the contrary, this could be a disadvantage “operatively.” “So then,” continues Giussani, “here we see the advantage of a nearness created not because there is an attraction, not because there is something to be gained: a nearness of persons who accept each other as a school, a school for loving others, for learning to love others, for learning to live a companionship that makes us move forward towards our destiny, so that, learning there [with those people], we return

to where there is a prevailing natural attraction (like the family!) or aversion, constant annoyance (like the family!) [or work] and we learn to look at others in a different way, working through likes and dislikes.”<sup>175</sup>

If we did not have a place where we are constantly invited to learn to love in this way, to recognize that we are together not simply because of flesh and blood, because of natural likes and dislikes, but because of He who has made us one, we will never be able to go to other places and live the relationship with everyone differently. The result of indwelling in this place is that, “then,” as Fr. Giussani underlines, “the first place where one truly lives this charity is in the family, one’s wife or husband.” But this happens as a consequence, a “then.” In fact, for this to happen, “a certain road is needed. The rule is precisely the companionship of persons who join together for this one purpose—in that sense, they could be people who have never seen each other before; in fact, if this purpose is clear, their initial lack of connection makes the task easier. On the other hand, already knowing each other, already liking each other, already being friends facilitates the joining together, even sincerely, for this purpose, but from the operational point of view it also has the disadvantages that I mentioned earlier in terms of the family. Therefore,” Fr. Giussani concludes, “the choice of the Fraternity is the perfect analogy with someone who enters a convent. Why does someone go into a cloister? Not because he likes the habit or because the cloister is more tranquil than the world, or because he likes to study, because he likes the devotional life, he likes to pray, he likes to hear singing, or because he will be taken care of in his old age. No, it is not because of these things. Someone goes into a convent or a monastery because he wants a companionship, he chooses a companionship that helps him go all the way in his love for Christ, in living his belonging to Christ and testifying to the world. He goes for this, otherwise he makes a mistake. He can make a mistake. He can go in by mistake and can purify himself by staying.”<sup>176</sup>

If we are here for this reason, we may experience the same thing as our prisoner friend, who began to love people even when there was no natural liking. This place, our Fraternity, introduces us to an entirely different way of living, even family, even friendship, even the relationship with strangers.

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<sup>175</sup> Luigi Giussani, *The Work of the Movement. The Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, Società Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2005, pp. 169-70.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

**Prosperi.** Now there are three questions on the relationship between mercy and justice.

“What is the relationship between mercy and justice? Does forgiving mean covering over everything?”

“How do you reconcile mercy with the need for justice?”

“What is the nexus between our need for justice and mercy? Can mercy be the foundation for civil co-existence?”

**Carrón.** Truth is not relative. Mercy does not obscure judgment and is not an alternative to it, so the idea that everything is equal cannot pass. We recognize this right away—there is something that corresponds and something that does not correspond. It is objective. Certainly, we could settle, we could cover over what we want to, but it will never truly correspond. The truth is the truth. We all know when we do something that corresponds and when we do something that does not correspond for us. However, once we have made a judgment and recognized how things stand, we have to identify what sets us in motion, what enables us to start anew, to begin afresh, to change. I’ll give two examples.

When I was the principal of a school in Madrid, there was a student of mine who did whatever he wanted to. He was also my friend, a member of the Movement with me. However, he had far overstepped all the possible and imaginable bounds, and it came to the point that after a thousand efforts, a decision had to be made. The other teachers were watching me, to see how I would act. “Just wait and see,” they said to each other, “he won’t do anything, because that boy is in the Movement” as if in the name of our common belonging, *a priori*, I had to cover over all of his screw-ups. Well, I expelled him from the school.

As the school principal, I was able to make that decision about a friend of the Movement only because the bond that had formed between us was infinitely stronger than any disciplinary action. What struck everybody? What was the surprise? This fellow enrolled in a school near ours, and during the break one day he came to spend some time with us. After having been expelled! Acting according to mercy does not mean covering over any and all behavior, but at the same time it does mean refusing to treat the person as if the mistake was the determining factor of your relationship. We can be free to speak frankly to each other because there is something deeper, a bond deeper than all our mistakes. This does not mean that just because we are friends and are very fond of each other that everything is equal. No, this would mean not being friends, not loving the friend’s destiny. At times you can talk to someone

about something that is not right in his way of acting, but this does not block the type of relationship that offers the other the opportunity to travel his road to reach the goal. That student of mine, to whom nobody would have given a dollar, earned his university degree because of the way he felt valued, regardless of the mistakes he had made. In this sense, at times you have to make uncomfortable decisions, like mine back then, that show how much we care about the destiny of the other.

