

LET US BEGIN TO JUDGE: IT IS THE BEGINNING OF LIBERATION

Testimony and synthesis from the Equipe
of Giovantù Studentesca



La Thuile, September 8–10, 2023

You can't hear anything. You think it must be the glass protecting the balcony overlooking the lounge of the Planibel in La Thuile. But no. Even moving around, nothing changes. Over six hundred high school students (accompanied by a few adults or teachers) fill the rows of seats without making the slightest noise, ready for the start of the GS Equipe. There is usually music to accompany the entrance into the hall. Beethoven, Chopin... Not this time. These are the last remnants of the holidays and school will start again for everyone in a few days. And since we have come here from all over Italy (and beyond), after weeks or months without seeing each other, who knows how many things they have to tell each other. But instead nothing. All in silence. Indeed, all waiting. Because we cannot get used to the fact that there is music during the entrance to the hall, because it is not an aesthetic accessory for us to enjoy, as is explained just before the notes of Schubert's Incompiuta fill the hall. Now they have a different flavour, an interesting sound, a friendly face.

"Everything is given and everything is new," comments Matteo Severgnini, Seve, a teacher who has the task of accompanying the young people on this early September weekend: "And the heart is already dominated by a Presence. He speaks of his, of mine, the young people's."

It is a dizziness that takes everyone. And you can read that it is not an interpretation or a suggestion on the dozens of faces, and it will always be that way for the next two days. The stakes are high and you can tell right away. It cannot be otherwise when one speaks of wounds, desires, affection, vocation, ideal... To 14, 15, 16 year olds with hearts full of questions: of beauty, justice, truth, happiness. Of being loved.

The Saturday morning hike, the spectacle of the mountains looked at in silence as they climbed, the songs at altitude, the Mass... Everything, rather than a factor of tiredness, became a springboard for dozens of hands raised during the afternoon assembly with Davide Prospero, who had come from Milan to meet them. The various Pietros, Robertos,

Maddalenas and Caterinas took turns at the microphone to tell their stories: their relationship with their parents, with their friends, with their boyfriend or girlfriend, their school, their experiences in class, but not only... Davide and Seve answered and raised questions. Word after word, that gusto that Prosperi mentioned became more and more comprehensible, indeed, enjoyable when speaking of friendship: "We can see who friends are not only by how well we get along together—this is a consequence—but by how my relationship changes, my judgement on reality." The matter, then, is that what makes life enjoyable become more and more familiar, Prosperi continues, recalling that this is a gift, to be asked for continuously: "Only in this way does one begin to experience a new gusto. In everything."

Words that become flesh in the evening, with the repeat—smaller, but no less intense—of the concert dedicated to Adriana Mascagni from the Rimini Meeting a few days earlier. And even more so the following morning, when Francesco Fadigati, a teacher, glued everyone to their seats by recounting his story, which you can find published here. Six hundred young people listening to a man talking about his life as a boy at his school desk, his encounter with GS, the death of his father, his friendships at university up to his decision to join the Memores Domini. Everyone in the audience listens moved: as he tells about himself, his parents, his friends, his love, he is talking about them. The same anxieties, the same wounds, the same desires. The same Fact that begs at everyone's heart. It is their stuff, all their stuff.

Seve, trying to bring everything what everyone has seen happen in not even forty-eight hours in La Thuile together in the Synthesis that closes these pages, reads a text message sent by a girl to a friend: "This happiness is forever, you carry it in your heart. I can't wait to take it home, to tell my friends everything. I want them to enjoy everything I have heard... They have to listen to what my heart wants to scream."

Paolo Perego

TESTIMONY

Francesco Fadigati

Matteo Severgnini (Seve). We asked Francesco Fadigati to tell us about his life. We listen to him on our tiptoes, because we are entering into something sacred, as is the life of each one of us. He will help us enter into the theme of this Equipe: “Let us begin to judge: it is the beginning of liberation.” Francesco is a professor of Literature at secondary and high school, the rector of a school in the lower Bergamo area, and also a writer. For me he is a vocational friend. One of those you can count with your fingers. I don’t know if you have friends like that too, the ones about whom you say: ‘With them I will go to Paradise and play the game and win.’

