

## GS EASTER TRIDUUM

### “Everything Begins with an Encounter”

#### *Easter Triduum Retreat of GS*

*Rimini, April 2-4, 2015*

#### INTRODUCTION, FR. JOSÉ MEDINA, FSCB

*Thursday Evening, April 2*

*Mare nostrre*

*Ballad of the Old Man*

Lord, “look upon our failed humanity in its mortal weakness, and grant it be revived through the Passion of your only begotten Son”.<sup>1</sup> Look kindly upon us. Everything comes from You. Even our acknowledgement of You comes from You. “Come, Lord!”<sup>2</sup> have mercy on us. “Your grace is better than life,”<sup>3</sup> because without your grace, without your Mercy, life has no meaning. Without Your mercy life would lead us to completely lose ourselves. We’ll sing *Discendi Santo Spirito*.

*Discendi Santo Spirito* (“Come Down, Holy Spirit”)

#### LIVING AUTHENTICALLY RIGHT NOW

I’d like to begin these days together by reading a note from one of you that summarizes the urgency expressed in what many of you wrote, which I also feel. One friend wrote, “How can we learn to live an authentic life? What does it take to truly live? At times, I feel like a robot stuck in the daily routine; completely apathetic.” This is the urgency I’ve been feeling lately: the desire to live an authentic life now, today.

You can’t talk about the desire for happiness if not beginning with today, by comparing with the present, with everyday things. Without the connection to the present, with daily life, which is made up of everyday problems, with friends, those that come up at school, at home, with sickness, with difficulties...if we aren’t talking about this present, this “now,” then we are talking about an intellectual happiness, and our conversations over the next two days wouldn’t be able to budge the difficulty we’re facing. To talk about happiness without talking about now—about you sitting there now—to talk about an idea would be, as Pope Francis has said, to become young people in a museum who know everything, who are well informed, are familiar with it all, but who don’t feel the impact of reality, the urgency of reality, who never weep.

Christ is interesting to me because, with Him, I can life authentically now; otherwise Christianity is something added on, another thing to do, a ritual, a moral code, something we already know. Without the connection to daily life, with the present it’s impossible to understand that God exists. Without the flesh of daily life, whatever form that takes, you can’t understand it, because it is precisely in the struggle of daily life that you experience the drama of being human.

## A BOAT LONGING FOR THE SEA AND YET AFRAID

One page 5 of the booklet for the Triduum, you will find a poem (*George Gray*) by Edgar Lee Masters that expresses the human drama in the way I've experienced it over the last few months: "I have studied many times / The marble which was chiseled for me— / A boat with a furled sail at rest in a harbor [because a ship isn't made for the harbor, but for the sea. It's like having a Ferrari and keeping it parked. A Ferrari doesn't belong in a parking garage]. / In truth it pictures not my destination / But my life. [Why does he say this? Why does he find that he has retreated from life, that he's given up on living?] / For love was offered me and I shrank from its disillusionment; / Sorrow knocked at my door, but I was afraid; / Ambition called to me, but I dreaded the chances. [A nice car, a nice boat, but you never drive it. You look at it, clean it, you even sit inside, but without driving] / Yet all the while I hungered for meaning in my life. ["All the while;" you know this feeling] / And now I know that we must lift the sail / And catch the winds of destiny / Wherever they drive the boat. / To put meaning in one's life may end in madness [life without meaning drives you to madness!], / But life without meaning is the torture / Of restlessness and vague desire— [you know very well that we're not made to live stuck in a routine] / It is a boat longing for the sea and yet afraid."

"I'm afraid," one of you wrote to her teacher. "Do you know what it's like at my age to already feel like you've fallen short? To feel like you're never good enough, as if everything that you knew how to do ends up blocked by one and the same limitation: ourselves. I'm afraid of living right now." Our friend continues, saying, "Do you know that my goal is? To find myself again. To find that simple girl who smiled at everything. To find that grit, that strength, and that desire to be more than I am that I had before. To no longer overhear the words of my mother, to no longer see her suffer and no longer feel alone."

We perceive that there is a promise in life, a great promise and we long for it. We know that we're not made to be trapped in life, but at the same time we feel almost finished, tired; we feel inadequate and incapable. This is the paradox of being human: to feel that we are made to be true, to be truly ourselves, and yet we are incapable of completing a single action that is true.

We'll sing *Cerco un gesto naturale* ("Looking for an Action that's Genuine"). Listen for these words, "I look at myself from the outside as if I were two people / ... in that movement, I was missing." ("*Mi guardo dal di fuori come fossimo due persone / [...] in quel movimento io non c'ero.*")<sup>4</sup> My actions are not an expression of my "I." I'm trapped, confused, trying to live an authentic life in the present, but I don't know how.

### *Cerco un gesto naturale*

## HOW CAN WE LIVE AN AUTHENTIC LIFE?

Man has made many attempts, in many different ways, to experience a natural action, one that is authentic, one that is truly human enough to say "I am here, now." He has tried to produce a natural, human act by his own hands, or by following the tide of trends, but without success; he has tried to do it on his own, but it doesn't

take much to realize that it's not enough, that I am not capable of being myself, of being me. As a result, man has concluded that it's impossible to live an authentic life and has given up, he's retired to his house in the country, or into his little group of friends, isolated, protected and convinced that the obstacle to overcome is the situation caused by a society created by men that are no longer men; seeking to censure, to deaden the impact with reality as much as possible.

What's missing today, Pope Francis says, are tears: "I invite each of you to ask him or herself: Have I learned to weep? Can I weep when I see a child who is hungry, on drugs and on the street, homeless [when I hear that an airplane has crashed in the Alps, when I hear that people are dying in Syria, do I weep? Do I feel the impact of reality?] [...] Or is my weeping the self-centered whining of those who weep because they want to have something else?",<sup>5</sup> self-centered because its goal is to remove whatever seems like an obstacle for my life. "This is the first thing I would like to say to you. Let's learn to weep [...]. Why do children suffer? Why does this or that tragedy occur in life? [...] If you don't learn how to weep, you are not a good Christian [not men].[...] Be brave. Don't be afraid to cry!"<sup>6</sup>

We need to let reality touch us, we need to feel the impact with reality and the drama of being human, because it's only at that level that our asking, our weeping and our desire come out. This sadness, this longing for something great for myself, this desire to be truly myself requires a reasonable man to take a step, requires his freedom to act: you have to cry out! A man aware of his own incapacity can live the impact with any circumstances, no matter what they are, either in a dramatic way (I cry out to an Other), or in a tragic way (I despair, I give up and say "It's impossible!").

A reasonable man, open to the possibility that there is really fulfillment in life, asks. If someone stops short of asking, it's because of pride that doesn't allow him to bend on his knees (he thinks he's capable of bringing about life's fulfillment, contrary to all the evidence) or because of despair. When facing your experience every day, you have to take that step: cry out! Like Bartimaeus, the blind man, who cries out to Jesus in the midst of the crowd, "Make me see!" They all yell back at him. Everyone wants you to forget yourself, forget your desire, your weeping (they want to console us; we don't have the courage to face it), everyone yells to make you forget. Just as with Bartimaeus everyone said, "Shut up, quiet, quiet! You're causing trouble!" But he wouldn't give up, "Make me see!"<sup>7</sup> I don't want to be consoled, I want to be myself; I want happiness now; I want to live like a man. So, to say it using another, even more beautiful, word: I have to be a beggar, because I cannot give or make myself what I want to be.

This, dear friends, is what I hope for these days: that you be men and women, that you embrace the impact, the blow of reality, because the dramatic question in life is not an abstract intellectual question. Weep! Cry out! Ask, in every second, every day! Beg! This is the structure of man: begging, it's the word that best describes what man is. I promise that, by begging and living as men who beg, light will shine in your eyes and you will be given an affection for life that you never could have imagined.

Let's sing *Blind Barnabas*.

## *Blind Barnabas*

### **EVERYTHING BEGINS WITH AN ENCOUNTER: GRACE**

We've quickly highlighted that the first step to begin to respond to the question of how you learn to live an authentic life is to become aware of what I am; that the first difficulty is in the fact that I am afraid of living life—because I don't weep—and that the structure that constitutes a man is that of a beggar, because to be myself I need someone else. Therefore, the most human thing to do is to cry out.

Pavese wrote, "I need some outside intervention to change direction."<sup>8</sup> Man needs something outside of him to push him to decide to ask. We need this, as well! We need someone even to be able to ask. What can push a man to this decision, to be a man?

One of you wrote, "A month ago, I went to the hospital for a surgery and I met a child who was very ill there. He was 11 years old, thin, and didn't speak or move. At first, I didn't even want to go into his room [we pull back, because we are afraid of living like men; you don't know what might happen if you enter that hospital room]. Leaving the hospital, I found myself moved, transfixed by his smile. I was amazed at how he smiled even though he wasn't well, and I was also stuck by his mother's serenity ["even though he wasn't well", because we think of circumstances as obstacles to being ourselves]. In that moment I understood the encounter with them gave me the chance to rediscover how a smile can have an effect on me. I realized that when I left his room everything was interesting [I recognized a change in me], that smile was the sign that inside of him there was hope and the awareness that being happy is worth it." We want to see someone who lives the same life as us like a true man. This is what changes me: someone who suffers like I do, but who has a hope within that I don't have.

Robert Stevenson (author of *Treasure Island*) wrote that what we need is, "What we want to see is one who can breast into the world, do a man's work, and still preserve his first and pure enjoyment of existence."<sup>9</sup> What we need is to see a man who lives life, who works just like I do, without eradicating himself, without losing himself; one who lives every circumstance without giving up on life, holding on to "the first and purest pleasure in life," which is to have the eyes of a child. We want to find a man who really savors eating, loving and working, who is fascinated by the number of the stars, who seeks out the beauty of a sunset, in other words, a man who is happy. A man who is always a man. One who doesn't have to forget or ignore anything, who cries as I do, who suffers as I do, but who isn't crushed by his finiteness, by the fragility of his being. A man who lives at the level of the promise he perceives in life, though aware of his own littleness.