I'd like to give you an example of this deep bond that can be formed between people on the level of civil co-existence, which I heard from Julián de la Morena. In Brazil there are particular prisons without guards or weapons, managed according to the method of the APAC association that gets directors and prisoners involved with each other. Access to these prisons is open to all offenders regardless of their sentence, even 25, 30 years or longer. It was observed that if the method was applied well, it enabled the recovery of any prisoner, regardless of the crime committed. The judge responsible for the area of jurisdiction of Itaúna, where one of these prisons is located, recounts, "I remember a prisoner who arrived at the APAC of Itaúna. He was sentenced to 40 years for crimes committed in different areas of the jurisdiction. He arrived in Itaúna for a crime committed in this territory. He was young and very strong, and had managed to escape from all the prisons he'd been sent to. He had been serving his sentence for two years, and still had not escaped from this prison. A journalist from the court came to the APAC to film an instructional video and asked him, "José, [that was his name] you escaped from all the prisons and they had prison guards, but you haven't escaped from this APAC [where there are no armed guards], why?" José gave one of the most provocative answers I've ever heard: "Because nobody escapes from love."<sup>177</sup>

***Prosperi.*** Jean Valjean!<sup>178</sup>

"In the relationships between us adults and children we normally have a 'measured' regard for freedom, above all when we are convinced that a person is making a mistake. From what you said today, it is evident how differently God treats adults and our freedom. So then, what does it mean to educate without evading our responsibility? What can help us look at the freedom of the kids the way God looks at mine?"

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<sup>177</sup> From an interview with Paulo Antônio de Carvalho, conducted in preparation for the exhibit at the Meeting of Rimini 2016 on the Brazilian experience of the APAC (*Associação de Proteção e Assistência aos Condenados*), the Association for the Protection and Assistance of Prisoners, which operates in a number of prisons in Brazil.

<sup>178</sup> The main character of *Les Misérables* by Victor Hugo.

**Carrón.** This is a question we all ask. I had to ask it of myself when I taught in Madrid. What was my responsibility to these kids? Was it necessary to set limits or could I let them be? This is not easy to answer, because most of the time one thing does not exclude the other. Letting the students be does not mean not doing anything. I confess that I was relieved to realize God had already resolved this problem. Facing a problem very similar to the one teachers have, what did God do? How did He leave us freedom and at the same time press us to acknowledge Him? He became a Presence. To answer this problem, He became flesh. Some may consider this insufficient, but it is what God did, and it will challenge all of us for the rest of our lives. Everything began with God's method, His gentle style.

For this reason, educating means being a presence in front of the other person. There is no education without presence, a presence able to fascinate the other, to move the other deep down. This is very different from covering over everything the other does, at one extreme, and from taking no interest at all on the other. If we think we can educate without presence, without being there with our whole selves, with a method that does not involve us, we are off the track! Only when we involve ourselves in the first person with the other can we become a presence that captivates, that evokes the free involvement of the other. It happens with children, students, everyone, and it happened first of all to us. To answer this question, you just need to avoid losing yourself in theories and ask yourself what helps us, and verify whether the way you behave with your children is the one that helps you, who are adults. Maybe we will begin to understand why God uses the method He uses. As Fr. Giussani told us, "the hypothesis, the ideal, is incarnated in the witness (in the educator), because education is a communication of self, that is, of the way I live the relationship with reality."<sup>179</sup>

During these days a mother was telling me how she was thinking about where they could have their children stay so they could go on the community vacation. Her ten-year-old heard all her ideas and said, "no, no, no, I want to come on the vacation!" What did he see that would make him want to go on the vacation? A winning attraction. There is no other way to evoke that desire. We have said that there is no morality, no attachment, except as a response to a presence. None of the rest is able to move the freedom of the human person. Attraction is crucial for

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<sup>179</sup> Cf. Giussani, "Viterbo 1977," in *Il rischio educativo [The Risk of Education]*, p. 84 (see note 152).

provoking attachment. Together with this, it is necessary to constantly invite our children to realize that they have a detector inside themselves (with which the Mystery put them in the world; the Mystery, not us!) that allows them to recognize what corresponds and what does not correspond: the heart, elementary experience. We adults should always challenge them to use their hearts as a detector. In fact, they may still follow you, but if you do not accustom them from a tender age to use the capacity they have originally to recognize what is true, and if you do not provoke them to realize that they have within themselves that capacity, once they become big, if they have not been educated to judge, they will be more easily at the whim of the first person who passes by on the road. If we do not educate them to judgment, we will suffer the consequences, because they will grow and will have to do their own verification.

**Prosperi.** “You said that in Simon, the wonder of this instinctive affection and preference dominated and was more decisive than all his errors. Can you explain better what this affection is?”