Francesco Fadigati. I will try to deliver my life to you at its most loved, dearest moment. In this case words always seem insufficient to express the experience, but I will really try. I would like to start from what happened to you in these hours, or before these hours: from my first encounter with this friendship, with the reality of the movement. I was 14 years old, I was in Sanremo, where I was born, and one afternoon my older brother—with whom I argued, but whom I respected—invited me to a meeting with a certain Don Pino De Bernardis. I didn’t want to go, I had band practice, but out of respect for what I saw in my brother I went. This says a lot about what it means to invite, perhaps even clumsily as he did with me, someone who apparently doesn’t want to have anything to do with it. Because that afternoon I had the encounter that changed, determined my whole life. Now, at 42 years old, I look back on that day knowing that everything that developed—as love, affection, as intensity of life, as falls and then forgiveness—was born there. At a precise hour.

That afternoon I sat in the penultimate row, hoping it would end quickly, but I found myself glued to the face, the gestures, the person of that man. I did not quite understand what he was saying, but I had a clear perception: this man is real, he is certain, he has

something to do with a word that no one really dares to say, the word 'happiness.' I saw an intensity of gaze, I heard words that I did not understand, but which I felt were full of meaning, full of the promise of life that I was waiting for. I had before me what I now recognize to be a 'presence', someone who in their flesh bears an incontrovertible fact: there is Someone speaking in this man's voice and speaking to my heart. At the end of that afternoon, I asked him the only question I felt made sense, the only question I knew how to ask. I shook his hand, because I wanted to feel what a happy man's hand feels like, and I looked him in the face and said, "Listen, how can I see you again?"

I only found out a long time later that I, as a 14-year-old, was asking the same question that the first two apostles had asked a charming man whom they had seen and heard speak 2000 years earlier: "Where do you live?" A month later, I asked my brother to take me to another meeting with him. And from there I went on my first GS holiday, where I made an extraordinary discovery: this was not just an exceptional man, but an entire companionship. The same one that has moved me in these hours with you. A companionship of faces like everyone else, but in which there lived Something or Someone that inexplicably revealed my heart to me. And as it unveiled it was already responding. I was absolutely stunned by this discovery: there is a place of my peers, full of limitations like everyone else, full of uncertainties, but with one certainty: the One or that 'something' that lives among us. The more I was with them, the more the question grew: "What makes you like this? What makes our singing, our being together like this?" From the very first time, I received an answer that I did not understand, but which I accepted: "Do you know why we are like this? Why do you feel this exceptionality that speaks to your heart, making you yourself? Because Jesus Christ is among us. That man who lived 2000 years ago and who still lives among us." I did not understand. But do you understand that I could not throw away that answer? Because it came from the most compelling and convincing place I had ever found. So I listened to it and, back home, I even repeated it! I felt that there was something true about it. I did not understand, but I wanted to go and see.

In Sanremo there was a small group of a few people, sometimes two of us, sometimes ten... The largest group was in Chiavari, with Don Pino. When I was 15 I would gladly take the train, I would make the three-hour journey even just to have lunch with them, because I would drink of that 'something' that made me return home full of the desire to really live. As I walked to school, I would list the faces of my friends and the words we had said to each other, the words of this 'Don Giussani.' Often I did not understand them, but I felt that they were charged with the capacity to describe my life. And so I chewed on them, learned them: *experience, comparison with the heart, event...* I felt they were the springboard for living. They were words full of faces, full of a presence.

From the very beginning of my story I felt the desire to stammer this news to my friends: "But do you know what I have found? Not a thought, but a companionship full of thought, full of true thought, true thought about life, because it is dominated by truth, living truth." And so I used to try to tell those in the band, who used to make fun of me, my best friend Jacopo, my schoolmates... I used to invite them, even awkwardly, to hear them say back so many no's. But every time I tried, all the love for this companionship and for this unknown and already beloved name, Christ, surfaced. The fathers who went to America to evangelise in the forests had the same love and drive for mission as I did as a 15-year-old, trying to tell my friends: "What we are looking for is there! The answer to our questions—our most dizzying questions—is there! That is why we can look at them without fear and with affection." It was already 'mission', because every time I took a risk I understood this certainty of love better.