What pushes man to conviction, what makes his heart decisive is the encounter with a man who really lives like a man. It's an encounter that changes you, makes you anew. What is needed is a man, the encounter with a man. The poet Betocchi wrote, "What is needed is a man / it's not wisdom needed / what is needed is a man / in spirit and truth / not a country, not these things / what is needed is a man / a step that's sure and steady / an extended hand that all / can grasp, and walk / freely, and be saved."<sup>10</sup>

If it's impossible for a man to make this happen by his own power, then you understand immediately that what I want is the "hidden God,"<sup>11</sup> because it's impossible for a man to truly be a man on his own. He needs to encounter someone who appears to be at the same time entirely normal and entirely other, extremely familiar and infinitely unreachable. A man who transmits—through whom is transmitted—a great Presence. That great Presence that reveals itself, that touches us. Everything begins with an encounter, which is a grace.

Everything begins with an encounter. Everything is grace. We prayed in the beginning, "Your grace is better than life,"<sup>12</sup> because without Your grace there is no life, life has no meaning, no direction; without Your grace I can't move. Without Your grace, without the encounter with this "hidden God," life is tragic, it ends badly and so we don't live it, we don't leave the harbor.

This is mystery of mercy: to my asking, to your need, to your begging God responds, not with visions or laws or advice, but with a man. Everything comes from the encounter with that man. The Holy Father told us this in Rome: "Everything in our life, today as in the time of Jesus, begins with an encounter. An encounter with this Man [...] a man like all men and at the same time different. [...] Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him... Or when, after the Resurrection, Jesus asks Peter: "Do you love me?" (Jn 21:15), and Peter responds: "Yes"; this yes was not the result of a power of will, it did not come only by decision of the man Simon: it came even before from Grace, it was that "primerear", that preceding of Grace. This was the decisive discovery for St Paul, for St Augustine, and so many other saints: Jesus Christ is always first, He "primerea" us, awaits us, Jesus Christ always precedes us; and when we arrive, He has already been waiting. He is like the almond blossom: the one that blooms first, and announces the arrival of spring."<sup>13</sup>

The encounter with that man changes your life. Within him, life is really life, and I can truly be myself. He brings the satisfaction into life.

This happened to Andrew—do you remember that excerpt in the video of Fr. Giussani?—when he "entered his house, took off his cloak and his wife said, 'Andrew, what's wrong with you? You are different; what happened to you?' [...] 'But what is wrong?' And he embraced his wife, who had never felt embraced that way before in her entire life; he was [he was a man. He was an "I"] [...]. Were someone to ask him: 'Who are you?' he would have answered: "I understand I am different...after listening to that individual, that man, I have become someone else."<sup>14</sup>

Such was the absolutely greatest event in the course of history. The encounter with a man who makes life "life". From that moment on, the hope that drove those men on, their goal and their objective was to hear Him speak, because "never before has anyone spoken like Him".<sup>15</sup> His words and His gaze change my life. Staying with Him, living with Him, I can breathe differently. His gaze reconstructs me, it reconstructs how I look at myself; he makes me at peace with myself and with the things around me. He embraces everything in me, even that which I hate, even the things that I object to, even death.

What would life be without that Man? "It would really be unlivable."

To remain with that man—to remain with Him—is what life is about. There is no event in the history of the world that’s more important. Life is to verify if He is true or not, now. This is the response to the search for an authentic life, to the fundamental question of every man and woman, of your life and of mine: Christ: yes or no? We’ll sing *Hoy arriesgaré*.

*Hoy arriesgaré* (“To Risk Today”)

**“REMAIN IN ME”**<sup>16</sup>

It’s not enough that Jesus existed. It’s not enough that He walked on this earth, that he saw, embraced and accompanied those men. I need to be accompanied now. A relationship with someone who is dead is a sentimental one, based on emotion and incapable of having an impact on my life. A friend writes, “I am really realizing that without Him, I don’t live; I need to encounter Him every day, because I need that fullness of life, and this time of difficulty is really precious because it is making me focus even more on understanding what I need. The source of my struggle is that my days are no longer defined by that gaze, and not encountering it any more is making my life a mess.” That man has to be present today, or my life doesn’t change, it doesn’t budge. It’s not enough to have met him; my life is now. I need Him today.

The disciples went through the same experience, and the thought of not being with Him was terrifying; it filled their hearts with sadness. “‘I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, ‘Where I go you cannot come,’ so now I say it to you.’ [...] Simon Peter said to him, ‘Master, where are you going?’ Jesus answered [him], ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later.’ Peter said to him, ‘Master, why can’t I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.’”<sup>17</sup> That man, Jesus, promised to remain with me until the end of the world, “I am with you always, until the end of the age.”<sup>18</sup> How does He stay with us? In a way that is inconceivable for man: “I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread [...] whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”<sup>19</sup>

In the Eucharist, God makes Himself present within a sign that is visible and tangible, so we can experience it, and through it Jesus shows us the way that God accompanies man. God responded to man, remaining with him in the things that are most “normal” (food to eat, sacraments to go along with life’s biggest moments, companionship), but at the same time completely Other. The Eucharist is a way of “being.” It’s a Mystery; it’s Other; it’s beyond my ideas and my imagination. It requires contemplation (you can’t reduce it to a human measure. It’s something Other that’s at the same time profoundly human).

“‘I give you praise, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for although You have hidden these things from the wise and the learned You have revealed them to the childlike.’”<sup>20</sup> Ask for the simplicity of a child, because *even* the ability to adhere to Christ is a gift of Grace. Man’s mind and heart are never sufficient for the steps that God takes toward him. Ask for a pure heart that seeks to enter into communion with Him (without trying to “explain it” in human categories); a heart directed toward the

love that it has been given. Otherwise, this love would remain like light for a blind man or words on deaf ears.

## LESSON, FR. JOSÉ MEDINA

*Friday Morning, April 3*

*Minha Festa  
Red River Shore*

### LOVE FOR LIFE

How can you learn to live an authentic life, to live a true moment right now or, as the song that we listened to last night said, a moment in which someone saw me, in which I felt like myself? Our doubts that this might not be possible lead us to deaden the impact with reality, to try to forget. All the desire to be authentic, to live that moment forever, today, now...we make it all disappear. We lose that dramatic sense of urgency in life.

Pasolini [an Italian film director] said: "I love life so fiercely, so desperately. [...] I love the sun, the grass and youth. The love for life has become for me a vice worse than cocaine." The urgency, the desire to be and to live that reveals itself every time, every second as a promise is not an idea, it's not something that I have to think of. It's enough to be fully alive to feel the dramatic urgency, the desire to be truly "I". "How will it all end?" Pasolini asks himself, and he answers, "I don't know."<sup>21</sup>

### THE PROMISE OF REALITY AND A SENSE OF POWERLESSNESS

At first impact, reality presents itself to us as a promise, as a source of affection. The first day of school, the first time that you felt a certain girl look at you, this newness, all that is new in life presents itself as a promise that awakens an interest. At first impact, man has an intuition of the positivity, the goodness that reality reveals, and so he develops affection for it. Man's affection for reality is not by calculation—he doesn't know what will happen—it's because reality "promises" something.

At the same time, man doesn't know what this promise is or how it will be fulfilled. Man recognizes the promise, there is something inside of him capable of recognizing its correspondence, but he knows neither what is "missing" nor how it will be fulfilled.

### ASKING

The fact that you don't know, or can't imagine, how this promise will come to pass means that the capacity to carry it to fulfillment is not within you; you need another that you await, to whom you beg, like a beggar who doesn't have the capacity—who doesn't even have the right—to ask, who has nothing to give in exchange. Begging is what constitutes man; it's not a shortcoming. It's not that I was born broken or defective, because just as I understand who I am... just as I become aware of who I am through the collision... the encounter with reality, it's in that same way that I understand that I am a need for something "other." Begging is not a shortcoming; it's being truly ourselves.

And so prayer, asking, crying out is the fundamental human action; it's the most concrete action in existence. Those who are reasonable pray, because being



reasonable is being open to the possibility of fulfillment. Open in the sense that, perceiving the dramatic nature of their asking, feeling the impact of reality that unveils this desire in me, asking affirms the fact that I don't make myself. Asking, begging is the most reasonable choice we can make, it's almost natural, like the asking of a child.

### **MAN'S ATTEMPT**

In front of the question of how his life will be fulfilled, however, man loses patience and thinks, "I'll do it myself!", but by doing it myself, the fulfillment of that promise that I intuit in the encounter with reality is reduced to my measure. It is reduced to the work of my hands, and so is an effort that is tainted from the beginning.

One of you wrote, "Since I realized that I had fallen in love, I've also realized that I have a great desire to love [the first moment of falling in love is the truest moment, because you immediately perceive the immense promise, you're in front of that girl in awe that there is another person who pays attention to you], but it's as if I can't manage to be with her as she deserves. Often, it seems like I dismiss her, I'd like to caress her, but instead it seems like I hurt her. I would like to respect her, but often I use her. Seeing this inability in me to love, the question 'what's missing?' bursts forth. How can I love truly, authentically?"

Another of you said, "When I was little, I suffered a disease. Now it's relapsed, without warning. How can I live through something like this, without just giving in to it?"

You and I can't imagine how the promise will be fulfilled; we don't know how to bring it about. Feeling this powerlessness that constitutes man, this begging that constitutes man; we accuse reality or the circumstances of lying. I want to live, to truly live, and you (illness, my inability) aren't helping me, you won't leave me alone. As a result, we think of reality, of circumstances, of the things that happen to us as objections. We accuse reality of betraying us, of being a sick, tragic joke that makes promises but doesn't deliver, that disappoints.

### **DOUBT**

If I follow this line of thought, the openness to life, to the encounter with reality that filled me with curiosity and the presentiment of a promise, is silenced in doubt. Doubt is very insidious, because it's not that you affirm something else, it's not that you've seen something in reality to make you say, "The promise won't come true;" it's not that you've seen additional evidence, rather it's as if for a second you shifted your gaze and lost the energy to live. In place of curiosity, you feel perplexed; and instead of staying in front of your girlfriend (and your textbooks, your friends), aware of the promise that sprang forth that first time that we met them, you find yourself saying "maybe," "...but," or "what if it's not true."

Doubt corrodes man's energy. It's like when you have trouble solving a math problem: the fact that you don't know how to solve it doesn't mean that it doesn't have a solution; that fact that you don't know how to figure it out doesn't mean it's against you, it might mean that you need someone's help. This is what we do with life: in front of a problem, we say, "it's not worth it," or we say, "I'm not good

enough,” “I’ll never manage to do it,” “this problem is against me,” and so we remain paralyzed; we can’t face things, we feel betrayed.