“You spoke about affection for Christ. Where does this affection come from? How can we grow in affection for Christ today? How can we love a person we cannot see? Is it necessary to feel affection for a sign? Do we learn to love Christ by loving people and signs?”

**Carrón.** One of the most beautiful things I read yesterday by Fr. Giussani concerns this question. “This man, Jesus, has a very simple human characteristic: He is a man from whom emanates a human *vibration of affection* and so morality, that is, the victory over nihilism, does not mean making no mistakes, never erring, but, even making mistakes, even erring, in the end you hear: ‘Simon, do you love Me?’ and you answer, ‘Yes, Lord, I love You.’ ‘Yes Lord, I want to be with You and this human affection that emanates from You, Jesus of Nazareth. Count me in.’<sup>180</sup> Christ is a Presence that attracts our emotion, that can draw all our instinctive affection. What attracted us in the encounter? In order to answer, each of us must return to what happened to us. What attracted you? At the beginning and during the journey, until now, what attracted and still attracts you? It was and will always be a grace, something that comes before your initiative. Fr. Giussani reminded us about this: the initial, original phenomenon, the

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<sup>180</sup> Luigi Giussani, “La virtù dell’amicizia o: dell’amicizia di Cristo” [The Virtue of Friendship, or Of the Friendship of Christ], *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, n. 4, April 1996, pp. IV-V.

reason I remained and we remain attracted, is “something that comes first,” running up against a Presence that is different, that we did not create and that corresponds to the expectant awaiting that constitutes the heart.<sup>181</sup> God’s initiative always comes before any initiative of ours. How does affection for Christ begin in us? It begins through the instinctive affection that Christ generates in us.

No matter what kind of character you have, Peter’s experience shows how affection for Christ begins in us; his story illuminates the origin. Peter’s affection for Jesus began because Peter found himself in front of a Presence that drew his whole being. He made mistakes, and started again, made mistakes, made more mistakes, yet could not help but start afresh; even making a thousand mistakes, he never left. Affection is born through following that attraction. This is the birth of morality. Morality is very simple: opting for an affection, a human affection, human like the vibration of affection a mother feels for her child and the child for her. It is a matter of choosing to *be* with this affection, to follow this affection. It is very simple. And yet we object: “We’re always talking about this!” as if there was something more substantial we should be talking about. Or, “OK, but we are not in front of Jesus the way Peter was.” This objection, implicit in the second part of the last question, is a different problem. It is the problem of faith. We do not recognize Christ present through all He does in front of our eyes. So then, I understand the objection very well. But we are in front of Christ exactly the way Peter was. We’re not in the minor leagues compared to him! The problem is that often we do not recognize Him.

Peter saw a great abundance of miracles that left him full of wonder. What are the amazing stories we tell each other as soon as we sit down at table or when we are together, if not the way Christ shows Himself present in our midst? If we were conscious of this, we would understand that Jesus’s reproach of the cities by the lake that had seen many miracles would be nothing compared to the reproach we might receive: in fact, the people of those cities did not see anything compared to what we see continually.<sup>182</sup> Jesus is not up in the clouds. He is happening right in front of our eyes! In recent months, the gatherings for School of Community have reported this with overflowing richness:

<sup>181</sup> Cf. Luigi Giussani, “From Faith, the Method,” suppl. to *Traces*, vol. 11, n. 6, 2009, p. 21. Available at <http://english.clonline.org/whatiscl/default.asp?id=635>

<sup>182</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented in sackcloth and ashes.” (*Mt* 11:21).

the stories and testimonies have shown Jesus, not His double, at work in very different ways. All that we see and tell each other cannot be explained except as the Presence of Christ, who in this way causes us to become ever more attached to Him. But you have to recognize Him. Unfortunately, often we do not recognize Him.

This is why I wrote the article at Christmas,<sup>183</sup> relating the story about the Pakistani man who realized the import of our gestures more than we did. Treated with human kindness, he broke down into tears, and we comment, “Doesn’t his reaction seem a bit excessive?” The problem is that we often reduce what we see, and then say we are not in front of the Presence of Christ. I understand it! And so our action becomes voluntarism. But this does not result from the fact that the Presence is not there, but rather from the fact that we do not recognize Him. Thus morality does not emerge in us, because without Presence there is no moral gesture. If Christ does not grow dear to us, it is not because He is not there, but because we do not recognize Him. Let’s try to help each other recognize Him. We will see that He is much more present than we think. In fact, Christ is present in reality, within the signs through which He reaches us and attracts us. Let’s help each other look with sincerity at the exceptional things that happen to us and of which we speak often, so that we more easily recognize Him at work and ask more consistently to recognize Him, because our faith grows in recognizing Him. It does not grow through reflection, alone with our thoughts, but through recognizing Him in reality.

