

Notes from the high school graduates meeting with Davide Prospero and Matteo Severgnini

Sacro Cuore, Milan and by video link from Italy, May 31, 2023

Davide Prospero. Welcome. Today we are here for the meeting we have every year with the high school graduates. It is an important moment in your lives, and therefore also in ours, because what will become of you is important, both for all the journey we have undertaken together and that we will undertake, because every end is also a beginning. Therefore, when you finish something, it is right to help each other judge what you have experienced, to ask all the questions about what you do not know yet, because it has so many unknowns within, so many questions, maybe doubts. We have to help ourselves to look with truth at what arises in our heart in front of the step we are living, that you are living.

First we wanted to introduce you to Fr. Francesco, for two reasons: the first is that he is the responsible for the CLU (Communion and Liberation university students), so he follows the whole reality of university students. Many of you are going to university, maybe not all of you, so you will meet again. So it is nice that there is a chance to get to know each other from the beginning. The second reason is that he will lead the WYD and the pilgrimage that will take place in Lisbon. He is a priest from the San Carlo Fraternity whom I asked to move to Milan.

Francesco Ferrari. Hi. I am introducing myself because I do not think we have ever met, if I am not mistaken. My name is Francesco, I am from Reggio Emilia and I am a priest of the Fraternity of St. Charles Borromeo. I have been around quite a bit in life: I went on mission to Canada, to Santiago de Chile, in the last few years I have been in Rome, and then last August Davide, as he was telling you, asked me to come to Milan to accompany the path of the movement's university students, which I am doing with great joy and gratitude. It is a beautiful journey for which I thank God. They asked me to accompany the movement's proposal to participate in World Youth Day (Lisbon, August 1–6, 2023). I know that many people have already registered, but I am also saying these things for those of you who have not yet registered and would like to do so, because there is still an opportunity to do so. Why this gesture? Why are we doing this? For so many years, the movement has been offering graduates and undergraduates a time of pilgrimage to entrust their lives to God during this delicate, beautiful and important phase of transition. It is a phase of transition that is full of questions as I hope, I am sure, you will all have: What will I do? What will I be? What is in store for me? What is the design on my life? How can I build something big, something beautiful, with the passion I have, with my desire to study that thing, with work? It is a time to address all these questions, which in the end boil down, really, to one: what am I called to become, to be? WYD is an opportunity to face them together, to put them before God, in the sense of entrusting them, handing them over to Someone, and doing it together. Normally you undertake a pilgrimage to Czestochowa, except the years when the Pope calls young people to WYD, if it is feasible, if it is a reachable destination.

What is the idea this year, given that the Pope will be holding the WYD in Lisbon? To live this moment of entrusting within a concrete gesture of belonging to the Church, which is very beautiful, because we can entrust our life to God, our questions, what we are, because we can entrust them to a companionship, to a precise story, which is the story of the Church, the story of our friendship. What are we going to do together? Our desire is to be able to have, in addition to the days with the Pope in Lisbon, moments of explicit entrusting to Our Lady, in a shrine. These will be challenging days, I will say it right away, very beautiful but very challenging. It is nine days in total. We will go by bus and make a first stop in Lourdes (these moments are also for us to address the questions we have). We will sleep there. Then we will go to Lisbon and we will stay there for 4 days together with the Pope, following his gestures (there will be a gesture together with him every day). In Lisbon we will also be joined by university students and some adults from Spain, Portugal and Poland, plus a few small

groups scattered here and there from Germany and Austria. It will be good, there will be a thousand of us, which is another reason why it will be challenging, but very beautiful. After the days in Lisbon we will make a day-long pilgrimage to the shrine at Fatima in northern Portugal, and from there we will return to Italy. This is the program. So many people have signed up, about 600. We decided to create a waiting list if anyone still wants to sign up. What does a waiting list mean? That we will then find a way for everyone to go, we have to organize a bit though; it is not easy, but we will find a way to do it.