Doubt, however, is not founded in reality. It’s that thought that insidiously enters into life when you don’t accept the simple fact that you cannot fulfill yourself; that you are “need.” It’s much more than needing another person; you *are* need of an *Other*.

When doubt enters into your life, so does fear. A friend wrote, “I’m afraid of going to the bottom of things, because then I would find something that I’m not expecting [This becomes our dominant mentality: since I’m not expecting it, it’s not according to my measure, I’m afraid of it. Look, friends, the only interesting thing in life is not finding myself in other things, it’s finding something new], something that’s not as I think it is, I’m sure of it, because I’m not the one who decides how things will go! The fact that I am not the one who decides how things will go worries me, it always makes me take a step backwards, it prevents me from really living. When I try to control everything around me, the world starts to cave in on me! I remain myself, with nothing left, having lost even myself!” Since I don’t know what will happen, I don’t move, “since I don’t know how it could happen, it’s impossible.”

When you heed doubt, when you give credit to doubt—it’s unreasonable, because it’s not founded on anything—, then you are overcome by fear, you get stuck; all that remains of life, of the desire and urgency to live an authentic life, is the attempt to reach tranquility, to live in peace without being moved, without problems, without weeping, like the living dead who are not touched by anyone. This isn’t peace! Tranquility isn’t peace, it’s getting old, it’s the kind of getting old that means lacking desire and curiosity. We are made for great things; we’re made for an authentic life, to devour reality, not to bear it. We’ll sing *Amare ancora* together.

*Amare ancora* (“To Continue to Love”)

#### **OUR UNPROBLEMATIC ATTITUDE**

Man is incapable of sustaining his original attitude, the gaze of a child; he becomes afraid, shifts his gaze and so no longer finds meaning in suffering and wants nothing more than to forget, to get rid of the question, of the problem that reality provokes. Forgetting seems easier, more comfortable and less of a struggle; it seems easier to cut off our expectation for the possibility of fulfillment and adopt an attitude of the most trivial and instinctive reactions (of falseness). Modern man tries to diminish the impact, the collision with reality, he tries to make it unproblematic: “Our attitude as modern men towards the religious fact is unproblematic; it is not normally a problematic attitude in the true sense.”<sup>22</sup> This attitude that is not “truly problematic,” which we read about in School of Community, is the dominant mentality in our life.

An unproblematic attitude means that we don’t let ourselves be provoked by life, that you no longer weep, that you don’t feel the blow of reality. “Life,” Fr. Giussani says, “is a web of events and encounters which provoke our awareness, producing all different kinds of problems. But a problem is nothing other than the dynamic expression of a reaction in the face of these encounters.”<sup>23</sup> Man, however, tries to avoid the impact with reality, that reaction that life in its series of events and

encounters provokes in him; man chooses to be anesthetized (closed), neglecting the “I” made up of desire for happiness, justice and truth, while at the same time aware of being “dust,” being powerless. Modern man does all he can to avoid weeping! Problems—when we perceive the impact with reality and the dramatic questions that arise—are not something to avoid, or to resolve; they are things we need to look at.

#### **DEADENING THE IMPACT WITH REALITY WITH NOISE OR EXPLANATIONS**

We moderns don’t like this; it bothers us, and so we try to deaden the impact of problems with noise, with distractions; we put in our headphones, as one of you wrote: “I look for excitement that can distract me from thinking: I look for hobbies and entertainment to run away from myself, from my unhappiness and my thousands of open questions about life and death. I fill my days and I stick my headphones in my ears as if I were afraid of silence.”

And when distractions aren’t able to deaden the impact of reality, the provocations opened by reality, then we try to “close” the problem with explanations: an airplane crashes and the problem is the pilot, so if you just fix the problem with the pilot then that kind of tragedy won’t happen anymore; I’m sick, so what’s needed is a biological explanation. We can even act this way in religious terms: I’m struggling, so there must be something that God wants from me, as a way of explaining it away, of finding comfort so I no longer have to weep or feel the drama of my own “I.” We become “museums,”<sup>24</sup> as the Pope says; we’re very well informed, but life isn’t fruitful, it doesn’t change. We forget the promise and become like the living dead.

#### **REDUCING DESIRE TO GOALS WITHIN REACH**

Faced with the impact of reality, some of us try to deaden it by focusing their energies on goals that they can reach with their own efforts. In the face of my desire, of the promise that emerges in the impact with reality, I think I can manage by getting a good grade or going to college. But it’s not enough, because I want life now, I don’t want a “successful” life that’s over, the sum of a lot of nice moments, I want to feel truly myself right now.

The consequences of a life lived this way are chilling: a man who is incapable of affection for reality, who finds every excuse in the book to justify his disinterest, just as we might treat a math problem: “It’s not that important anyway,” or, “It’s just not for me,” as if life were not for you.

The consequence of a life lived according to the measure of my capacity, or even the measure of my imagination, is a man who is unable to love, paralyzed, bogged down like Novecento in the monologue written by Alessandro Baricco. For Novecento, the main character of the book, the ship where he was born is “everything” up until the day that a passenger tells him about his experience of seeing the ocean for the first time (that ocean that Novecento knew so well): “It’s like a great bellow that yells and yells, and what it yells is: ‘Band of cuckolds, life is immense, do you want to understand or not? Immense.’”<sup>25</sup>

Novecento is fascinated by the tale and the idea that life is immense (reality showed its attraction, showed the promise it contains, enough to make affection grow in Novecento, to make him want to move toward it). He wants to go ashore

because he is fascinated by this promise, but then, when he's on the third step of the staircase that would lead him to the desired solid ground, he turns back, scared.

Novecento never steps off that boat. Not even years later, when they decide to sink it. Novecento explains the reasons behind his situation to a friend, "I was born on this ship, and the world passed me by, but two thousand people at a time. And there were wishes here, but never more than fit between prow and stern. You played out your happiness, but on a piano that was not infinite. [...] Land? Land is a ship too big for me. It's a voyage too long. It's a woman too beautiful; a perfume too strong. It's a music I don't know how to make. Forgive me, my friend, but I'm not getting off."<sup>26</sup>

When we lose touch with reality, we become incapable of commitment, without the strength or energy to love life, we lose the ability to love at all. We look at life with suspicion, with doubt. Let's sing *Canzone di Maria Chiara*.

### *Canzone di Maria Chiara* ("Maria Chiara's Song")

#### **EVERYTHING BEGINS AGAIN WITH AN ENCOUNTER**

We need to go back to being like children; in other words we need to go back to seeing life as a promise. This means, as the song says, "For those who were persecuted, / for those who wept in the night / for those who loved [...] / my house will be open."<sup>27</sup> Going back to being like children means rediscovering that promise that reveals itself when I encounter life, when I dive into a problem, as our starting point. Still, man is not capable even of this: of being himself, with the same zest for existence he had in the beginning; even this is impossible for man. This is why man is a beggar. But we perceive our need as a weakness, as a defect to overcome, because we think of life according to a logic of power, in which the one objective is to overcome weakness, instead of becoming aware that I am this lack, that powerlessness is part of the structure of man. This is so true that the second that I'm no longer aware of my weakness, I am no longer a man, I am no longer "I". Man struggles to be himself, to beg, to ask, to be like a child, and clings to his own power, to his own action, his own measure; he never manages to get past the logic of power, as if the problem of life were "success" and not "being."

#### **GRACE**

What pulls man out of this trap and pushes him toward the decision to be himself is an encounter, a grace. It's clear from the experience described in what many of you wrote.

One of you wrote, "I would like to tell about how my life is changing; finally I've begun to live! [This is the sign that you are changing, "Finally I've begun to live!"] I was tired of having to give in to fading away, tired of living the discomfort of making the wrong choices, I was tired of underestimating myself, tired of believing that there was nothing true or beautiful for me [because reality–life–lived according to my measure or in forgetfulness, is tiring]. But I found true freedom when you entered and became a part of my life [an encounter breaks into my life and from that moment, I am free, "finally I've begun to live!"], no one had ever embraced my desire as you did with one look, no one had ever ventured to dive into the abyss that

kept my heart from looking at and accepting my need!” To finally live, to be free, and to look at your own need.

What pushes man to be a man (what pushes man to a decision, what makes his heart ready to be decisive in recognizing [an Other]) is the encounter with a presence that carries, that transmits something great to us, that “hidden God”<sup>28</sup> that we spoke of yesterday. It’s then, in the encounter with that person, that you suddenly begin to breathe. Another person wrote, “The year 2015 didn’t begin particularly well: I failed a lot of assignments at school after coming back from Christmas vacation, I couldn’t concentrate, I wasted a lot of time and spent days as if in a vegetative state, a slave to the world [this is man’s attempt]. To fix the problem, I tried to cut out some things, thinking that way I’d have more time: I stopped going to sports practice, I spent a lot less time with my friends... but I still had the same attitude toward things [your attempt didn’t work, but you kept at it]. On Saturday, March 7, I was there in Rome with the Pope. I don’t remember at all what he said; I spent the entire time with my friends. That evening I went home with a tremendous sense of emptiness inside, as if something was out of place; I feel the desire of being loved by someone as no one has been loved before. My heart is empty at the core [the encounter, going to see the Pope, made me understand who I am. I feel this desire of being loved as no one has been loved before. I feel this emptiness inside of me]. The next morning, doing my homework in the living room at home, I turned my bored eyes to the Christmas poster that had been hanging there for three months (I hadn’t really noticed it until that moment). I was struck by how Mary looked at Jesus, with a look of indescribable sweetness and tranquility. I need that gaze.”

In the simplicity of an encounter, our life, the view of our heart, is reconfigured. You become at peace with yourself, you are able to embrace everything, even difficulties, death, even the things you hate and the things that make you feel like you are against yourself. An encounter allows me to begin to be myself.

But it’s not enough to see it once. I need to see it now, to remain with Him now, because the second that the presence of the person who carries that greatness vanishes, I can no longer be myself.

The same girl continued on, saying, “After a while I was overwhelmed, I decided that I wasn’t ready and never would be, that everything was too good for me [an objection that we feel very strongly and very often, but that, if you think about it, is really stupid: recognizing that everything is too good scares me. This is doubt; there is nothing reasonable about it], I felt like I didn’t deserve it [of course! You deserve nothing and everything belongs to you], so I left everything. Blindfolding my eyes and closing my heart, I sank to my lowest point [with that same old fear, stuck]. Then, a few months ago, that gaze that I had received before entered my life again. It wasn’t the same gaze as before, it was that of someone my age who I didn’t know, and despite this [despite the fact that it was a different person], it “freed me” from that way of life I had reverted to. It helped me to start to care for things again and to recognize it, starting with him. From there, I started to take responsibility for myself again, to take care of myself.”