***Prosperi.*** This question concerns the relationship between morality and works. “You said that in true morality the numbers do not count; there is no measure. Now, morality has to do with action. But if I have to decide whether to keep a school open, whether to host a migrant in a structure, whether to hire a person, I have to look at the numbers. Doesn’t this create two levels, a ‘substantial’ one in which there is no measure, and a ‘practical’ one in which I choose on the basis of numbers? A personal level and a level of civil choices, work, society, etcetera? What is the connection between my *yes* in recognition of the mercy upon me, and the spiritual and corporal works of mercy to which the Church and the Pope call us, so that they are not just moralistic actions?”

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Julián Carrón, “Christmas for Believers: Acts of Human Kindness that Move Hearts,” *Corriere della Sera*, December 23, 2015, p. 35. Available in English at [http://uk.clonline.org/default.asp?id=440&id\\_n=21188](http://uk.clonline.org/default.asp?id=440&id_n=21188)



**Carrón.** Would you like an example of a tangled situation? Here it is! Once I went to Brazil and the directors of a certain work told me about their difficulty in carrying on because they did not have the resources necessary to provide for the people they hosted. They decided to welcome everyone, since they themselves had been welcomed first, and so they had to do the same with others, without limitations. And so the work collapsed. But the fact that we all have been welcomed does not mean that we have the means, instruments, and resources to carry forward certain things in the effort to welcome everyone. We are the first to have to obey reality. The Pope went to Lesbos but he did not bring back with him all the refugees he encountered. Jesus Himself, who had the power to heal everyone, did not do so. Does the fact that He did not heal all the sick of His time mean that He did not love them all? Christ loves everyone, but according to a design that is not His: He was the first to submit to the design of the Father. He could have gone to Rome, to other places, but instead He obeyed, and through this obedience slowly but surely His Presence spread throughout the world.

Therefore, the numbers do not matter, not even the number of our sins, because we are always embraced, and this constantly puts us back in motion to do what we can, according to a design that is not ours. It is called “obedience.” Mercy is not moralistic action. It is the fruit of the merciful embrace of Christ. The prisoner, having felt the merciful gaze of his friends, had the same gaze of mercy on those who treated him in a mistaken way. As Fr. Giussani told us, under the force of the moved emotion with which God treats us, we too can begin to imitate God in a way that is not moralistic.

**Prosperi.** “We thought we had understood or at least sensed what you told us in the first two lessons, until you came to the last part about mission, where Benedict XVI spoke about the understanding the Church has reached on the possibility that non-Christians can also be saved. We were intrigued when you asked us, ‘So then, why propose the Christian experience?’ Could you please expand on this aspect of the lesson?”

“Is living the gladness of the encounter with Christ enough for being missionaries, or is there another step that must be taken?”

“What does it mean that the task of Christians is *to be for*?”

**Carrón.** The first thing that struck me in Benedict XVI’s interview is the awareness he expresses with his usual clarity: after the Second Vatican Council, the conviction that the unbaptized could not be saved and were

condemned forever was abandoned definitively. That is, a fact of history (Luther's Reformation, the era of discovery) helped the Church to understand the nature of Christianity more deeply. We too, today, in the new situation in which we find ourselves, are called to a deeper understanding of the nature of Christianity and our task in the world. This is not the moment to explain everything thoroughly; we will return to this, but the things we have said this weekend are starting points regarding crucial factors to consider in understanding what we are in the world to do. The first thing you must do to respond is to ask yourself: what desire do I have? Why do I feel a strong need to communicate to others what I live? Do I have something to communicate to others as a good for them? Does my experience of faith, my free experience of the relationship with Christ make my life more human? If I have a friend, a child, or a colleague in difficulty and through the grace I have received, perceive that I can offer her or him the contribution of my experience, do I feel an urgent need to give it, even if the other may enter eternal life anyway? Because of the correspondence that I have perceived, because of the good that Christ has offered me which makes my life totally new and different, I desire nothing other than to share with the other what has been given to me.

When I went to Vilnius a few weeks ago, an Orthodox friend said, "Do you know what struck me most in the encounter with the Movement? Not the big gestures or the relationships with important people, but the fact that it changed daily life." What most attracted him was the fact that the encounter with the Movement changed the daily life "that cuts your legs out from under you," to use Pavese's words.<sup>184</sup> We want to offer this encounter, this event that is the Movement to everyone, no matter what they may decide about joining or not, whether or not they recognize Christ as the origin of the human change they see and experience by adhering. This is the *being for* of which Giussani spoke, formed of two factors: "love of the Fact of Jesus Christ as the one true motivation for every attempt and every presence" and "the love of our sisters and brothers [in the circumstances in which they live], [...] through the profusion of opportunities." Therefore, how can I *be for*? "*Sharing* the situation of need in which people find themselves, because the authentic basis of all need is the cry, more often than not unaware of its desire, to God who has become man like us, to rip us away from the power of our evil."<sup>185</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Cesare Pavese, *Dialoghi con Leucò [Dialogues with Leucò]*, Einaudi, Torino, 1947, p. 166.