Matteo Severgnini (Seve). Thank you Fra (Fr. Francesco). I am Seve, nice to meet you. I am not introducing Davide because he has already introduced himself. I wanted to introduce this moment, this assembly, which seems to me to be of a vital importance—Fra also made us perceive this somewhat with respect to the WYD proposal –, because it is a particular and very beautiful moment, both the one you are living and the one that awaits you. I remember one thing, thinking back to when I chose the subject that I wished to study. I went to study philosophy and the desire that moved me was the possibility of confronting the truth that I had encountered during my high school years. So I went to my father Cecco, all happy because I had discovered what I was made for, at least for the immediate future, and I said to him, “Dad, so I have made up my mind, I am going to do philosophy.” He looked at me and said in dialect, “What is it?” “Philosophy.” “And what is it about?” “I am going to study truth, because thought....” So he put his hand on my shoulder and said, “Tomorrow I will put you on the tractor, and I will make you understand what philosophy is.” Later, when he saw that my heart was really pulsating for that thing, he said, “Go!” And I studied philosophy. And from within that aspect I discovered more about myself, about reality and about the friendship that helped me walk. That was a beautiful challenge. And, I was saying before, this was a beautiful, very special, beautiful moment, because it opened me up to an adventure. If you are reading *The Religious Sense*, you will have noticed that Giussani talks about these structural questions, which are the fabric of our humanity. And these questions are awakened by the impact with reality. Here, for you, reality becomes so urgent, that I think you are all here with these structural questions: what is the meaning of my life? What is the good Lord calling me to do? What will become of me, of all my desire, all my talents, all my inclinations? What will become of me? So today we want to spend some time in front of this structure, this human fabric that is emerging in you. And let us undertake this path helped by Davide. So let us get going. There will be interventions in person and interventions by people connected online, whom we greet. High school seniors are connected from all over Italy, all there quivering with their questions. So let us start, giving priority to those who are connected online.

Intervention. *Hello everyone; I wanted to tell you that I am also going to study Philosophy. I have been thinking a little bit, wondering what the Mystery is calling me to and what task I have in life. Just this morning I had my last religion class in school. At the end of the morning the teacher said to us, “Guys, this is the last Saturday, the last lesson.” The others said goodbye to him and headed for the exit, glad to be able to leave school after 5 hours of class and apparently not seeming very interested in what the professor had said. I, on the other hand, stopped with my backpack on my shoulder and could not help but be moved by the beautiful five years I had spent with him and, thinking about the fact that everything was coming to an end, an important phase of my life was coming to an end. I thanked the professor and on my way to the car I was thinking back to all these things and crying. I was delighted with the wonderful experiences I had had and with what I am now: a curious young man who is open to the possibility of being surprised by reality. I think that is really what my life is all about: saying yes to what is around me, starting from proposals from a friend who wants to talk, an evening of dancing or singing, a hug from my parents, that is, anything that makes me feel loved and irreducible. I am constantly looking for something that can make me live so that I do not passively suffer circumstances, dragging myself forcibly forward. I have to respond to the thousand possibilities of beauty and goodness that color my everyday life. I am still unclear as to what my task exactly is. I am, however, in constant search, and the mystery of life calls me to search for it.*

Severgnini. I immediately react to what you have said, because it describes a human position that is totally desirable. And paraphrasing what you were saying, I was reminded of the fact that the human position that is always required of us, that one desires, and that you especially perceive at this time, is to be able to enter reality with eyes open and heart wide open. Eyes open and heart wide open. To be able to ask to enter reality with these curious eyes, as he said, and with this heart that, awakened by reality, finds itself saying yes. It struck me because he said, “I think that is really what my life is all about: saying yes to what is around me, starting from proposals from a friend who wants to talk, an evening of dancing or singing, a hug from my parents, that is, anything that makes me feel loved and irreducible. I am constantly looking for something that can make me live so that I do not passively suffer circumstances.” This is the urgent desire of a heart that awakens in the impact with reality. It awakens. It is paradoxical. You come to a moment of conclusion, as he says, after five years. And at the end of these five years one can take home the disappointment of the end of something, or one can be grateful to the point of tears, as he said, for this time that has opened him up to reality, to the search for meaning, to the urgency of meaning, to being able to discover the content of the self. And it strikes me: everything becomes an opportunity. In his testimony this is evident, everything becomes an occasion. This seemed like an interesting opening point to me.