It’s a gaze that you can recognize in various people, one that frees you, that helps you to begin again; a gaze that corresponds to the emptiness that I feel, to that lack that we try to push aside, but which is actually the privileged place of encounter. In

the audience on March 7, Pope Francis said, “The privileged place of encounter is the caress of Jesus’ mercy regarding my sin [regarding my lack of being, of my nothingness]. [...] The will to respond and to change [...] comes thanks to this merciful embrace.”<sup>29</sup> It’s from this embrace that a new, different life springs forth.

Our temptation is to fall into the logic of power, thinking of my sin, my incapacity, my powerlessness and my limit as something that I have to either overcome with my own effort, or forget by surrounding myself with noise or explanations. It’s a logic of power that quietly asserts that, deep down, there’s something inside of me that was defective from the beginning. No! There is nothing broken in your being expectation, in being a promise that is actively manifested as begging.

### **THE PERSON BECOMES AWARE OF HIMSELF**

Only an encounter can awaken the “I” from the prison built with one’s own hands and literally drag him out of his tomb. It’s a rebirth, becoming aware of oneself. “The fruit of an encounter,” Fr. Giussani said, “is the kindling of the sense of the person. [...] in the encounter, the person [the “I”] becomes aware of himself, and so his personality is born.”<sup>30</sup>

The gaze of that person who transmits the great Presence, which is Christ’s gaze, makes me aware of myself; finally I can accept to embrace that fact that I am the desire of the infinite because I no longer let myself be limited by my littleness.

This, however, doesn’t happen automatically. One of you wrote, “This path is a struggle, because it’s not easy to love and to entrust yourself, but there is no struggle more beautiful. It’s a struggle that fills your heart day after day, unlike those things that are easy to accomplish but, though they may be nice, quickly get boring.”

When we live rooted in this gaze we have encountered, our struggle has a meaning, life is no longer an objection. The circumstances, my sin are no longer objections, but are rather the condition so that, thanks be to God, helps me to be aware of my lack, that I miss You, to be aware that I desire, I *need*, to be saved. This is what we affirm when we sing *L’uomo cattivo*: that we are need of, and so desire for, the infinite.

*L’uomo cattivo* (“The Bad Man”)

### **THE HUNDREDFOLD**

We need to be reborn, and this rebirth, as Jesus told Nicodemus, is not something that you can make happen, it happens in an encounter. But the encounter is not the end of the road. It’s the beginning of an adventure that continues, the beginning of a story destined to permeate my entire life, destined to save, to take over my whole life. Little by little, the relationship with that man becomes the root of my actions, it enters as if by osmosis to define my actions. We need to be reborn. Jesus said to Nicodemus, “no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus responded, “How can a person once grown old be born again? Surely he cannot reenter his mother’s womb and be born again, can he?” Just like many of us ask ourselves how we can be reborn. Jesus responds, “Amen, amen, I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.”<sup>31</sup> You cannot be yourself, I

cannot be myself, without You, O Christ. And so the question that defines life is, “how can I remain with You?”, because it’s beautiful to see that I can finally live, and I want to live now, and tomorrow, and every day, not every once in a while. I want to experience this new life that comes from living with You. Then, it is truly terrifying to think that You are not there, Christ. Because if You are not there, I can’t live. I want to experience this new life now and always, I want to experience this hundredfold, the 100 times greater that I experienced when I felt Your gaze upon me. The hundredfold is in this life, it’s glory on earth, it’s the experience of a life that is finally life.

The hundredfold, however, is only experienced by those who leave behind, who set aside their own measure and who never take their gaze off of Christ. You have to “decentralize,” as the Pope said, from your own measure and put Christ at the center, look to Christ. “Whoever wants to save his life will lose it.”<sup>32</sup> Do you want to live? Stop looking at yourself. Stop measuring life against your own ideas, because God is more creative than you are, the promise made to you is 100 times greater than what you can imagine.

“Everyone who has given up houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for the sake of my name will receive a hundred times more, and will inherit eternal life.”<sup>33</sup> Leaving behind everything—your idea about what it means to love, about the reason to study, about what you need to have—leaving all of your imagined realities behind and living for Me, Jesus tells us, you will find 100 times more. You will live the affection for your father and mother 100 times better, you will have 100 times more passion for your studies, you will love your work, your girlfriend 100 times more. The hundredfold is that foretaste of a life that is more fully life, an affection that is more fully affection. The hundredfold is a foretaste of life as Jesus tasted it. It’s experiencing life, looking at things, as struggles, at moments of joy as Jesus looked at them.

St. Paul said, “No longer I, but Christ who lives in me,”<sup>34</sup> which means being reborn. Being reborn means looking at life the way Jesus did. But you can’t do this alone, you don’t know how, you can’t even imagine it. This can only happen if He is here and if your life stays centered on Him. Over time, staying with Him, remaining with Him, this experience of the companionship with Christ generates a new way of perceiving things, a new judgment that contradicts the dominant mentality, which has nothing to say except that life is tiresome. It’s a judgment that differs from the one resulting from my measure, which is no longer able to love life. The hundredfold is not an expansion of your instinctiveness; it’s something new; it’s beginning to experience Christ’s gaze on reality. The hundredfold is a foretaste in my flesh of how Christ lives. It’s living in the flesh, as St. Paul said, living the life of faith. The hundredfold is a foretaste in me of a love that’s more suitable, a love that foreshadows, in a way that takes our breath away, eternal tenderness. We’ll sing together *Ballata dell’amore vero*.

*Ballata dell’amore vero* (“Ballad of True Love”)

## **HIS COMPANIONSHIP CHANGES LIFE**

“My love [...] / dies without the sun.” “I would like to love you,”<sup>35</sup> but without the sun, my love dies. It’s not your measure, it’s not your hands or your power that can change things. Your life changes because He is there. Everything in our life, the most beautiful moments of our life are a witness to this change: I recognize in myself a way of looking at things that is not my own. No longer I, no longer I who live, but it’s Christ who lives in me. Remaining with Him changes your life.

A friend wrote, “Over the last few weeks, I’ve seen how a line in the School of Community is really desirable and fully human: ‘God [...] has become man’s companion on his journey.’ I felt this urgently at the day with Pope Francis. It had done me so much good, I wanted to tell a friend about it. As I was walking along the street, a homeless man stopped me to ask for money. At first, I was annoyed, because I thought I was saying something so important that I couldn’t be interrupted. Still, the good that I received being there with the Pope was so great that I really felt the need to look at it with that same measure, including in how I related to Robert (the homeless man).”

When you are struck by an encounter, your life changes; without you worrying about the “problem” of how to change it. The only problem is how to remain within this relationship: “I turned around, and I asked him how he ended up on the street. He told me about all the struggles and disappointments in his life. As he spoke, I was moved because I saw in him the same need that I have; the need of Someone to save me, Someone who has mercy on my meanness, Someone who can walk beside me on the journey, because by myself I don’t see the value of things. In fact, I needed to see it again the next day, because it had awakened in me an overwhelming desire for Jesus. You see, I deeply need to feel this urgency in every instant, because only then can I look at the girl I’m in love with, or a friend who asks me for help at school, in a true way. I want to come to the days of the Triduum fully aware of the economic sacrifice that my family has to make, because I can’t live without Jesus.”

We are witnesses of this miracle of a life that’s changed. The proof of a person generated by Christianity is in his own experience, in the unforeseeable miracle that happens in front of his eyes: the transformation of the present: “You can see it in the way it makes all circumstances more real [for you], ‘engaged in every circumstance.’”<sup>36</sup>

The fact that this way of living, loving and looking at others enters into all of my thoughts and actions, that these words become daily experience, life experience; that these words become something you feel deep within: this is the hundredfold.

The affirmation of my happiness, which is to say the realization of myself, is the relationship with Christ, because it’s only in the relationship with Him that I can fully live the events and circumstances of life: “Therefore, the relationship with Christ is the truth of *these* things, the truth of these things is in the awareness of that Presence, the awareness of that belonging. In short, this is living faith [in the flesh]: it’s not some other thing, it’s a subversive and surprising way of living ordinary things.”<sup>37</sup>

The one response to Stevenson’s dramatic wish is only possible with Christ; even though I live in the flesh, I live “taking on” the world, doing work as all men, and still preserving the first and pure enjoyment of existence, or, as Giussani says, maintaining, “in life our original affinity for being, for reality, that we are born with;



truly being like children in life (or poor in spirit, as the Gospel puts it), because this continuous positivity in front of reality is nothing other than being like children.”<sup>38</sup>

However, for this way of behaving, of living, of loving and of looking at others to enter into my way of living and thinking; for these words to become daily experience, life experience; for this hundredfold to become what I daily feel, we have to risk ourselves in life, remaining with Him.

### **THE EVENT CONTINUES**

The event, the encounter continues only if you risk your entire self in this relationship with Christ, otherwise it becomes just a thing of the past—beautiful, yes, because I felt something beautiful inside of me, but in the past—; unless I put my whole self into play in the relationship with Christ, so that He can enter in and give me the satisfaction of His way of life, I can't be myself. One of you wrote: “Everything, school, my studies, basically the entire reality that surrounds me, has brought me to discover that the only thing that brings me joy is following Jesus,” staying with Him.

What, then, does it mean to remain with Him? What does it mean to risk ourselves? Our friend responds: “In the book about Fr. Giussani, in a letter that he writes to his sister, he says that to begin to take responsibility for your vocation, you need to get to know and consult a priest. I trusted his judgment on this. [Why did you trust it? Listen:] Because I desire to live like he did, and to love like he did.” I risk my entire self because I want to live like you live. The encounter continues. I want to enter into the way that you see love, schoolwork, life, just as the disciples did with Jesus: “Listen, how do you use money? Listen, these guys say that we shouldn't walk on the Sabbath, what do you do?” I want to see like as you do, because I want to experience the same satisfaction in life that you do. Our friend continues, saying, “I started going to confession with a priest; and if in the beginning I was, let's say, ‘okay with myself,’ meaning school is fine; girlfriend, good; at home, fine, [now] I've begun to reassess everything, based on one question: is this what God is asking of me today? What do You want? [Jesus, what do you want from my life?] Because I want to do His will, and not follow my idea. This is all especially true in the relationship with my girlfriend.” He concludes saying, “More and more, the experience of Christ takes on flesh, enough to turn all my plans upside down. I've never felt so grateful and so joyful; this companionship, through whom Christ has won over my heart, gives me the certainty to risk everything, to have faith in what I am living and to begin to be aware that nothing is lost. Experience overcomes all of the ideas and images I have of myself. Before, I woke up thinking “but,” “maybe,” “who knows,” “it could be...” [doubt]. Now I say, ‘This is true today. I don't know what will happen tomorrow, but I know today this is true.’ It's that changed life that faith proposes.”