<sup>185</sup> See text above at note 164.

**Prosperi.** “Betting on ‘pure freedom’ is a frightening position. I listened to today’s lesson as if it were a real ‘Copernican revolution,’ that offers no parachutes other than permanent dialogue between His dominant Presence and the heart. I perceived it as a real ‘new beginning’ in the Movement, following the magisterium of Pope Francis. But this radically redesigns the Church’s modality of presence in the world (for centuries bridled by the search for ‘a place in the sun’ or a homeland, as Fr. Giussani would say) and also has enormous repercussions for ecumenism. What assures us or—at least—where do we find the reasonable certainty that this is the road that the Lord is asking us to travel today?”

**Carrón.** We always find certainty in the correspondence we experience in what we live. As Fr. Giussani says, and as I never tire of repeating, faith is a present experience, confirmed by it, that is, an experience in which I perceive how faith is in my best interests, humanly speaking, and is pertinent to the needs of life. Therefore I need nothing other than to experience the correspondence, because certainty is born of this, as it was for Peter. There are lines like this or the one by Saint Thomas, often quoted by Fr. Giussani, that show us the road. “The life of man consists in the affection that principally sustains him and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.”<sup>186</sup> The reasonable certainty of the road lies in the fact that I experience a satisfaction in the relationship with Christ that makes this very relationship and the affection for Christ the substance of living. But as we said recently, we discover this only through our freedom. Consequently, the only chance for access to the other is through her or his freedom. I can only testify to how the relationship with Christ is worthwhile, so that the other can open up to recognize it freely. Another big reason for being certain that this is the right road, as mentioned in the question, comes from the fact that Pope Francis himself, the ultimate point of reference for the Church, confirms this experience.

The importance for ecumenism referred to in the question is confirmed in experience, too. In Vilnius it was striking to see its realization: there were Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Russians and Kazaks, Orthodox, Catholics, and Christians of other confessions. What was the reason for their being together? Only the attraction of the charism encountered. In our own small way, we already have the confirmation of the

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<sup>186</sup> See text above at note 142.

revolution that this implies, without any kind of violence, seeing how Christianity, when it is presented, lived and testified to in a certain way, that is, according to its nature, generates an attraction capable of healing centuries-old divisions. This is the confirmation that the Mystery gives us. We want to obey the Mystery. As I told the Pope about it during the audience he granted me a few weeks ago, I saw the wonder in his face.

In front of what I saw in Vilnius, I could give no other explanation than the one Giussani always repeated to us: it was an example of the great revolution introduced by Christianity. I say it quoting Saint Paul, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male or female, for you all are one in Christ Jesus."<sup>187</sup> We have seen it in many moments of our history, which is a confirmation that, if we are faithful to the charism that has been given to us, we can make a contribution also in this particular moment of the life of the Church, marked by so many questions. Through the grace of the charism, Fr. Giussani, having sensed before others what was at stake, having grasped the justification that modern people need, and having thus proposed Christianity to their reason and freedom, so that they could perceive how it corresponded to their own human needs, also foresaw the most urgent problems and introduced us to a way of living Christianity that is suitable to the challenges of the present.

For this reason, ours is a very beautiful moment in history, and it will make us even more grateful, as Davide said at the beginning, for the grace we have received.

Let's ask for the simplicity to become ever immersed in Fr. Giussani's proposal, so that we can see how the life of each of us blossoms, for the good of all.

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<sup>187</sup> *Gal* 3:28.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***Meeting For Friendship Among Peoples 2016***

I was moved to learn about and see how our friends in the United States lived the gesture of the New York Encounter last January. People arrived from the various states and from Canada, at their own expense, paying for their airfare and accommodations, at considerable personal sacrifice. They were in New York as volunteers and visitors, all with the desire to meet each other, with the will to participate and engage in what happened, because they were aware that it was a place where something good for them could happen.

This is what we, too, desire to experience at the next Meeting of Rimini. For that matter, it is a lot easier for us to get there, and thus less of an effort to participate. We hope that it is a place where something good can happen for us, too, for the friends we will meet and for those we will invite, so that they can see and touch an attempt to express an experience. For this reason, and only for this reason, I allow myself to invite you to go for at least one day.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Acts 15:1–2, 22–29; Psalm 66 (67); Rev 21:10–14, 22–23; Jn 14:23–29*

## HOMILY OF FR. FRANCESCO BRASCHI

The gospel passage we have just listened to invites us to renew the journey in the present, the time that is given to us now, and it points us toward the coming feast of the Ascension of the Lord.