I had to explore the value of the encounter a few months later: a few days before the start of the fourth grade, my father, who was a surveyor on the railways, had an accident and broke his hips. But for some time his body had been battling—I didn't know—a serious tumour, so he was in bed for a year and a half, on and off, suffering a lot, and he died when I was in fifth grade. At that time, I could see that what I had encountered had the claim of holding up even in the face of death. It was so hard for me to come home from school and see my dad fragile, to see him suffer and to see us

tired, fatigued. But I cannot detach the memory of that time from the friendship I experienced. Even between adults! My parents at that time were tightening their relationship with the movement. And their friends came to visit us. In particular I think of Aldo, the shyest of the company, who came to our house every day during his lunch break to spend 20 minutes drinking coffee with us and my dad. I saw that this companionship brought with it a love that knocked on the door of our house: until a minute before, the three of us brothers were there arguing, my mother was grief-stricken, tired, my father was moaning in pain... but when Aldo came in we all became human again. My dad would start talking again about the things he was passionate about, my mum would arrange his pillows more gently and we brothers would try to keep quiet. Not to look good, nor because Aldo told us something or was particularly 'charismatic', but because he brought the warmth of the charism and friendship he lived by into the house. He brought into our home all the breath of the movement, of this friendship dominated by One who says: "I am with you every day". And so, even in front of your dad. He would bring in a presence, a love.

That is how the answer I had been given from the beginning began to become more familiar to me: Jesus has to do with this friend who comes in and drinks coffee with you. I believe it was because of this loyalty, this love that embraced my whole family, that an hour before he died my father summoned us to his room, us three brothers, one at a time. He gave me the deepest and truest educational judgement that has ever been said to me: he shook my hand, as I had done with that priest, he looked me in the face as one does between men and he said two things to me: "You are good", he said it to me with a smile and he knew very well that I was doing stupid thing every two minutes, but as if to say to me "you are a good thing, and your life is filling up with a good thing." Then he said to me, "See you." And he said it with a smile. A smile that did not come from an effort, but from all that love we had received. I did not quite understand that greeting, but I assure you that I carry it within me, written in my heart, as one of the truest promises. "See you", that is, we are not made to die, but we are in eternity. I

remember his coffin at the funeral, and then the moment when the friends of GS came in, that piece of the Church through which I met Jesus. When I saw them, I felt that I was not alone before my dad's death, but not because there was someone hugging me or patting me on the back. No, those friends carried with them that promise: "You are made for eternity. I will give eternal life and a hundredfold here below to those who follow me." I was already beginning to experience the hundredfold here below. I definitely cannot wait to enter eternal life. But do you understand what it meant to stand in front of my dad's coffin like that? For this reason alone I hugged everyone with a smile. And I was no fool, no visionary. I had there before me, touchable through certain faces, that living promise: life is for eternity, life is saved by One.

Perhaps the greatest claim that this companionship brought into my life was that it was not simply for a few great moments of beauty, nor was it just to stand in front of pain, where it is already as if nature is sustaining you by pulling your energy out. That companionship demanded to enter the greatest challenge there is: the everyday. We are all ready for great feats, but the greatest feat is to live and not suffer the everyday. I wanted that beautiful thing to have something to do with the way I went to school, for it not to stay outside and the meat grinder start... like the beauty I saw these days, I want to take it to school tomorrow! And I remember the moment when I realised it was coming in a powerful way. Third year of high school, May, my school overlooked the sea... who was actually following the classes? The Italian teacher was explaining Petrarch, I was drawing on the desk, and I heard her yawn and say: "Anyway, guys, in the end Petrarch was depressed like all Christian authors are." I suddenly raised my hand! My classmates rightly thought "Fadigati needs to go to the bathroom," because that was my average contribution to the class. Instead I had to make an immediate comparison, within myself, between what I had heard and the experience that in a powerful, suggestive way was entering my life. Of all the people I had met, the most vivid ones linked their beauty precisely to the fact that they were Christians. The most intense and least depressing thing I had encountered was precisely Christianity! I knew nothing about