Prosperi. Beautiful, let me emphasize another aspect that struck me about what our friend said, when at the beginning he asked what the Mystery calls him to and what task he has in life. What surprised me was this juxtaposition. What is my task in life? This already is a question that I do not know how many people your age are asking in these terms. Usually, one asks, “What am I going to do? How can I do something without being cheated by life? How can I be sure that by choosing one thing, I do not miss out on other, better possibilities?” These are the questions that normally arise. If you go out and ask twenty young people your age, at random, “Excuse me, but if I ask you this question, ‘What does the Mystery call you to in life?’ What do you say?” Try it. There will surely be someone for whom these words will resonate, but there will surely be others, unfortunately I fear most, who will say to you, “Mystery! What mystery? What is it?” Because in order to be able to ask, “What does the Mystery in life call me to?” one must have experienced that there is a Mystery that sustains life. And that this Mystery is something to which one may want to give life. But in order to give life to the Mystery (Mystery means that I do not know it fully, I cannot know it fully), one must experience that this Mystery, this mysterious “you” that has entered my life, is good. It is good, it is a possibility of good for me. And then, if we are sure that there is this Mystery, that this Mystery is good and it is good for me, it is for me, we are no longer alone and therefore we are less afraid of the future.

Severgnini. We continue with a question regarding the unavoidable circumstance that was read in the book *The One Voice of the Ideal*. “The inevitable circumstance is a hundred percent with absolute certainty,” says Giussani, “the index of the road to take. Therefore there is nothing that is more friend to us than the inevitable circumstance, the fact” (L. Giussani, “Talk at the Vacation for Students Graduating from High School,” 1964, in J. Carrón, *The One Voice of the Ideal*, Traces–Litterae Communionis, May 2010, p. 3. <https://english.clonline.org/cm-files/2019/06/17/jc-web10-89.pdf>).

Intervention. *Hi, I wanted to ask a question about the text The One Voice of the Ideal. I cannot understand the section about the unavoidable circumstances. Together with the group of high school seniors, we managed to come up with an example: when we went to the Triduum, we were stuck in a truck stop for hours, and although we had every reason to be angry, we were not. Despite this example, I cannot understand how to live through an unavoidable circumstance without getting angry and accepting it. And I also cannot figure out how to live naturally, without forcing my attitude.*

Prosperi. In another of his texts, Fr. Giussani says, “The circumstances through which God has us pass are essential and not secondary factors of our vocation, of the mission to which He calls us” (L. Giussani, *L’uomo e il suo destino. In cammino, [Man and his Destiny. On the Way]*, Marietti, Genoa 1999, p. 63), for which we are made, to understand what we are in the world for. By this he is not saying that when faced with an unavoidable circumstance that perhaps does not go our way, we should

not get angry. We do not have to. You can also get angry. The problem is that you still have to deal with it. That is, you are confronted with something that you do not dominate, you do not rule, you cannot rule by your own strength. Do you agree with that?

Intervention. *Yes.*

Prosperi. Thus, in the face of that, it is evident that one is placed before an alternative: either reality is my enemy because circumstances are against me, come at me, or there is something that I still do not understand. So something that asks me to go deeper. Deeper into what? Not just into the circumstance, because if you are stuck at the truck stop, the problem is not that you have to go deeper than the truck stop, but rather you have to go deeper than your desire, the purpose for which you are there. Because if you are stuck at the truck stop, and you cannot go on, and you have gone all the way (with all the hassle of going to the Triduum) and along the way there is an accident that forces you to stop—I too came across the accident, I went by car, I took a detour. But on the coaches you were further ahead, unfortunately—and there you are. So you come to the conclusion that either it is a deception—so “it was all a deception: I left with all good intentions to do a good thing, for me, for my spirituality, etc., and here I am, stuck at the truck stop. So God did not want me to get there in time to listen”—or I am forced to remind myself, and therefore to ask myself: What am I doing, why am I going there, what question do I want to answer? Maybe I was going without even thinking about it too much. Because, yes, I went for the right reason: my friends are going there, I will go too, they invited me; or because the other times it was good, I learned something, let us go and listen... But there you are put in crisis, in difficulty, you are questioned.

So, the first issue is that unavoidable circumstances challenge us. Look, we live in a time when you would like to have all the certainties without having to go through the trouble of getting to these certainties, that is, without having to go through the pain, the hurt, the misunderstandings, the mistakes, all that it takes in normal life to get to be certain about something. Think about when you fall in love with a girl and you would already like to have the certainty if she is the one or not: “Will she say yes? Will she say no?” You would like to know without risking anything, without having to put everything you are completely on the line, at the risk of being wrong, at the risk of being corrected. Whereas it is precisely through this risk of our humanity that things are better understood. The most important things in life are not understood by mathematical evidence. The most important things in life are understood by affective knowledge, I would like to say, that is, they imply a risk of ourselves, they imply a gamble, they imply an attachment, a putting ourselves on the line, a getting involved. And what is more important in our lives than the path to our destiny? In order to follow the path to our destiny, we are asked to risk something. In fact, in the end, to risk everything. So what can we risk on? Indeed, there are not so many things that are inevitable, for example, an illness.