At the beginning of the 1960s, in this regard, Fr. Giussani said, “Our faith can only be lived through the *absence* of manifestations of the power of Christ according to our expectations [...]. Our Christian vocation becomes *authentic* only through this absence [...]. Where Christ is no longer visible as personal action, then His action coincides, becomes one with, the motivations and the action of our person.” (*From “Dalla Liturgia vissuta: una testimonianza [Lived Liturgy: a Testimony]*)

In the gospel we have just heard, Christ describes how His action coincides and becomes one with our motivations and our action. He uses the image of Himself and the Father coming and making their dwelling in the disciples, with whom a relationship of reciprocal love and charity are established. But this “make our dwelling,” this constant Presence of Christ and His Father in us, has a very clear condition: *keeping His word*. The verb John uses could be better translated as *take care of, cherish*, the word of Christ. In fact, the emphasis is not primarily on the ethical aspect of the execution of a commandment, but rather on cherishing the truth of this word, preserving it from distortion and corruption.

The truth of Christ’s words consists first of all in the fact that they are the words of the Father. They express the relationship of total dependence that makes Christ fully free and fully capable of expressing the perfect face of mercy of the Father.

In addition to this, the Lord says that “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in My name—He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you.” Thus, cherishing the words of Christ does not mean closing them in a definition and a meaning that is already fully defined by a content possessed once and for all. Rather, cherishing and keeping the word of Christ means submitting constantly to the teaching of the Advocate, entering into a relationship and a process in which we never “already know” the meaning of the words of Christ, but rather, in which the Holy Spirit continually teaches, explains, and reminds us of them.

It is no coincidence that the Lord defines the Holy Spirit as “Advocate,” that is, consoler, but also lawyer and defender, suggesting not so much the idea of a master who engages in dialectics and descriptions, but rather a faithful and beloved companion who never abandons us in the various circumstances of our journey.

The ultimate sign of this process underway is the gift of peace, a peace that is not the result of efforts of mediation, in the human manner, or of the absence of reasons for worry. Instead, this peace is the result of victory over the turbulence and fear that arise from the concrete circumstances of living, a victory granted through the companionship of the Spirit of Christ sent by the Father.

All this is not an abstract thought, but rather a precious indication of the method of God in the life of the Church, as shown immediately in the first reading from The Acts of the Apostles. Here we find a quick summary of a key moment in the establishment of the identity of Christianity, which happened in the very first years after the Resurrection of the Lord. In Antioch, where faith in Christ was spreading more and more among the pagans, some disciples who came from Judaism insisted that for salvation it was necessary that the converts be circumcised and that they observe all the commandments of the law of Moses.

Behind their attitude were two dynamics that are important for us to recognize, because they closely concern us too. On the one hand, these people established the conditions for salvation, in an entirely peremptory way, independently of Christ, as if in Him there was nothing new in regard to the Old Testament. In addition, their way of seeing was myopic and unreasonable, because they did not even consider the hypothesis that God could act in a new, yet recognizable way, bringing about the New Covenant promised by the prophets.

The response of Paul and Barnabas to these people was simply to tell them what they had seen; namely, that God had sent the Holy Spirit to the pagans converted to the faith, pouring out the same Pentecost that initiated the Presence of Christ through the Church in mission.

Thus the final decision of the disciples was not simply the fruit of mediation or the attempt to find an honorable compromise. Rather, it was the full recognition of the guidance of the Holy Spirit and of the *method* that He teaches us for reading history. “When He comes, the Spirit of truth, He will guide you to all truth.” (Jn 16:13) This full truth of the action of God is not simply *a dogmatic content to repeat*, but acceptance of *a new attitude with which to look at reality, made of the*

*certainty of the Presence of God and of His freedom to express in ever new ways His faithfulness to the Covenant, or in other words, His desire to use mercy to evoke the freedom of our response of love.*

For us too, there is a renewed invitation to let ourselves be taught by the Holy Spirit to comprehend the words of Christ and His love and the love of the Father. Isaac of Nineveh, a saint of the Church of Syria, wrote in the seventh century during the first Muslim invasion, when everything seemed to be collapsing: “Just like an abundant source of water is not impeded by a handful of dust, so is the Creator’s mercy not defeated by the sins of His creations.” And, “There is one cause of the existence of the world and of the coming of Christ into the world: the revelation of the great charity of God, who moved both to existence.”

Let us ask for ourselves as well, in grateful obedience to the guidance of Pope Francis and Fr. Julián, this purity and clarity of faith and judgement.