Petrarch at the time, I knew little about Christian authors, but I knew one thing: there had to be a non-depressed Christian author, at least one! So I said: “Prof, look, in my opinion what you said is not true.” My classmates looked at me as if to say “what are you doing, it’s May, let’s just survive...” Instead she, who was a great woman, because she was loyal, had a brilliant idea from an educational point of view. She challenged me: “Ah, Fadigati, you say that? I give you two weeks. If you find me a Christian author who is not depressed, I will give you a good grade.” “I’m in. Imagine my friends... But I really wanted to find out how what I had encountered, and that what was proving to be true in everything, was true there too! That was my first experience of studying. Because to really study means that you start a dialogue with Dante, with Manzoni, with Vivaldi in the light of a hypothesis of meaning... It was not possible for me to do it alone, so when I got home I started to call my friend Giorgio, a professor of philosophy, my friend Anna, a great reader, my cousin who was studying philosophy, another friend for music... I asked everyone for advice and began to study with two or three of the students from the Raggio. Boy, what gusto! It was the first time I discovered that study is an *inter-est*, a ‘being inside’ of this fascinating dialogue, where Manzoni is no longer the waffle that you have to study to perform well, but someone that talks to you about the love between Renzo and Lucia and asks: “And you, how do you live love?” For the first time, I realised that I envied how Dante and Beatrice loved each other, with that certainty, with that confidence... After two weeks, I went to class with my cassette player in hand, three crumpled photocopies of painters and some poems, and bits of passages I had read. I had my first experience as a teacher. Even today what I try to do in class with my pupils is to participate together in this ‘dialogue’. The dialogue between my heart awakened by the encounter I made and Dante, Leopardi, mathematics... I began to study, to enjoy school. I was interested in that dialogue. What is study? A friend who says to you: “Throw yourself into the comparison with everything.” Imagine if life became yours, finally, and studying was no longer something you endured, but this dialogue where you are the protagonist and Dante becomes your friend. I saw that, awakening my heart, every-

thing began to speak to me in a truer way. And it is the same today. How much do the interventions of my students change me! For this companionship brought into the moment. Thank you for this friend, Jesus, to whom you ask: "I want to see you here in class too," thank you for the friends you carry within you.

The longer I stayed within that companionship, the more I saw the desire for affection, to love and to be loved grow. At that time, I met a girl with whom I fell in love. We got together. And at the beginning there was that very pure, almost magical moment, the curiosity aroused by the surprise that the other is, the desire to listen and hear oneself, to know oneself in the eyes of the other. I believe that everyone, really everyone in the world, wants relationships to always be that beginning. While unfortunately one thing always happens: it is as if relationships, sooner or later, begin to corrupt. In place of that curiosity, full of the mystery that the other person is, you begin to take them for granted. In the place of astonishment comes possession. An instinctiveness that makes you angry, full of jealousy, resentment, things to make the other person pay for. One particular evening—after a year of dating like this—she and I went out, I still remember the sense of suffocation I experienced. As much as we could hold onto each other, we could not get rid of an ultimate, very heavy, unfamiliarity. We were distant, even clinging, sad deep down. And the worst thing was that we had to lie to each other, to tell each other that everything was fine. But what a difference when, the following summer, we went on the GS vacation together, which was her first. I cannot forget two moments: one during the hike. Me and other friends had stopped on the usual scree to give a hand to those passing by. We sang and helped. What an impression when she passed by in the queue and looked at me and smiled. What infinite esteem. What affection full of respect and love I saw in her and in me. She understood that what I was doing was beautiful and important for everyone, she did not have the problem of me shaking hands with others and I did not have the problem of her talking to others. We were united before the same beauty and enjoyed each other's enjoyment of it, according to the breadth of her heart and the unique form of her