To put your whole self into play, you have to weep, you have to ask to have the simplicity of a child, with a simple heart that is decentralized, that doesn't of its own measure and instead throws its whole weight, risks everything on the desire to look at life as You do, because I want to live as You live.

The second that we lose this focus on risking everything, of verifying that Christ brings my life to fulfillment, makes my life truly life; the second that we stop risking

and running the risk of weeping, life is reduced to my projects. Our companionship, friendship: they're all beautiful projects, nice traditions that remind us of something beautiful that happened in the past, but not anymore. We need to, as the Pope said, "not worship the ashes but pass on the flame."<sup>39</sup> We need to put our whole selves into play now. We need for the "what" that happened to us to happen again, now; not "how" it happened in the beginning. We heard in one letter: I met another person, a friend, and meeting him I was reawakened, I found myself free again; I read Fr. Giussani's biography and I found myself again, and now I am here at the retreat for the Triduum. Everything is remaining with Him, not like the mechanical repetition of the beginning, but as the collision with something different, with a humanity that is different, that sets that origin I discover in motion, renews me, makes me be born again. It's being like children, open to the promise, accepting the impact with reality, asking, desiring to be like You. This is what allows me to be myself. Life is now. The hundredfold—this life that's more truly life—can be experienced now. All we have to do is ask Him: "Remain with me." All we have to do is risk ourselves and let Him act: not I, but may Christ live in me. We'll listen to this next. It's very beautiful. *What can I say.*

*What can I say*

## **SACRIFICE**

### **THE HUNDREDFOLD LEADS TO SACRIFICE**

The hundredfold, a life more truly life, appears inevitably to our eyes as a sacrifice. It's inevitable because the hundredfold suggests another measure, not mine, and so it requires that I affirm a presence instead of my idea. The decentralization that the Pope spoke about in Rome entails a sacrifice. Do you want to live? You have to lose yourself. Let it go, because your capacity is not enough. Just let it go! But we're afraid of abandoning that little bit that we have, because we think: now we very little, but if we leave that behind, then we'll really have nothing. No! Embrace your powerlessness, embrace the fact that you are desire of an Other, not a "little nothing." There is not a single act, not a single human action that is good and true that doesn't involve the awareness of this sacrifice. If you don't experience this sacrifice, then your actions are not true, they're still measured by your hands; it's an expression of your tiny power.

### **SACRIFICE IS A CONDITION, NOT AN OBJECTION**

Jesus proposes suffering, the sacrifice that we so often perceive as an objection, as the sole condition for our lives to be true. "Not you, but I," Christ says; "Not your life, but Mine. Do you want to live? Forget your tiny measure!" Sacrifice, then, isn't an objection, but rather the condition under which we can truly possess things. Here, the game begins again and you have to choose: either you affirm your own measure, your capacity, and as a result you lose your life, you no longer cry, you live in a vegetative state, like a puppet; or you let God enter into that void that you feel inside, and you risk everything on He who is present. All of life is played out in this choice.

## **SACRIFICE IS ONLY POSSIBLE BECAUSE JESUS DIES ON THE CROSS**

This losing ourselves is a scandal to us, an obstacle. In fact, living this way seems impossible, it seems impossible for us that a man could truly live life. This is the where the mercy of the Mystery of God comes in: that, seeing your asking, your desire to be yourself, to save humanity, Christ made Himself a sacrifice. On the cross, Christ took on sin so that he could rebuild your humanity. He didn't come to condemn you; He took upon Himself what you threw away. Christ became sin so that your life could bloom again, so that you could live. He took the initiative. Christ said, "Let me do it, give up your attempts."

God in His mercy chose to save man using what man threw away, what he thought was worthless, was scandalous. St. Paul declared, "we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles [...]; for the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength."<sup>40</sup>

Christ saves your life, He gives life to your life through the action that we think is the least powerful of all: dying. Jesus saved life by dying, embracing the powerlessness of death that you and I toss aside every day. Embracing sacrifice is only possible for the man who looks at Jesus, moved and blown away by Him, by Him on the cross, blown away by God's gratuity. St. Paul says, "The love of Christ impels us [...] He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."<sup>41</sup> He died embracing what you throw away, what disgusts you; he did it that you might live no longer for yourself, but for Him.

The ability to embrace sacrifice, to live life with hope, to weep and to ask to be men is born out of our pining for the love of Christ, out of the preference experienced in the love God has for me. This is the source of our liberation. Let's sing together.

### *Liberazione n. 2 ("Liberation #2")*

I invite you to live these days contemplating God's creativity, which uses what you toss aside in order to give you life. The only thing that is asked of us is to say yes with simplicity, which means to look with a pure heart at what happens right in front of you. Give priority to the reality that's proposed to you. Let reality open up life's questions inside of you. Let yourselves be affected; say yes. The silence, the guidelines given, the prayer and the singing are all opportunities to help you to say in front of Him, to truly say "I."

## WAY OF THE CROSS, FR. JOSÉ MEDINA

*Friday Afternoon, April 3*

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Remaining with Christ is our only possibility for living a full life. Being here today with Him, living the memory of Him on the cross is the opportunity to enter into the greatest and most dramatic mystery of our lives. Struggle and suffering, death, which terrifies us enough to make us accuse reality of being against us, of being an objection: Christ embraces all of it. His death on the cross gives us the possibility to embrace everything and to live fully. May this time together be filled with a sharing in His experience to learn how to live, to learn how to die like men.

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Jesus' flesh is weak. Jesus didn't want to die; He didn't want to suffer. This is why He asks the Father to accompany Him, and asks his friends to stay with Him, too: "Remain in Me."<sup>42</sup> But he is abandoned by everyone, abandoned by His friends in the moment of greatest suffering in His life. He is abandoned by His friends, betrayed by the kiss of a friend. This is the instant of God's freedom: facing that friend, that friend who betrays Him, the friend who abandons Him, in front of those circumstances, the fact that He came for them and they didn't want Him, that He came to stay with them and they fell asleep, in front of this, Jesus says to the Father, "Your will be done."<sup>43</sup>

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What Jesus heard from the people of God, from the people of His Father, from Caesar and from the Romans was, "The things you say are nice, they're not wrong, but they don't do any good in this world; no one is interested in this world, because in this world what matters is power." What Jesus heard was precisely this, "You've come, but we aren't interested, because we're only interested in our power."

In His mission, in the journey toward the cross, He was told that all of it had no significance, no meaning, he was neither appreciated nor feared by anyone. He didn't have power. It was precisely in embracing the powerlessness of that gesture, in mounting the cross, that He continued to affirm what is true: "I am everything; I, not your power, am everything." Still, nothing, no one could take back the scourge, the insult; no one could take away the certainty of having come into this world to say these things, and to hear these things and find Himself abandoned by his friends, betrayed by His friends and, in the end, without anyone who cared, because He is not powerful. Jesus responds to this by simply embracing the powerlessness so feared by the world, in order to make man truly man.

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Jesus nailed all of my objections to the cross. There is no longer any objection that can be reasonably upheld. He died betrayed, abandoned, destitute, powerless, and out of all these things that scare us, He brought about salvation. He had to die to show the nature of God who loves me, even when I've betrayed and abandoned Him, even when I've insulted Him because He didn't have the power that I hoped He had. Christ showed the nature of God, as well as the nature of man: that you are loved because you belong to God, not because you have power, not because of things you possess. You, you are worthy, mysteriously worthy of God's love.

**WITNESS BY DAVIDE PROSPERI**  
*Saturday Morning, April 4*

*Angelus*  
*Morning Prayer*

*Canzone dell'ideale ("Song of the Ideal")*

**Alberto Bonfanti.** The questions we received show that we have been struck by what has been said, but what we have lived. This is the first fact not to overlook, but from which we can begin our own personal work, because we have to become fully aware of what truly struck us; we have to understand what makes what we have lived together true. From the questions we received, many were posed with a faithfulness and sincerity that made them stand out; I'd like to now synthetically review those that seemed most important to us.

The first: above all, the question of doubt. Some strongly defend the positivity of doubt: "My question is linked to what Medina says about doubt. It seems I've been made up of doubts over the last year, and what Medina said about doubts shifting our gaze and that they keep us from living life in its fullness made me angry. Without doubts, what would I do? Affirm everything as certain? I need my doubts; they help me to understand the reality of things, and I was also annoyed by the aft that he said doubts aren't based on reality. If I begin to doubt something, there is some reason that makes me doubt. I think doubt is healthy." Others understand the danger, but don't know how to be free themselves: "I perceived the truth in what was said, I felt the correspondence. But then doubt immediately crept in: what if it's not true? This doubt creeping in distracted me from what Medina had said. This bothered me. So, the question that comes to me is: how can you learn not to doubt things that are true, as well?"

A second category of questions asked: how can the impact of the truth that we perceive last? "Often, I risk living these moments of great intensity and immediately, when I go back to the daily life, I lose the clarity I had. The more beautiful the time, the longer it recharges me and for a little while I manage to keep it in mind, but then I lose it again." Another example: "I come back from the vacations or the Triduum, and I'm happy. But it only lasts two days. This time, I lived every instant with intensity, I am happy once again, but how can I hope I won't just be disappointed again?" The same idea, formulated differently: "I had an encounter, I lived a moment of that authentic life that filled me with enough certainty that I could face anything, enough to push me out of the port into open sea. Often, though, when I'm in the moment, confronting life's difficulties, I feel like I've been emptied of that certainty that seemed to have completely overtaken me. You said we always need the encounter to happen again. What does it mean, then, for this impetus to be there always, and not wear out at the first obstacle it meets?"