In this regard, let me recount an episode. Last week I went to visit our friends in the flooded cities. That is an unavoidable circumstance, it happened: there are people whose houses had completely filled with water and mud within 35 seconds. 35 seconds, huh! You have just enough time to get upstairs, if there is one, in a hurry. And there you realize that it is not the circumstance, no matter how tragic or incomprehensible, that makes you say that reality is right or is wrong. Because it is something to do with the way you look at reality, the way you let go or try to respond.

I remember when I was finishing university—and I get to the end of what I wanted to say, if you have followed my reasoning—I had to decide what to do, it was a similar situation to yours, and I had various options. I did Chemistry, and I had opportunities to go and work in a company. I was not lacking anything, but I was not making a particularly comfortable living, you kind of struggled to get by at the end of the month. I struggled like crazy in Chemistry, which was a very hard, though nice, subject. I knew that chemists at that time often had their way, high salaries, you just had to choose, they would come after you. But when I talked to Fr. Giussani about it, he told me that, in his opinion, it was a good idea for me to stay at the university and do a PhD. At that time, a PhD meant precariousness, having to go through a competition. By the way, I did not have a professor to support me, it was extremely difficult to get through a competition where there was so much competition if you did not have someone to introduce you. So I did not see much of a chance, and even if it had

gone well, it would have meant years of precariousness for me without the security then to be able to move on, plus I would have the lowest salary of all those who were graduating with me. So I elegantly tried to decline the suggestion, “You know, Gius, it sounds like a beautiful idea, in fact there is someone in my class who wanted to continue in academia, I do not, because I do not have the qualities.” And he said, “Whatever, think about it.” For me, this “think about it” from Giussani, I cannot explain it well, was an inevitable circumstance, because of the kind of relationship that had been born with him. Every now and then, he would send me people to ask me if I had decided to continue in academia, so eventually I decided to try it. In the end, though, it was deciding to try it by betting on a suggestion. Giussani had not pressured me; in fact, he had not really asked me anymore. In order to pass the competition I had to study everything I had not studied in five years within six months. Then things went well, but I was not at all convinced. I became passionate later, starting to go down this path. One time, I was finishing my PhD, I came up against a wall and I remember saying to myself, “Whatever, now that I have done my PhD I can do something else.” And I got a note from Fr. Giussani: “Grateful for your doctorate. Onward.” Another unavoidable circumstance.

Along the way I had to face so many obstacles, so many difficulties, and in all of this it was not that Fr. Giussani or whoever was there solving the issues for me, or clearing the way for me, I had to face them. I had to stand in the face of the circumstances, and I did it because I recognized that what I was doing was motivated concretely by a relationship of which I was certain. I understood that Giussani was asking me because of something that he saw as useful, in fact he told me, “Right now the university environment is an important place to be present, because today’s culture does everything the opposite of what we are educated to; there needs to be people who are living a certain experience there where our kids are educated.” So I, who may not have felt this move to the university environment to be in my nature, took it seriously. But taking it seriously meant dealing with all the problems, it meant looking for the paths with the tools I had, because he was not a chemist, he did not know anything about this subject. I had to find the people I could get help from; that is, I had to take this path seriously, because I understood that to really follow this suggestion, I had to take it seriously for me, otherwise I would go crazy doing things just because someone else told me to. I had to conquer the reasons for myself. So I lived through all this by asking myself what was being asked of me every moment, as you say, through the circumstances that came my way, and in answering I realized that the very circumstances helped me to understand, day after day, situation after situation, what I was called to.