involvement. The second moment: Don Pino placed us, in silence, before the beauty of the Dolomites. I was not next to her, I saw her in the background. Years later I found the same scene in Dante's *Paradiso*. I saw her far away, but in front of the same beauty that filled our hearts. Then we told each other: we were both experiencing the same wonder, the same awe and silence. And we felt so free, yet connected deep inside. We did not know it, but when I was 17 on that trip we experienced one of the greatest discoveries of my life: virginity. That's what Giussani calls it, that's what the Church indicates. It is the gaze that loves the other, that grasps the other, in its relationship with Beauty, in its relationship with Destiny, with the happiness and infinity to which it is destined. Together before the One who fills your heart now. But think, friend, in the most intense moments of these hours, that maybe the girl who has struck you is here and she is enjoying the same thing: how much this unites you! Without touching each other, how close! For me it was an enlightening experience. When we came back from that holiday, we could no longer be satisfied. We were wrong, but we could no longer content ourselves. We had felt how true it can be to love each other with this respect, with this delicacy of passion for each other. May you be happy. That way relationships last. So they do not tire because they are constantly a sign of the eternal that lasts. And the other is a gift.

After the first evening here, a young friend of mine said to me: "Prof, can you explain to me why you made a certain choice." He knows that I am part of the *Memores Domini*, those who live in the memory of that encounter. Imagine always living with the living affection of the one we met in these hours. *Memores*, those who remember the Lord, who dominates our hearts, makes them so full now. Why am I part of this wonderful companionship today? When I went to university I only had one problem, not even what job I was going to do, what grades I was going to get... the only problem was, "Can I find this presence, this gaze, this fascinating man?" At 19, I could say the name Jesus—which always makes me tremble—more familiarly. Can I find him here? The gift was that, from day one, I received an answer to this desire. I arrived at the

university and met the friends Seve mentioned earlier. First him, and then other specific faces, Francesco, Stefano, Fabrizio, Mega... They came from Casale Cremasco, from Reggio Emilia, from Stagno Lombardo, from Imperia... and they were there with the same desire. They had met that same companionship, the protagonist of that companionship, and were won over. We only had the desire to dive into the heart of that life called the movement. An other-worldly friendship began... guys, can you imagine? To be able to say with certainty: this friend is forever! Not as a Baci Perugina phrase, but real, lived. After so many years, our friendship continues to grow, as profundity, as beauty we live, as awe for the other. What does a 'vocational friendship' mean? That our being together has been, from then until now, even this morning at breakfast, a help to stand before the One who had drawn us one by one and was making life human, life intense, in a continuous forgiveness. This was not possible on our own, but because it came natural to us to follow together an adult who was fascinating to us. Fascinating because his whole life was kneaded with this Presence. Indeed, in his life that encounter had become a task, that event shaped his person, so there was no time to waste. Life—you could see it in him—had to be spent on the real thing. In a burning love for others and for the world, waiting for this very thing. It came natural to us to follow him. His name is Stefano Alberto, 'Don Pino' to his friends. For us, being friends coincided with following this man. He must have seen something in this 'scruffy' group and one evening he summoned the five of us, who then ended up in a flat together, plus another called Federico, to dinner and told us: "Don't be splendid soloists. Give space, look at the protagonist of your friendship, Christ, and build the Kingdom of God together." Can you imagine being told this at 18-19 years old? You are made to build the Kingdom of God, you are needed. How? By making room for the Protagonist of life. And so, guys, what a life exploded in our hands! What a passion to study, to read the newspapers, to talk politics, to discuss, to try to judge the things that were happening in the university... And then to become passionate about Dante when we met Franco Nembrini, to found the Centocanti association with

him, to take writing seriously, to transform a passion into a task that still endures today. And the more we lived this, the more a strange nostalgia increased. The more this intensity increased, the more I felt an urgency to go to the root of that beauty. I remember that after certain evenings, days like these, I would come home and struggle to fall asleep, because in the darkness of the room I would ask myself: “But then... But it is you! Who are you? Fascinating face, fascinating friend, who since I was 14 years old has touched my life, continues to touch it, filling it with life, with Your life.” I was repeating something a friend of mine said to me yesterday after the assembly: “Prof, but then it was Him. It was always Him.” In everything I have experienced over the years, it was He who was calling. I found myself saying ‘it is You’, which is different. It is the same thing, but it is saying ‘You.’