A third group of people asked: how is this impact with truth that we have lived connected with Christ, with the encounter with Christ? "I just met the community, and many things here have touched me, have moved me. I understand what the encounter with a person who knows how to reawaken me and break me out of my

mechanical way of living is, but I don't understand the step from this fascination that I'm living to Christ."

The last question is related to the hundredfold: what does it mean to say that this impact with the truth generates the hundredfold, generates the authentic life that we all desire? "Do you experience this hundredfold? What is the hundredfold? And why does it entail sacrifice?"

Considering these and the other questions that have come up this year, it seemed to us that the best way to introduce you to the road of the response was to propose the witness of a person who lives his reason and his freedom to their fullness, because Christianity is a road for men who don't give up on their reason and their freedom. This also has a methodological value, because we have people along the way who are witnesses, who live with certainty, and we need to learn to follow them. This is connected with that putting my whole self into play in the relationship with Christ that Fr. José talked about. It's always been this way for me: following what attracts me all the way to the end, in everything that attracts me, because the first response to the questions we have is not a correct definition; it's a place in which I can pose the question, like a child with his father, like the apostles with Jesus, like one girl, who said to José Medina in the hotel after the assembly, "Your certainty opens a path for me;" this is the experience many had over these days.

Daide (Vice President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, and so of this revered companionship, professor of Biochemistry and researcher in nanotechnology at the medical school of the University of Milan-Bicocca), who we thank for being here with us today, is one of those great witnesses and one of my best friends in life. We've asked him to help us by sharing the witness of his life.

**Daide Proserpi.** Obviously, I won't tell you my whole life story, because otherwise we'd be here into tomorrow! I'd like to begin with what happened yesterday: I participated in your... in our Way of the Cross, now that it's been 25 years since I was in GS, and I was moved—just as I think most of you, and I hope all of you, were—by the beauty of the gesture. Precisely because of this a pressing question came to me: what is this beauty, in front of all the contradictions in the world? As we heard once again yesterday in the words of those leading the Way of the Cross, Christ continues to be crucified today, in me and in the world. I thought of the martyrs (today of all days it's appropriate to mention) in Kenya; those Christians who just a few days ago were brutally killed for their faith. So, what does this beauty have to say to us; how can this beauty carry with it all the contradiction of incomprehensible evil? I have to say that this gesture has really helped us. Those who really lived it intensely were able to enter into what happened. Enter into means to feel that which those who were felt, starting with Jesus. At a certain point I asked myself: why did Jesus, a man who could restore vision to the blind, make a lame man walk, and resurrect a man who'd been dead for four days, why did he accept to die?

There is nothing more incomprehensible to us than this, with the way that we are used to reasoning. For us, who find the greatest satisfaction in being able to see our destiny fulfilled, who find pleasure in when what we expect to happen happens, none of this makes sense, but the Son of God exactly precisely this. He obeyed; he

participated in the only way that He and we can live to fulfill our destiny, just as He fulfilled his. If He had done something other than what we can do today, how could we enter into it here and now? He accepted that which we consider to be weakness, because in this world of which we are sons and daughters, in our mentality, weakness is synonymous with barrenness, or the incapacity to generate something good, feeling incapable in front of things. What we lived yesterday was the opposite of this—as Fr. José said—we saw that weakness can become the origin, the genesis of a new fruitfulness. If any of you recognized it—I picked up on it—at each station of the Way of the Cross, we listened to the *Stabat Mater*, which describes what Mary did in the face of her Son on the cross. We listened to it because, if we want to understand, or at least try, to understand what was happening that day, we have to look to that woman, that Mother, who was the only one who understood. Mary stayed, “the mournful Mother kept her station.” She participated with and accompanied her Son. What else could she have done? Why didn’t Mary climb up on the cross to pull Him down, why didn’t she shout in protest and rail against the Roman executioners? Because she was the only one who understood that this was way that her Son’s destiny was being fulfilled, and through Him, that of the whole world.

This is the way I would like to learn to look at things. I want to learn to see things as she did; those things that we struggle to see because, so often, “reality” is reduced to appearances. This is why we are often plagued by doubt, as was said earlier. Because I—I’d like to tell you a story from my childhood—I was, if not full of doubts, at least full of insecurity, because I lost my father when I was six years old, and without a father you feel the absence of the presence that introduces you into reality. I remember how when I used to go visit my grandfather when I was young, I was full of questions...but first I have to tell you what happened before my father’s death.

My grandfather had had another son, who had died of meningitis as a child; his wife couldn’t have any other children and seeing her husband suffering so much, made a vow, that she would be willing to give her life to have another soon. After a few years, she became pregnant again, but the doctors immediately told her that she needed to end the pregnancy right away because the baby wouldn’t survive long enough to be born, and that her life was also at risk. She said she was ready to give her life, because she was certain that this pregnancy was given to her by God. She carried the pregnancy to term, and my father was born, but my grandmother died during childbirth. My father died in an accident when he was 33 years old, and I remember how, when we were little, my brother and I would go to our grandparents’ house for holidays and at eight or 10 years of age—with the understanding that a boy of that age could have—looked at our grandfather and wondered: what is it that makes a man who has lost everything remain certain that life is not a cruel joke? Because that is what we had before our eyes: a man who was, yes tired and tried by life, but not defeated; he was a man of faith.

This question, which on the one hand seemed so contradictory considering the insecurities in my life, always kept me unsettled: is it possible to live this way in the face of everything, and never find it was an illusion, never find out you were deceived? Skipping over everything that has happened since then, I’d like to speak



to you about where I found the true answer to this drama that I lived for many years, and that I still live, because life, even if it's not doubt, is at least a question. As we read in *School of Community*: the alternative to doubt isn't certainty, it's a 'problem'<sup>44</sup>. This means that life poses problems, because everything is not already resolved, and this kicks us into action. We see the greatness of a man or woman in the fact that he doesn't give up, and not that he knows the answer to everything right away. So, skipping over a few years, I arrived at the real encounter that I had, which took place in 1994, during the Spiritual Exercises when I was in college. The title was—as if tailor-made for me—“Recognizing Christ.” This is what I was interested in: how could I recognize that what my heart was waiting for was Him? Fr. Giussani was there—in fact, it was the first time that I saw him close up—and began to speak, quoting a line from Kafka: “There is a destination but no way there,”<sup>45</sup> the goal exists, but there is no road to get there. This was my problem. I felt, I understood that I wanted to live for something great, I didn't want my life to be thrown away, to not be defined by the time that passes and slowly devours your life, but that it be lived for an ideal. But where to find that ideal? This, for me, was “the” question.

To respond to this question, you have to begin to experience the fact that this ideal is connected to your life, with the things that you live, that you feel, and with the problems you have, with the interest you take in your girlfriend or boyfriend, in your studies, or the lack of interest that you have for your studies, with the difficulties you have, with the problems you have with your parents... The ideal has to be connected to this, or what kind of ideal is it? It would be unattainable, there would be “no way there.”

To respond to this question, Fr. Giussani began to tell the story of John and Andrew, the first two to encounter Jesus. I still get goosebumps thinking about it again, because as he spoke I relived that scene as if I were there. You could tell that for him, it was as if he had been there, next to those two, and little by little a question arose in me: how does he do it? How can he say these things? He even described what Andrew said when, returning home, he saw his wife, who saw something was different. You can see it in the video recently released in the Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera* for the 10th anniversary of Fr. Giussani's death.<sup>46</sup> How could he say those things? Because, as you could see, it was a present experience for him; he was living now what had happened then. I remember how, as I listened to him speak, the desire to be able to live grew little by little inside of me—that his experience could be for me too, despite my insecurity and incapacity, that it could be possible for me to live—to live what he was living.

To help us to understand how this is alive today, that this experience is an experience in the present, at a certain point he read a letter that, since that day, I've always carried in my briefcase, even if it was from 20 years ago; you know the things that are important, and this was among the questions you asked: how can you manage to not forget everything when tomorrow comes? Eh, guys, you need to have memory! You can throw away things like this, because when you forget you can go back and see what won you over once again, and so recognize that the thing that won you over is still present. If it won me over, it is always with me. So, Fr. Giussani read, among various witnesses, the letter of a boy who had AIDS, who died two days after having written the letter. AIDS was still an incurable illness; now, 20

years later, there are ways to treat it, but at that time AIDS meant you would die, and it was a terrible death, with excruciating pain, completely alone and ashamed, because AIDS was the plague of the end of the last century; it was a sign of a disordered life, of immorality, and we live in a moralistic world. Right, so this boy wrote that, a number of years after high school, he had run into a former classmate—who is now in *Memores Domini*—and had written the letter to Fr. Giussani, whom he had never met.

“Dear Fr. Giussani, I am writing you calling you ‘dear’ even though I do not know you, I’ve never seen you, or heard you speak, but, to tell the truth I can say I know you because—if I’ve understood anything of *The Religious Sense* and of what Ziba [his friend] tells me—I know you by faith, and I add, now thanks to faith. I am writing just to thank you; thank you for giving a meaning to this arid life of mine. I was a high school classmate of Ziba, with whom I’ve always maintained a friendship because, even though I didn’t share his position, I was always struck by his humanity, his unselfish availability. I think I have reached the end of the line of this troubled life of mine, carried by that train called AIDS, which allows no one respite. I am not afraid to say this anymore. Ziba has always said to me that what matters in life is to have a true interest and to follow it. I have pursued this interest many times, but it was never the true one. Now I have seen the true one, I see it, I’ve encountered it and I begin to know it, and to call it by name: it is called Christ. I don’t even know what it means and how I can say these things, but when I see the face of my friend, or I read *The Religious Sense* that is accompanying me, and I think of you, or of the things about you Ziba tells me, everything seems clearer, everything, even my evil and my pain. My life, now flat and made sterile, made like a smooth stone over which everything flows away like water, has suddenly an outburst of meaning and sense that sweeps away the bad thoughts and pains; rather, it embraces them and makes them true, transforming my worm-eaten and putrid body into a sign of His presence. Thank you, Father Giussani, because you have communicated this faith to me, or, as you call it, this Event. Now I feel at peace, free and at peace. When Ziba used to recite the *Angelus* in front of me and I blasphemed to his face, I hated him and told him he was a coward, because the only thing he was able to do was to utter those quick prayers before me. Now when, stammering, I try to say it along with him, I understand that I was the coward, because I could not even see the truth I had in front of me when it was only one inch from my nose. Thank you, Father Giussani, is the only thing a man like me can tell you. Thank you, because through my tears, I can say that to die like this, now, has a meaning. Not because it is more beautiful—I am very afraid of dying—but because now I know there is someone who loves me and that perhaps I, too, can be saved, and I, too, can pray that my fellow patients may encounter and see as I have encountered and seen. Thus I feel useful, think of it, merely by using my voice I feel useful; with the only thing that I still manage to use well, I can be useful. I, who have thrown away my life, can do good simply by saying the *Angelus*. It is impressive, but even if it were an illusion this thing is too human and reasonable, as you say in *The Religious Sense*, not to be true. Ziba has stuck over my bed St. Thomas’ quote: ‘Man’s life consists in the affection that mainly sustains it, and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction.’ I think that my greatest satisfaction is to have known you [I have never met him!] by

writing you this letter, but the even greater satisfaction is that in God's mercy, if He will, I will meet you where everything will be new, good, and true. New, good, and true like the friendship that you have brought into the life of many people and of which I can say: 'I was there too.' I too, in this wretched life, have seen and participated in this new, good, and true event. Pray for me; I will continue to feel useful for the time I have left by praying for you and for the Movement. I embrace you. Andrea."<sup>47</sup>