I have told you this to say that our problem is that we perceive the given (which we do not create) or unavoidable (when they are unavoidable) circumstances as problematic, in the hostile sense of the word, because we do not perceive that we have been sent by anyone. Because if you are “sent” inside a particular circumstance, you face all the difficulties there are aware that you are responding to someone present in your life. It is not that you just have the problem of overcoming the circumstance. And if the circumstance, at some point, suggests to you that you need to change course, then you will, but it will be the faithfulness to this relationship that will help you understand it. In my case, I was sent by a person, but lately we are always sent by the One who calls us within reality. This You who sends us can take the face of a person, of friends, of an insight that you have, for which you have to ask the Lord to enlighten you to help you understand more, and you have to follow the signs. That is how it is: especially when things are not clear and seem very contradictory, you have to pay more attention to the signs. I was told, I also said this while talking with friends in Lugo di Romagna, that Fr. Giussani once used this image: when one is traveling in fog, in order to get to one’s destination without crashing, one has to be more attentive to the signs than even when the sun is shining. Why? Because there is fog. When you are more confused, maybe you see fewer signs, but the ones you see, you have to stick to. Whereas to us, so many times, it is like, there is fog, I will stop. I remember once I was coming back from Turin with Giancarlo Cesana. I was driving and I was going slow because there was so much fog that you could barely see ten meters ahead, and he said, “Pull over, you are not a fog guy.” He could more or less see, and so he was pretty indifferent to driving in fog, because he was used to being more attentive to the signs. We must help each other to learn to pay attention to

the signs. Unavoidable circumstances are important signs, but, like all signs, they pose a problem: they must be interpreted.

Severgnini. Now there are two questions that summarize so many contributions that have come in. They take up a passage by Giussani in *The One Voice of the Ideal*: one of the criteria for choice is the good of society, of the Church, that is, of the Kingdom of Heaven.

***Intervention.** Regarding The One Voice of the Ideal, when I read in the section on vocation as a vocational choice, just to be clear, pages 4–6: “How can I give myself as I am, serve all things, the Kingdom, and Christ evermore?” This is the only educative criterion for the human personality as redeemed by the light and strength of the Spirit of Christ,” I flinched, because I never thought I had to choose my path with the good of society and the Church in mind. In fact, to be honest, I always thought the opposite. Throughout the day this thought kept coming back to me. However, I then remembered something that had happened to me on the trip back from the Triduum, namely that the fulfillment of life is to give glory to God and not to me. I heard and sang Non nobis many times on that trip. I am wondering then: how do the two things fit together? I want to be a mathematician, but does the Church right now, and therefore the glory of God, need a mathematician? Should I do something else, which maybe does not fulfill me like being a mathematician does? Is it possible to give glory to God and at the same time do what I do best, or are the two contradictory?*

Severgnini. Let us listen to another intervention.

***Intervention.** When I first heard the criteria proposed in The One Voice of the Ideal, I was so struck and questioned by the third one: social need (p. 4), or rather “the need of the Christian community.” When I heard this, I was in my 4th year of high school, we were still in the Covid situation, and since I had an interest in anatomy that I was learning about in science, the most obvious thing to say seemed to be: I am going to go into medicine. Over time that idea faded and I went back to my initial intuition, which was in the sphere of art, specifically interior design. I often wonder, though, how I can help the need of the world and the church, assuming I have figured out what they are, by going into interior design.*

Prosperi. As I said after the first intervention, it strikes me that you ask questions in these terms, that is, that on the horizon of your interest is wanting to understand what the good of the world and the good of the Church are, because this is not at all obvious. Is this really the case for you? Do you say it just because it says so in the booklet or do you really think so? Because if you really think so, it is a very great thing, and I have no reason to believe that you do not really think so, because if not, you would not go out and say it, I suppose. It is a very great thing, because normally one has one’s own benefit in mind and that is all. To have that as the horizon of life, something big must have happened. So the first question is to become aware all the way through of this something big that has happened to our life, because we must not detach ourselves from this. Whatever happens: tempests, storms will come, but we must not detach ourselves from there, from that rock.