After three years of a relationship with my girlfriend, we had decided to break up and each go our own way. And this ‘You’ had become so imposing that in my second year of university a desire was born that almost made me dizzy: “But if it is You who since I met you at 14 years old filled the eyes of that man (Don Pino), making him so alive even now; if it is You who is the strange protagonist of this friendship when we sing; if it is You who makes the heart vibrate; if it is You who made the relationship with the girl I am in love with vibrant, beautiful, virgin... But if it is You, I would like to be with You always, every moment. I would like life to be You. I would like to live with You, I would like to live for You, even more: I would like to live in You.” It is what the Church makes us say at Mass: “Through Christ, with Christ, [moreover:] in Christ.” The next day I told this to the friend who of all people has always impressed me with the bold freedom with which he plunged into the arms of this ‘You’, who is Seve. At breakfast, in the North-East café, I looked him in the eyes and said to him, trembling a little: “Seve, look, I don’t even know how to say it, but the desire has come to me... If between us, if the best between us, if the thing that makes us free, free from fear, lovers of life, is called Christ, I would like to live always for Him!” I told him shaking and he burst out laughing! A beautiful, heavenly laugh. He told me: “Damn, Fra, it has been a

few months that I have only been living for this!” That’s why we are such friends. That’s why he’s such a friend.

As we left that café, I told him a phrase that reminded me of the disciples of Emmaus: “Seve, something has happened to me. I think my life has changed at this breakfast.” The next day I went to tell Don Pino, and he didn’t burst out laughing, he told me: “You will find that it is no coincidence that this desire was born in you with some friends.”

The day I started on the path to verify that intuition I was scared to death, but I was determined, because I felt it concerned my whole life. I went and met with Seve, Francesco, Fabrizio and others... Without knowing about each other. Think about what God does. We had developed the same desire at the same time. After a few months the fifth person of our university flat would also arrive. I thought: “This is paradise.” Because paradise is friendship that is paradise. Vocational friendship. He called us from the moment we were born, with all the facts of our lives, he sought us out and brought us there.

“With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you” (cf. *Jer* 31:3). Yesterday this young friend of mine told me: “I can no longer allow myself not to be happy.” And he added: “I know that Christians also have their moments of sadness. But with the one we met, sadness no longer wins.” It is a joy, because that “with age-old love I have loved you” has become an encounter, a face, a friendship, a journey. A path whereby judgement keeps increasing more and more: “To You who love me, I say yes, I love You.” It happens that you love more and more that Presence that makes you more and more yourself, that makes you passionate about your classmates, your teacher, what you study, your daily life... It inserts a difference into living that is sensitive. Life becomes beautiful and sorrow becomes human, manageable. Friendship becomes eternal. And the other who is called together with you, the other who does not yet know Him and who is only waiting to encounter Him through you, perhaps in Prague, that other becomes your brother. Thank you, excuse me.

SYNTHESIS

Matteo Severgnini

Matteo Severgnini (Seve). Listening to his testimony, this kept ringing in my ear and heart: “The life of the human being consists in the affection which principally sustains a person and in which that person finds his greatest satisfaction.” What truer judgement can one make than this? The affection that principally sustains all life. Thank you Francesco.

1. Your memory fills me with silence

We cannot deny that in these hours, in these days, the fascination of something true has happened between us. Better, of a real Presence. From the first evening: the silence as you entered this hall, the attention, the tension during the introduction, the Mass. And again the beauty of the hike and the songs, the barrage of your questions and experiences during the assembly, expressing a life that explodes within the heart, whatever circumstances we have to live through. The friendship of Davide Prospero, a friend who accompanied us, showed us how the promise of fulfilment in our lives, in our relationship with Jesus, can be fulfilled in a dynamic that makes life ever more certain. And then last night’s gift, that explosion of new creativity that the encounter with Jesus brings out in Adriana Mascagni’s song. This morning, a humanity conquered to the core by the novelty that continues to knock at the heart, at mine, at yours. “I am the way, the truth and the life.” The heart, my humanity and yours fascinated by the presentiment of truth. Francesco said several times: “I didn’t understand some things, but I accepted them, because they came from the place that was conquering my heart inch by inch, millimetre by millimetre.” Giussani says: “The way of the Lord is as simple as that of John and Andrew, Simon and Philip. Out of curiosity and desire, they started following after Christ. There is no other path, after all, other than this eager curiosity aroused by the presentiment of the truth”