A true encounter (and not when we say, repeating a slogan, "Yes, I had an encounter...") it's always-always!-the definitive recognition of a presence in our life. It's definitive: you can leave, you can try to tear yourself away, but it stays with you forever. This what a true encounter is: it defines your life, which then, is given; life takes on new meaning as given to come to know that which you've encountered more and more. It's to deepen this knowledge that is, as Fr. Giussani always said, and affective knowledge; this knowledge grows through an attachment, not a line of reasoning. It's not that we push ourselves to explain things with a discourse, as if we needed to understand everything before moving; no, it's an attachment, it means following. Just as it happened for that boy who had AIDS. An encounter takes you where you are, and you have to decide whether or not to live your life following that true thing that you met.

In that moment I understood-I understood it instantly-that to know that Christ, of whom you could speak in that way, of whom Fr. Giussani spoke in that way and that boy in such a circumstance spoke in that way, I had to try to become attached to, to follow and get to know the people who were witnessed that way to me. I understood that I needed to get to know that man. And I did it, I tried until I managed to meet him in person. Then, a friendship began, which expanded because I had my friends, and we were all seized by this newness, so that all of our time, in our days, everything was defined by that experience that was born again every day, which was renewed every day following what was happening in that man and seeing what was happening in us, in each of us. This completely defined our friendship, as Andrea was saying. In fact, along with the letter, which was published in *Traces*<sup>48</sup> after the boy's death, the publication was dominated by an image, which was-I believe you're familiar with it-the painting by Burnard<sup>49</sup> that depicts Peter and John who are running toward Jesus' empty tomb the morning of the Resurrection, because that is the greatest symbol of our friendship, it's what best describes what our friendship is: it's running together, it's tension toward the same thing. In Peter's eyes you could see all the awareness of his betrayal, all that he had lived, together with the extraordinary focus on seeing the victory of Christ. They run together.

Since that day, this became the greatest companionship for my life: friends with whom I could run the race for that which took over our lives and that, day after day, interrogated us, provoked us, called us, that we could know it better. It's in your response that you discover what the hundredfold is. I could give you tons of examples, but I'll just list a few. A few years ago, I went on a vacation for graduating seniors, and I was very struck by the fact that they had so many questions, like you; especially in that moment when they were about to have to decide what to do next, about what to choose. In front of the question of vocation, of what is asked of me in life, lots of questions emerge and become pressing; you want life to take on a more definite form. What struck me was that, along with this desire

for life to take on a more definite form, they also desired not to lose, or let's put it this way, they were afraid to lose the breadth of the desire they felt inside them, because you perceive that you're made for the infinite; there's nothing, *nothing* in life that can completely respond to the breadth and greatness of my heart. This situation was seen like a contradiction, this contradiction kept coming up: "I want to understand what to do, because I'm afraid of missing out on everything else;" it would be impossible to think of taking a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend seriously while worrying about missing out on everything else, on other opportunities, and so it seems impossible to have a stable relationship. Or it seems impossible to set out to study a specific thing for five years, to pick a certain course of studies, because they think "And what about the other subjects? I like everything else, I like literature, science, I like..." Little by little, the soon-to-be graduates began to express that the real issue was whether the infinite could break in to meet me where I was, not that I could have all possibilities within reach.

Hearing this, I thought: as yours lives gradually take form because you choose certain thing or because things happen to you (life, after all, doesn't just take its form based on what we want), as this gradually happens, you will never lose or abandon this question and the desire for the infinite. So-called adults, old people, will tell you, "Look, these are the things that you feel when you're 19, but when you're 40, 50 or 60 years old, life shows it's not like that, this desire slowly begins to be restricted, it's reduced, you just have to settle." It's not true! I promise you that it's not true! The hundredfold is precisely that experience that you don't have to settle in life, that our desire can always grow bigger, that the more that you find satisfaction in life, the more our desire doesn't run out, but actually continues to grow. When do we reach the hundredfold? We never reach it, the hundredfold isn't a finish line to cross. No, the hundredfold isn't 100, but the hundredfold; it's a multiplication factor, it's always more. And so, moving forward, following true life—following that fascination for the true ideal of life—everything in your life becomes more satisfying, in a way you never could have imagined, and so you realize that what you thought was everything was really very little, there is so much more.

This all shows us that the life we've encountered is a promise. We don't see it in its completion, we don't see it already fulfilled precisely because it is fulfilled inside of time. This is what gives life its 'gusto', because it's a promise that I still have to discover, otherwise it would already be all over. When we feel like we have possession over what we are doing, that we are in command over what we're doing, because things are working out—you see, it's not only for when bad things happen, and so you feel the urgent need for meaning, but also when things are going well—, most of the time feeling like we are commanding the circumstances we live is the sign of our superficiality, and not the sign that we've grown up. It's true that we can understand a lot of things right away, but often that's not the case; those times we see a contradiction, and it seems like we lose that 'gusto.' But the seeds that are placed in our lives develop in ways that we can't see right away, because when a seed is planted in the ground, there's a time in which it's growing and you can't see it; you can only see it when it starts to bear fruit. The most important thing for the seed is that it stays there, attached to the ground, and isn't torn away. If there is one thing that gets in our way, it's that we don't understand struggle or difficulty. It's

not that you don't understand that something is asked of you, you get that, but you don't accept the struggle that it entails. To accept the difficulty, you need to know the reasons why you do it, and always stay attached to the true reasons; if you're studying, there is a reason you are doing it, there's a purpose even if you're struggling in a given moment. Personally asking ourselves the reasons why is the first companionship that we have; we don't necessarily need someone else to tell them to us. In fact, it's exactly because we usually don't ask why we do things that we feel so alone in doing them. The challenge of the hundredfold is that what we expect is much greater than we do. This is the challenge: there's more out there than the image that we've formed, and so you feel the vertiginousness of the fact that there is a presence in reality that makes this promise, the sign of which I see in the desire that I have, which can't be crushed.

A year ago, right around this time, I found out that I have a very serious illness. Because of the work I do, I already had a lot of hints and in deep down I already knew what it might be, but until the doctors tell you exactly what you have, you keep hoping that it might be something less serious. After a while, it became clear what it was, and I had to go through surgery. The surgery went very well, and now I'm okay, I just have to have regular checkups. Back during that time when it still wasn't clear what I had and what would happen to me; however, the question about what was asked of me began to weigh on me in a very dramatic way, because I have a lot of responsibilities in life: I'm married, I have four young children—one who is almost your age by now—to support and to raise; I have a job that asks a lot of me (I lead a 15-person research group); and then there are the responsibilities in the Movement, which have grown since Fr. Carrón asked me to help him in leading the Movement. In the face of all of this, I asked myself: what is really being asked of me? I realized that, in the beginning, I treated this thing that was happening to me, being sick, as if it were an accident, because I thought that my real task in life was made up of all the other things that I did in life, and that unexpected mishap didn't fit. I discovered what is really asked of me precisely thanks to the fact that we didn't understand right away what was wrong with me. Because, often, we speak of hope in life when everything is already resolved, but what does it mean to say there is hope in life when things aren't clear, when we're still in the midst of problems, when we're immersed in a difficulty? Otherwise, we speak about the hundredfold saying things that are abstract and thinking that things are only going well when all life's problems have been resolved. Is it possible to experience the hundredfold, to live hope even in the midst of difficulty? This is the question I had.

In those moments, I understood that I had to finally begin to see that which we always struggle to see, and I began to see it thanks to all that has happened in my life, in these years; thanks to the certainty that has continued to grow in me day after day within this friendship, the friendship of the Church. I began to understand that what is asked of me is "vocation", and that vocation is not a form that you give to your life to dedicate it to God or to yourself, but rather vocation is to respond to the personal relationship that someone asks of your life, to that preference given to you, because that circumstance was given to me alone, specifically to me, so that I could recognize Him in my life. I couldn't go on living all of the other things in life without taking that fact that what was happening to me seriously.

As a result, I began to understand that the hundredfold is not 100 times what we desire, it's something completely different, it's a different measure. We are not promised that what we have in mind will be fulfilled; we are promised much more, 100 times more. We are promised something according to a measure that is not ours. Then, you begin to understand why sacrifice is needed, what sacrifice is. We are promised the fulfillment of the desire of our heart, if we never give up on staying attached to that beloved presence that has entered our lives. The hundredfold begins within what is already asked of you to do, not in you imagining who knows what other kind of thing. And you know, during that time something that Fr. Giussani always said kept coming to mind, and kept me company: that inevitable circumstances—those in which you can't choose what to do, you can pretend nothing is happening, but your fate has been decided—are the most simple circumstances, even if not the most desirable, they're not the ones that go as I want them to. Of course, I would have preferred to be well, to be able to dedicate all my energies to the big, important responsibilities that I have in life, but at a certain point an Other chose something else for me: "This is asked of you now, because it is I who want your life, not you who command it." I remembered that even Jesus decided to accept this relationship as the definition of the fulfillment of His task, of that for which He was sent: the relationship with the Father. Fr. Giussani says that the most favorable, most simple circumstances are those that are inevitable, because in an inevitable circumstance it's clearer what is asked of you, you don't have to conjure up anything (thinking: who knows what I should do, what's asked of me in life, how I can serve God?), because your task is there in front of you.