It is not that the Church—I do not know what idea you have of the Church, what you can think of as “the Church”—or the Pope comes and tells you that mathematics or interior design are needed or not needed, but the fact that you have this concern will make you study design or mathematics differently. That is, the real issue is that you do not lose this concern, you do not lose this tension, you do not lose this desire to serve something big, something greater, to serve the whole. Why does Giussani use this expression? Why is this written in Carrón’s booklet that you have read? Because of a total gaze at the human. Because those who are ahead of you, who have lived what you are living, know—I can tell you this for my part as well—that so many things that you can do, you can think about, on what to spend time and energy, even money, eventually converge towards one question: was all this useful? Was it useful? What is the use of what I do, the way I do it, what I give my energy and time for? So the reason Giussani says this is because he knows that one has to live for an ideal great, greater than

the perimeter of one's own benefit, that is, for an ideal that is service to the totality, to the ultimate goal, to the purpose for which everyone lives, even those who do not realize it. This, over time, raises the certainty of the usefulness of one's life. The way in which this is accomplished (precisely because in us there is first of all a demand that our life may be useful) must be an availability to the way in which, He who wants us, where He puts us, will ask us to accomplish, to contribute to His work. Ours is first of all an availability; we do not have to come up with something, exclude or add anything.

The example of my experience on choosing work that I gave before was of an availability to a person, but it can be an availability that comes through what you choose yourself, being a designer or being a mathematician. It is not indifferent whether one makes a choice with that question, because in this case one will seek not only to derive benefits for oneself in what they do, but to take into account the whole and do what they do for the glory of God. So how you do "that" thing will be different, how you treat people will be different, everything will be different.

So it is, first of all, an openness to the ideal of life that puts us in the position, in the human deposition of adhering to what the Church, that is, the body of Christ, that is, this companionship, asks of us. Then, in some cases, it may even come to ask you for specific things. I gave one example, Seve can give others, because I asked him to come back from Africa. He has been in Africa for ten years and now he has come here because he is needed for other things. But, mind you, it is not that you wake up—in some cases it happens, however, normally it does not happen that way—and live this availability serenely, peacefully. It is within a path that we learn, day after day, in a continuous relationship with this presence—which is made concrete in our companionship, in the life of the Church, in the world, in your classroom, in the way you are called to be yourself because of what has happened to your life—that day after day this availability is nourished until it becomes a total availability. So one, at a certain point, becomes clear about what is asked of them at that moment or throughout their life. Think of those who go and lock themselves up in a monastery. They do so only because, day after day, at a certain point it became clear that that was the mode through which that girl there, that boy there, was asked for this total availability. It is the same for each of you, for each of us. And so one goes to the monastery, because they are asked to pray for us, so that we can be present in the world in another way, and that is precisely why we need someone to support us in our daily life. I need to be supported in what is asked of me today by all those who can do what I perhaps cannot do. Another person might be asked to teach math or furnish their neighbor's house, who pays or the who does not pay, or the flood victim whose house will need to be put back together. In short, living for the ideal, beginning to live for the ideal now, is the way by which we learn this availability, through which God will be able to make great things of our lives.

Intervention. *Hi. I have two things to say. I am afraid of not passing the medical entrance test and so I am wondering how it is possible not to look at another course of study just as a fallback. How do I really understand that medicine is not my path if I do not pass the test? And, if so, would it then be a contingent circumstance or not? The second question concerns the text when it talks about vocation as a state of life, where it says that person serves to open you to the totality of the mystery. I am interested in that, but my question is if to open yourself like that to the Mystery, do you have to be in a relationship?*

Prosperi. In a relationship? No, I am not in a relationship, I am married. I do not think he is in a relationship either, although he is not married. I would say three things. The first is this: if you desire something, you have to really commit to it. We are not fatalists, it is not that the Mystery acts without us putting our all into it, that is, without us really risking it. As I said before, we understand things more, even in the value they have for our lives, the more we are willing to risk to get them. So you have to take the medical test, you have to get down to studying, you have to get help, you have to find all the ways to prepare for it as best you can, you have to ask for help if you need help. That is, you have to put in the effort. That is the first issue. Because this is how you can tell if our questions are real. A real question is a question that engages your whole humanity. Because then the answer makes you more certain, whether it is a yes or whether it is a no. Only then are you certain, you do

not have the doubt that you have not really played the game. Then, it is true, things can go one way or another.

This is the second thing: let me tell you how I chose my course of study. You should know that I have a great passion, which is mountaineering, climbing. In fact, I am now getting in shape because this summer I would like to attempt a challenge. The year I graduated from high school, I had set my mind to do, together with a friend of mine, a variant of the Matterhorn's lion's ridge, and so I had been training all year round, even in winter, to do this climb, because to climb above 4,000 meters you need special training. At that time I had decided to do engineering, so I had studied a lot for the entrance test, because back then (now I do not really know what it is like, I mean I know there is still the engineering test) it was very, very selective, and so I had studied a lot for the entrance test. The thing is that I went on pilgrimage to Częstochowa to ask Our Lady to enlighten me, because in the meantime I had a thousand questions, a thousand doubts, everything had happened. I had been in a relationship, I had left my girlfriend, I had found another one, and so my head was confused.