(L. Giussani, *In cammino (1992-1998)*, Bur, Milan, 2014, p. 367). Something true has happened. We realise then that the good God has taken care of us at every moment, has tirelessly knocked at our heart, continuously provoking our freedom, our desire. In a word, provoking to the core our humanity, what I am. Yes, he has unceasingly dialogued with my humanity and your humanity, he has taken the initiative with you, just you. We come then to repeat, filled with emotion, what the hermit Laurentius said: “I understood then that perhaps my whole existence would be spent in realizing what had happened to me [what happened to you?] And the memory of You fills me with silence.” Otherwise it is inexplicable: 640 people that enter in silence.

2. That our joy may be full

Davide told us yesterday: “Jesus could have chosen to remain present Himself, instead He chose to remain present in communion, in unity among His own.” We are here together, certainly each person for themselves, with their own question, with their own desire, sometimes with their own sadness and anger or misunderstanding, but together, in communion. This is the method chosen by Jesus, we have been loved, preferred together, in communion, as Francesco told us this morning. The method God has chosen is this communion, this unity that is expressed in belonging. You are mine! “Belonging is not the effort of a civilised being together, it is not the comfort of a normal loving, belonging is having others within oneself” (Gaber). Giussani commented: “How suggestive are these words of Giorgio Gaber! In a peoples, genius always illuminates aspects of existence, assuring each and every person a more mature awareness of the evidence and elementary needs of the heart.” Yesterday we were asked: “What diversity do we see in this companionship, in this communion?”. It is not only the matter of the heart that unites us—otherwise everyone would be here—but an encounter with a present event that has reawakened a gusto for everything, for the whole, for a totality of meaning of reality that has made itself encounterable. This meaning has made itself encounterable, it has made itself lovable, and by making it-

self lovable it has made everything lovable, everything about me, everything about reality. This is why we can judge everything personally, communally and publicly. *Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto* (Terence, *Heautontimoroumenos*, v. 77). Nothing that is human I consider alien to me. From studying in the classroom, from what is happening around me, from the earthquake that happened yesterday in Morocco: more than 2,000 victims. What does that have to do with it? From the flood that so many of our friends have experienced, not suffered, experienced. From a friend asking for help. Everything is for me, it can become a path to my conversion, because I am well on my way and in this love I can convert. To become more and more kneaded, similar to Him who loves me. Everything is for me, everything can become a path to my conversion. To be able to take seriously the question posed to us yesterday by one of you: “Who am I?”. Then “abide in My love” so that our joy may be full. To abide in this love is to abide in this communion so that our joy may be full, so that the experience of the hundredfold that we have been promised may be fulfilled, day after day.

3. Judging is the beginning of liberation

Yesterday one of you posed the question of the whole Equipe: “What does it mean to judge? Where do I draw the criteria from?” “If we wish to become adults without being deceived, alienated, enslaved by others, or exploited, we must become accustomed to comparing everything with this elementary experience.” Listen to what Giussani says: “The most audacious challenge of a mentality that dominates us and affects us at every point—from our spiritual life to our clothing—is to become accustomed to making a judgment about everything in the light of our primary ‘evidences’ and not at the mercy of our occasional reactions. [...] It is always necessary to cut through images generated from within the cultural environment in which we are steeped, to reach down and grasp [reach down, it is a job] our own original needs [given, original means given] and ‘evidences’ [mind you, Giussani is a blade here. Not only the needs but the evidence] and to judge and evaluate accordingly every proposal, every existential suggestion” (L. Gius-

sani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2023, p. 11). To judge means to compare everything with that complex of needs and evidence that is my heart, elementary experience, and everything that happens and is said to me, everything. You will say to me, everything? Everything. "But I sometimes, I mean, it's not like I'm that smart..." No, no, it is not a question of intellectual process, it is a process of relationship, Francesco described it to us earlier. It has been a continuous going from relationship to relationship, all compared with that complex of needs and evidence that is my heart, and that which reality poses.