So, seeing as we're in the Easter Triduum, I'll tell you about what I was living: last summer, I spent a lot of time meditating on the Agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, which we referred to yesterday as well. I'll reread what we read from the Gospel of Matthew. When He is praying alone, at a certain point Jesus says, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak." Withdrawing again, he prayed saying, "My Father, if it is not possible that this cup pass without my drinking it, your will be done!" [pay attention to how the account continues]. Then he returned once more and found them asleep, for they could not keep their eyes open. He left them and withdrew again and prayed a third time, saying the same thing again. Then he returned to his disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?"<sup>50</sup> He's at peace. As I was living those months of sickness, I perceived in myself that same torment Jesus felt. Returning to his disciples and finding them asleep, he says, "How could you? You who are my friends!" He felt alone. This solitude is life's greatest tragedy. It means no longer perceiving the meaning of what you are doing, of what you are living—not perceiving the relationship it has with the totality, with the infinite—it means thinking that what you are doing is useless. Jesus needs his friends; He who never needed anything—it was the others who needed Him, Jesus never needed others to explain things to Him, for them to tell him something, or help him to see something, or solve problems for Him—he needed not to be alone, but "they could not keep their eyes open."

This wounded me because, saying this, the evangelist underlines something that I had never thought of until I was living it: it was almost against their will that they fell asleep, because they couldn't keep their eyes open as if the Father Himself had

allowed it to happen so that Jesus couldn't even find an escape in this last resort [to His friends]; so that He would discover that the only true victory over solitude was to affirm the relationship with the Father, abandonment to the Father, even though He seemed so distant at that moment. I realized that I was living the same experience. With this in mind, I began to face everything that life put in front of me, including the trials that I had to undergo. Because of this, I understand that inevitable circumstances are the simplest ones, because we can clearly see what is being asked of us. We're asked to obey, but what does it mean to obey? We really have a moralistic perception of things, and we don't know what obedience is.

Obedience is first and foremost availability; it's availability to the Mystery who wants me now. It's being faithful to what is given to you to affirm the meaning of life. Life has a meaning, and I have to discover it. The only way I have of discovering it is entering ever more deeply into what is given to me. To help, I am given friends, companions on the journey. The Mystery doesn't leave us alone. You are here; we are here together because this continues to happen today.

In order to beg that this meaning reveal itself more and more, even though there still are some moments when you don't see it clearly—as we heard in many interventions, you don't see it clearly right away, you don't see it shining through, but your vision is obscured, like looking through a keyhole—, you remain attached to that source of life that you have seen and that changed you in a moment, that you felt as a force that challenged your whole life. You understand that the hundredfold is a different kind of satisfaction, it's not in doing or having more things, but a new satisfaction in living ordinary things which would otherwise just be a burden. You understand that you are doing something that is connected to the world's destiny, and first of all with your destiny, connected to that for which you were chosen. You can also continue to do the same things without this attachment; however, and quit desiring great things. This is the battle, guys: don't ever quit desiring great things! The 'gusto' of life lies in this availability.

This is the experience I had. It's the only thing I can give you with certainty, because experience, what we call experience, is beginning to understand what has begun to happen; it's going ever deeper into that truth that has reached us through what we call an "encounter." Tomorrow is for this, as is the day after and the day after that. There is a way, a road. You have the road in front of you. If you want to keep desiring great things, you have to stay attached to—with both eyes and heart—those who live them, always asking the Lord of life who fulfills that which we cannot accomplish with our own effort. This is what I wish for your lives.

**Alberto Bonfanti.** The gift of Davide's presence with us today is not the only gift of this Easter Vigil. Now, Fr. José is going to read us the greeting that our friend Julián Carrón didn't want us to miss, once again this year. It seems to me that he summarizes all that we have lived over the last few days.

"Dear friends,

Reality, along with the heart, is our great ally.

It's our ally against ourselves when we let our bad moods or our fears dominate us.

Luckily, reality is stubborn, and it is more real than our doubts.

It imposes itself in our days – no matter what mood we are in – without asking permission.

We see it when we feel the attraction that comes when we meet a beloved face.

To deny this evidence, then, would be crazy. To deny it would be to deny ourselves.

Recognizing this evidence is easy. It's enough to give in to its attraction, like a child in front of a spectacular mountain view. Does it mean being naïve? No, it simply means being simple; being faithful to what we see with our eyes.

Yet, often we feel assaulted by the fear of nothingness. So, what then? Here again, reality is the ally that accompanies us: reality is the greatest testimony against nothingness. It's there! Perhaps fragile, fleeting and transitory. But it's there. Without question!

There's just one hitch: it takes our freedom to acknowledge it. Thanks be to God! Who of us would want to be loved by slaves, or by robots, mechanically? Not I, never!

To help us to acknowledge it, the Mystery became flesh, died and rose again for us. The power of His presence was such that no one was left indifferent.

As Pope Francis told us in St. Peter's Square, "Andrew, John, Simon: they feel themselves being looked at to their very core, intimately known, and this generates surprise in them, an astonishment which immediately makes them feel bonded to Him...".

Fr. Giussani reminds us that "the way of the Lord is as simple as that of John and Andrew, of Simon and Philip, who began to follow Christ out of curiosity and desire. In the end, there is no road other than this desirous curiosity inspired by an intuition of what is true."

Only those who go along with this desirous curiosity can discover the truth.

In the meantime, He is waiting for our recognition. Free. "...and when we arrive, He has already been waiting (Pope Francis)."

Christianity is a road that's only for men and women who don't give up their reason or their freedom.

Happy Easter, friends.

Julián Carrón"

As an anticipation of our Easter greetings, we'll sing the *Regina Coeli* together.

### *Regina Coeli*

**José Medina.** What I hope for you is that you take life head on. As far as concerns me, I'm going home moved, and so I don't want to add anything else except this invitation: challenge life, because it will surprise you. Truly, it will surprise you! St. John Paul II, the anniversary of whose death we celebrated yesterday, always said "Do not be afraid!"<sup>51</sup> It has already happened. It continues to happen.

### *Veni Sancte Spiritus*





## ENDNOTES

- 1 Collect for Monday of Holy Week in the Roman Missal.
- 2 *Rev* 22:20.
- 3 *Ps* 63:4.
- 4 G. Gaber, “Looking for an Action that’s Genuine”, from the CD: *Far finta di essere sani* (1973-1974).
- 5 Pope Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Young People*, January 18, 2015, Manila, Philippines.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 Cfr. *Mk* 10:47-48.
- 8 C. Pavese, *This Business of Living*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, NJ 2009, p.13.
- 9 R. Stevenson, *Henry David Thoreau: His Character and Opinions, Part 1, Cornhill Magazine, June 1880.*
- 10 C. Betocchi, “Ciò che occorre è un uomo”, *Dal definitivo istante* (“What’s needed is a man”, “*Of the definitive instant*”), BUR, Milan 1999, p. 146.
- 11 Cfr. A. Tarkovskij, *Andri Rubev*, Film released in 1966.
- 12 *Psalms* 63:4
- 13 Pope Francis, *Address to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.
- 14 L. Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio. Dio e l’uomo* (“Time and the Temple: God and Man”), BUR, Milan 2015, p. 48.
- 15 Cfr. *John* 7:46.
- 16 *Jn* 15:4.
- 17 *Jn* 13:33,36-37.
- 18 *Mt* 28:20.
- 19 *Jn* 6:48-51.
- 20 *Lk* 10:21.
- 21 Cfr. E. Siciliano, *Pasolini: A Biography*, Random House, New York, 1982, p. 321
- 22 L. Giussani, *Why the Church*, McGill-Queen’s Press - MQUP, 2001, p. 32.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- 24 Pope Francis, *Address at the Meeting with Young People*, January 18, 2015, Manila, Philippines.
- 25 A. Baricco, *Novecento*, Oberon Books, 2011.
- 26 *Ibid.*
- 27 C. Chieffo, “*Canzone di Maria Chiara*”, in *Songbook, Communion and Liberation*, p. 295
- 28 Cfr. A. Tarkovskij, *Andri Rubev*, Film released in 1966
- 29 Pope Francis, *Address to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.
- 30 L. Giussani, From *L’io rinasce in un incontro (1986-1987)* (“The I is reborn in an encounter”), cited in “The Religious Sense, Verification of the Faith”, *Traces Magazine*, February 2011.
- 31 *Jn* 3:3-6.

- 32 Cfr. *Mt* 10:39; *Lk* 9:24.
- 33 *Mt* 19:29.
- 34 *Gal* 2:20.
- 35 C. Chieffo, “Ballata dell’amore vero,” in *Songbook*, op. cit., p. 209.
- 36 L. Giussani, *In cammino* (“On the Journey”)(1992-1998), BUR, Milan 2014, p. 27.
- 37 L. Giussani, *Dall’utopia alla presenza* (“From a Utopia to a Presence”) (1975-1978), BUR, Milan 2006, p. 330.
- 38 L. Giussani, *L’autocoscienza del cosmo* (“The Self-Awareness of the Cosmos”), BUR, Milan 2000, p. 306.
- 39 Pope Francis, *Address to the Movement of Communion and Liberation*, March 7, 2015.
- 40 1 *Cor* 1:2, 25.
- 41 2 *Cor* 5:14-15.
- 42 *Jn* 15:4.
- 43 Cfr. *Lk* 22:42.
- 44 Cfr. L. Giussani, *Why the Church*, op. cit., p. 33.
- 45 F. Kafka, *The Zürau Aphorisms*, Harvill Secker, 2006, p. 26.
- 46 “Don Luigi Giussani 1922-2005. His Thought, Words and Faith,” enclosed in *Corriere della sera*, February 21, 2015.
- 47 Cfr. L. Giussani, *Il tempo e il tempio. Dio e l’uomo* (“Time and the Temple: God and Man”), op. cit., pp. 57-59.
- 48 Cfr. *Litterae Communionis-Tracce*, no. 11, December 1994, p. 4.
- 49 Eugène Burnand, *The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on the Morning of the Resurrection*, 1898. Musée d’Orsay, Paris.
- 50 *Mt* 26:41-46
- 51 Pope John Paul II, Giovanni Paolo II, *Homily for the Inauguration of His Pontificate*, October 22, 1978, 5.