What happened? I went to Częstochowa, there was the WYD with John Paul II, so we did the pilgrimage with the Pope. When I came back from the pilgrimage, I was ready for the climb, and the test dates came out, which coincided with the only days—in fact, the forecast was for three days of good weather in August in Cervinia—when you could attempt the climb; so I had to decide whether to take the test or to attempt the climb and give up the whole engineering trajectory that I had imagined for the rest of my life. I went for the climb, so no engineering test. And I took chemistry! And then from there, a lot of things happened in my life so that I am now here telling you these things. What do I want to say? That, yes, there is all your commitment, but then, as I said before, you also have to be aware of the signs. And the signs, again, involve our humanity, what you are. They never force you. That is why I was saying before that they have to be interpreted, because the signs indicate, they suggest, but at the same time it is you who has to decide what you want to follow.

The third aspect, also regarding the example I gave you: we should not be afraid that a wrong choice of ours will ruin our lives forever, because that is conceiving of ourselves as alone, it would mean that the ideal is no longer there. Thinking in this way, the ideal ultimately becomes something for which abstractly we are even willing to give heroically our time, energy, but then in the concrete only our calculation counts. Instead, no, you give it your all, and then, at some point, things become clear. You follow, you will be wrong, you might have been wrong, oh well, we will be corrected. And if you cannot go back, you will continue along the path you took and so you can find more signs. Why? Because we are not alone! If we were alone, our mistakes would be a condemnation; but we are not alone, so one can continually resume, restart, and through this continual resuming our path becomes clearer. Because the path may be straight or it may be full of bends, but the important thing is to arrive. We have been told: you are on the path and the goal is there, because the goal walks with you. Destiny walks with you, you are not alone; destiny is not just the end point and if you miss the exit you are finished. It walks with you, you miss the exit, you can always go back. This is the certainty that we need, because this makes us secure in the journey. There is a companionship that assures us of this, because destiny makes itself present in a companionship you can always ask, you can get help from. Is everything confused? Ask, ask those who are older than you, your friends. Do not conceive of yourself alone, because if you go it alone, calculation will win in the end. Instead within a companionship that has your destiny at heart, your good, for you to be happy, what wins is not calculation, what wins is good for you. So put your mind to it; and if you do not pass the test, we will see. If you do not pass the test, you cannot study medicine, that is obvious; you cannot do it this year, then we will see. But you will make it, come on!

Severgnini. Let us close with one last question, which is also a testimony, because it speaks of this relaunching oneself into the world as a task, which you were talking about, and also as friendship in the world.

Intervention. *Hi. A few weeks ago my GS adults invited us to a presentation of on The Religious Sense given at a university, and I was very struck to see in what he was saying, that is, in the method proposed by Fr. Gius, the method to which I have always been educated. But most of all, as I was listening, I was saying to myself that I would say this to all my classmates, that is, this heart, this religious sense—that I thought was a bit of an absurd term –, this heart that he is talking about is really the same as the heart of all people. But then I was in class and it seemed to me that nobody cares about the newness that I have encountered. That is, in these five years I have received so much from my school, first of all from my GS friends, with whom a great friendship has grown over the years precisely because it was born in the hallways, that is, because it is really physically present there where each of us struggles the most. And the grace I have received from meeting them allows me to be free from my performance every day, free from grades and performance anxiety. Because every day I have faces that testify to me that I am loved. Nevertheless, precisely because of what this companionship has taught me, it has never been enough for me to be at recess, to live at recess, to live in the afternoon and hold my nose for the six hours spent in class. And so I often ask myself: how can a friendship, like the one with my GS friends, be true if it ends up making me impatient with those classmates who are my everyday? That is, how can what I have encountered be true if my classmates do not seem to care about anything? And how can it be true, if I then see that one of my classmates is destroyed by anxiety and I cannot do anything to help her? Now that I am about to finish, I am a little shocked that I have not yet been able to find an answer to these questions. But I cannot help but recognize, though, that I am standing in front of people whose lives are changed every day by the story I have also encountered.*