"Let us begin to judge: it is the beginning of liberation," Yesterday, taking up the story of the flood, an image was also used that struck me, because Giussani speaks of a work of the heart, of an ascesis: the image of mud. At a certain point, bulldozers were needed to remove that mud that had become almost cement. That mud that also settles on our heart. What is the bulldozer for us? It is the education we receive. And the education we receive is the education of this friendship. To compare everything that happens to us with the deep needs and evidence of our heart, that is, with the fabric, which God makes and weaves every moment, which is my heart. In fact, judgement is expressed as a relationship with reality and my heart. How do I live my study, my relationship with my boyfriend? Did you hear how Francesco spoke of his relationship with his girlfriend? A judgement that continually opened him up in self-knowledge and knowledge of her. A freedom, a liberation. How do I live my relationship with my illness, with my anger, with my parents, with my teachers, with my companions, with my wife, with my husband, with my children?

4. The style of the mission is witness

Summoned, sent, invited. "Freely you have received, freely give." This is where all our responsibility stems from. Freely we have received, freely we give. I still have in my eyes and heart what our friend from Prague told us yesterday. Roberto said: "Two others and I are there, in the heart of Europe. Me, with my temperament, together with two others to bear witness to who we are." We can-

not go home tonight and not think that we have him there, rather than all the others, our Spanish friends, our Portuguese friends. But doesn't your heart expand? Just as Roberto cannot return to Prague without having all of us in his heart. Or what Caterina told us about her mother, who said: "I sacrificed my holiday to come to the Rimini Meeting with you." And then she was happy. But she had to see that place where her daughter is blossoming, that symphony that her daughter is listening to, where she is blossoming and singing for everyone.

Listen to what one of our friends wrote to us, it has a lot to do with what we are saying: "It is a fact that happens again in front of us. Our friendship is new in every moment because it happens again every day in front of us [it happens again, we don't invent it, it happens again in front of us]. Often we can fall into believing that novelty is synonymous with diversity, but instead the overwhelming beauty is the exact opposite, namely that novelty is the exact reoccurrence of the same friendship between the apostles and Christ [as Francesco also told us earlier]. I am called today as they were called 2000 years ago [it is not a sentiment, Davide said yesterday, it is a fact]. Why and where do I see this calling happening? It emerges from my engagement with life, with school, with everything. I realise a preference and instead of objecting I move. And this process of appreciation of the gift that is my life [judgement, the comparison begins] becomes a responsibility that is played out in places, in study, in time, in relationships. We often believe that it is we who need the companionship of GS and we forget that GS is us. Otherwise it becomes like an abstract entity outside of me that I can draw on. But it doesn't. Gosh! GS is me. I need the companionship, but the companionship needs me too. We are all called as protagonists, each one as an apostle, and we immediately relive that face-to-face relationship with Christ. I need God, but God, in order to act in history and act with me, needs me, needs my yes. Hence my desires, my miseries towards reality and towards my own heart, which is an original instrument to grasp, in the particulars of reality, the universal sense that governs it. I want to obey this promise by asking for a patience that is a cure

for the moment, because I wish to be continually in the face of the exceptionality that happens in front of us. And for this there are the friends who pull us out of ourselves and make us look outside ourselves. I ask that this companionship always be a *vocational* companionship, that is, called, one by one, but together.”

A friend who is not here sent me a message received from someone who is here. It says: “This happiness is forever, you carry it in your heart. I can’t wait to take it home, to tell my friends all about it. I want them to enjoy everything I’ve heard, because they are huge truths [the presentiment of truth] and they have to know it, they have to hear what my heart wants to shout.” The testimony, the mission. What my heart wants to shout: the truth that it has encountered, the truth that has made itself lovable, making everything lovable. And so I want to conclude in a roundabout way with that quote from Pope Francis that I read to you at the end of the introduction, because it makes even more sense now: “Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts. Do not stand still” (Audience to CL, 15 October 2022).

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