\* \* \*

*Regina Coeli*



## MESSAGES RECEIVED

Dearest ones,

Becoming aware that the embrace of God is that of the *Eternal* Father gives our heart, mind, and action a solidity that is otherwise impossible.

Let us ask the Most Holy Virgin Mary to sustain in unity and freedom the journey of those who have encountered the charism of the Servant of God Msgr. Luigi Giussani.

With affection, a special blessing

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola  
Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Fr. Julián,

I would like to express my closeness to you during these Spiritual Exercises, united in prayer and listening to the charism. The title of these Exercises repeats one of the expressions dearest to Fr. Giussani and all of us, from the words of the prophet Jeremiah: “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness.” (*Jer* 31:3) This “mercy” is the true point of departure that tells us again what our origin and our hope is, and that enables us to live with affection all the challenges that circumstances set before us, be they beautiful and positive or bitter and problematic.

Because of the magisterium of Pope Francis and my role in the Italian Episcopal Conference, I allow myself to remind you of the challenges of offering hospitality to migrants and caring for the earth, our common home. The love that saved us from nothingness moves us to the charity of hospitality and to a holistic gaze upon creation that the Pope calls “integral ecology,” things that in the context in which we live, and also in our own lives, are not at all to be taken for granted.

We have been welcomed and loved by the charism of the Movement, made up of concrete people, and now, out of gratitude we are even more desirous to learn, to live in communion, and to witness with freedom.

May the grace of the Exercises and the encouragement that Pope Francis expressed a few days ago warm the hearts of the people of our Fraternity and makes us more docile so that we can learn the charism, follow it, and communicate it to everyone. *Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam.*

With my embrace and with the blessing of the Lord

*The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto*

Dearest Fr. Julián,

My greetings, my prayer and my well-wishes on the occasion of the annual Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of CL.

I remember with particular affection all of our people and I ask for the help of your prayer.

*The Most Reverend Massimo Camisasca  
Bishop of Reggio Emilia - Guastalla*

Dearest Fr. Julián,

I would like to express my closeness to you in these days of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity in Rimini, which will have as their title the word of God to Israel and to each of us, through the prophet Jeremiah, “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have had pity on your nothingness.” (*Jer 31:3*) In the Holy Year of Mercy, there is no greater help that we can offer each other than the renewed discovery of this certainty and this love: we are a “nothingness” embraced by the tenderness of the Mystery, who in Christ reveals his good face.

May the Holy Spirit make the gesture of the Spiritual Exercises bear abundant fruit for the entire Fraternity, and of an even more passionate service to the Holy Church of God, I pray for you and I ask you to pray for me as well, in these first months of my service to the Church of Pavia.

*The Most Reverend Corrado Sanguineti  
Bishop of Pavia*

## TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness Pope Francis*

Your Holiness,

At the conclusion of the Spiritual Exercises that have gathered 22,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation in Rimini and thousands of others by satellite link-up in 16 countries, we are grateful for your message, which, like the caress of Christ, makes us experience the wonder of the disciples in front of the Risen One.

Following the history of God's moved emotion toward the people of Israel, we have felt the call of the prophets to conversion directed at ourselves. In Peter's *yes* to the boundless embrace of Christ we have recognized the beginning of the new morality, as you said on March 7, 2015, "The will to respond and to change, which can give rise to a different life, comes thanks to this merciful embrace." We have never encountered anything more liberating.

Aware that testimony is born only of gratitude for the gesture of Christ, we return to our homes desirous of carrying out the mandate you entrusted to us: "that all those who follow the charism of the late lamented Monsignor Luigi Giussani may bear witness to this mercy, professing it and incarnating it in their lives [...] and that they may be signs of God's closeness and tenderness" for a wounded humanity that despairs of salvation yet seeks it anxiously.

Celebrating Mass, Cardinal Bassetti reminded us with the words of Fr. Giussani that, "The real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ." We want to imitate God, desiring to be like Jesus to communicate to all people we meet the mercy with which Christ treats us.

We want to live this supreme task of testimony following you, Holy Father, the prophet whom the Lord has sent us in this time of epochal change for our conversion, underlining the positive we discover in anyone, even with its limits, as you do, and abandoning the rest to the mercy of the Father.

Ensuring you our daily prayer for your ministry in the see of Peter, we offer all our struggles and sacrifices so that the Church may ever-increasingly be the fascinating place of redeemed humanity in the world.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Holiness Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI*

Holy Father,

The Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity were marked by Pope Francis's invitation to conversion in this Holy Year to be witnesses to mercy to the people of today, who have such need of grace and forgiveness, as you said recently.

Aware that the method of God in His relationship with women and men is gentle, and does not want "to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love," we ask you to pray for the entire Fraternity, that we may have Fr. Giussani's same simplicity in front of Christ, to renew our *yes* to the Lord who continues to have mercy on our nothingness.