Prosperi. Beautiful! However, in the face of others not recognizing this, you have to ask yourself whether this makes you question what is true for you. From what you have recounted, it does not. And that already is no small thing, because it means that there is something in our experience that is beginning to become a certainty. Because of that, we do not want to stop wanting Christ to be known to everyone. We simply must not measure whether Christ is encountered by how they respond to us. We are asked to live the Christian experience faithfully, to the full, integrally, in a totalizing way. What, then, will happen in the lives of others is a mystery concerning the relationship of each person's freedom with God. So where does mission come in? We use this word—mission is not just going to Africa, as Seve did, or coming to Italy from Africa, because by now missionaries have to come to Italy from Africa—because mission begins with what we were saying before, the consciousness of being sent inside reality. Not just being inside reality—because you still have to go to school, you have to do things—but you go to school, you do things with the consciousness that you are sent by somebody. And that is different. To say that you are sent means that you have been chosen, that is, that your life has a great purpose, that you have been chosen among many, somehow preferred. Again at that meeting with the flood victims, a woman asked me, “I mean, I am there shovelling just like everyone else, I have the questions that everyone else has, friends come and help us and help others. Where is the difference in having an experience like mine, that is, in being a Christian?” It is in this consciousness. It is not that you do not have the questions that other people have or you do not have the anger that other people have because when you have spent the day cleaning up mud all over the place, you have managed to get it off, there is still some down in the basement and you go, then you try to clean the shower glass, it comes off and shatters and you cry all afternoon about it, about a nervous outburst after you have spent the day cleaning. So what? It is not that if Jesus is there, then you do not cry, you do not get angry, you are an alien. It is not in what you see, but it is in the consciousness of being chosen.

You were talking about performance, because we think God's glory is seen by how capable we are of achieving it. No, it is seen first of all by how available we are, as we said before. The whole history of salvation says this. The whole history of the Bible, from Abraham onward, is a history of “yes” said by one person, by another, to do one thing, to do another. That is why we are here today. I have mentioned the story of Gideon several times in these days in different circumstances, because this question always comes up in all contexts. Do you guys know who Gideon is? No, you do not. The

Old Testament is not studied that much. I mean, there are some interesting stories. Gideon was the youngest of the sons of Joash (cf. Jdc chapters 6–8). There had been a long period of forty years of peace, and at some point the pagans, the Midianites, who worshipped idols, the Baals, come and conquer the land of Israel and the oppression begins. So there are years and years of oppression under them. Then the Israelites say, “But, Lord, where is all the peace and freedom You promised us?” So God chooses this boy, Gideon, in one of the remote villages of the various tribes of Israel, to lead His people. And Gideon says to him, “But how? What can I do? I am nothing, I am nobody. If I go to the other Israelites from the other tribes, they will say, ‘But who are you?’” God answers him, “I am with you.” So he goes. The dialogue with God continues and Gideon asks him for signs. We often do not go so far as to ask for signs. We stop first, and say, “No, that is impossible, no one will answer me.” Instead, he asks for concrete signs. And God satisfies him: for example, he sends an angel who raises a fire from the stone on which he had laid meat and bread and cooks them. Gideon takes courage and goes forward. When God, at one point, tells him to gather an army to fight against the oppressors, Gideon does so: they count themselves and there are 32,000 of them, while the enemies number 135,000. And God says to him, “The people who are with you are too numerous [...]. Israel could boast before me and say, ‘My hand has saved me.’” So there are 10,000 left, but still too many for God; in the end only 300 follow Gideon. The story continues, read it, it is beautiful. Gideon goes. And he wins. Then they want to make him king, but he refuses, so that it is clear to the people that the victory is not his: “I will not rule you [...]: the Lord will rule you.” The time of the judges begins and for forty years there will be peace, etc. The history of salvation is all like that. Jesus sent the disciples saying to them, “Go, don’t worry about carrying your staff, about studying what to say or do. Go and carry what has taken your life. Be yourselves in the midst of the world.” There, I think what changes is the consciousness we have of being chosen in everything we live. Then you do what you can, and you ask. The Lord will do. That is enough.

Severgnini. Thank you. We are always sent by the One who calls us inside reality. Thank you very much, Davide.

Prosperi. Thank you to you.

Severgnini. And thank you for your testimony and your urgency.

Prosperi. Take care!

Severgnini. Thank you all, even those connected.