We continue to ask for you an intelligent apprehension of reality that is born of the intelligence of faith, that you may be for a long time to come our friend and father in the faith.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco  
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Dearest Eminence,

Embracing Pope Francis's invitation to conversion, the 22,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises in this Holy Year of Mercy renew their desire to profess and incarnate mercy in Italian society, to be a sign of the caress of Christ that reaches our sisters and brothers, that they may experience the embrace of the Father who saves us.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko  
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity*

Dearest Eminence,

The 22,000 members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation gathered in Rimini for the Spiritual Exercises in this Holy Year of Mercy, pledge their commitment to conversion to testify to the

beauty of mercy for a humanity that is wounded yet desirous of the salvation that only the Risen Christ can give.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*His Eminence Cardinal Angelo Scola  
Archbishop of Milan*

Dearest Angelo,

Grateful for your message, we assure you that these Spiritual Exercises have been an opportunity for the conversion to which Pope Francis constantly invites us and for experiencing that unity in freedom that Christ achieves in those who yield to the attraction of His mercy within the life of the Church, more powerful and faithful than our resistance and distraction.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*The Most Reverend Filippo Santoro  
Metropolitan Archbishop of Taranto*

Dearest Filippo,

We would like to you for what you wrote us and assure you that in living the memory of Fr. Giussani and in following Pope Francis who invites us to conversion, we want to serve the Church by communicating to all the mercy with which Christ has bent over our nothingness and welcomed us like the father of the prodigal son.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*The Most Reverend Massimo Camisasca  
Bishop of Reggio Emilia – Guastalla*

Dearest Massimo,

Your note finds the whole people gathered in Rimini united in the memory of Fr. Giussani, our father in the faith, and in following Pope Francis who invites us to conversion to be witnesses to mercy.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

*The Most Reverend Corrado Sanguineti  
Bishop of Pavia*

Dearest Corrado,

Thank you for your letter. In these days we have experienced Christ's embrace of our nothingness, and feel boundless gratitude and the desire to serve the Church in following Pope Francis, witnessing to the beauty of mercy, the one hope for the wounded humanity of our times.

*Fr. Julián Carrón*

## ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

*Prepared by Sandro Chierici*

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

### **The cycle of ivories of the diocesan museum of Salerno**

The largest surviving cycle of ivories of the High Middle Ages (late 11th century), which probably decorated a bishop's throne, presents the story of salvation—with a few omissions—in a style that is at once essential and symbolically rich, typical of the figurative culture of the era. The mercy of the Father who draws all things from nothingness extends through history in the vicissitudes of the great patriarchs—Noah, Abraham, Moses—and reaches its culmination in the gift of the Son. The mercy of Christ, witness to the Father, offers women and men an opportunity for life and a relationship with reality that is revealed fully in self-sacrifice and is fulfilled in acceptance of the gift of the Spirit. All human mercy has meaning inasmuch as it testifies to the mercy of the Trinity.

The creation of the stars  
The creation of the plants  
The creation of fish and birds  
The creation of land animals  
The creation of woman  
The temptation and original sin  
The expulsion from Paradise  
The work of the progenitors  
The sacrifices of Cain and Abel  
The murder of Abel and Cain's flight  
God commands the building of the ark  
The building of the ark  
God closes the ark  
The end of the flood  
Leaving the ark  
God blesses Noah  
Noah cultivates the vineyard  
The drunkenness of Noah  
The building of the Tower of Babel  
God appearing to Abraham at Sichem  
The sacrifice of Isaac

Jacob's dream  
The appearance of the burning bush  
The presentation of the stone tables of the law

The visitation  
Joseph's doubt and dream  
The journey to Bethlehem  
The Nativity  
The announcement to the shepherds  
The presentation in the Temple  
The Magi before Herod  
The adoration of the Magi  
Joseph's dream  
The flight into Egypt  
The massacre of the innocents

The wedding at Cana  
The baptism of Jesus  
The calling of Peter and Andrew  
The encounter with the Samaritan woman  
The multiplication of the loaves  
The healing of the paralytic  
The man born blind  
The Transfiguration  
The resurrection of the son of the widow of Naim  
The healing of the man with dropsy and of the lame  
The resurrection of Lazarus and the entrance into Jerusalem  
The Last Supper and the washing of the feet  
The crucifixion  
The harrowing of Hell  
Mary at the tomb  
Jesus appears to the women  
The women tell the apostles  
The disciples of Emmaus  
Jesus appears to the apostles  
The unbelief of Thomas  
The apparition of Jesus at the Sea of Tiberias  
The Ascension  
Pentecost





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