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“We have never  
seen anything  
like this!”

(Mk 2:12)

**GS Easter Triduum  
Rimini, April 13-15, 2017**

## Greeting from Julián Carrón

April 15, 2017

Dear friends,

I'm thinking of each of you, dominated by your desire to become an adult.

Growing up means taking the reins of your life into your own hands.

But this isn't always easy. Sometimes we even want to go backwards.

It was easier, less demanding when other people were thinking of how to face problems for us.

Often, we go back to the question: do I really want to grow up, or would I prefer to keep being a child?

Following this desire to become an adult takes a real love, a passion for our self.

Living at the height of our desire takes work.

And it's only for the audacious, as I often tell you; it's for those who want to be protagonists, on the front lines, not offloading our freedom onto other people.

It's I who desire to discover how beautiful it is to live, what intensity of experience my life can reach.

Discovering this, Fr. Giussani reminds us, is "a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously," not leaving anything out: "love, study, politics, money, even food and rest, excluding nothing, neither friendship, nor hope, nor pardon, nor patience." The reason for this audacity is Fr. Giussani's unshakeable certainty that "within every [...] gesture lies a step towards our own destiny" (*The Religious Sense*, p. 37).

It gives you chills to think of it: to wake up every morning, curious to discover how every gesture can be revealed as a step toward our destiny, in every challenge that we face!

We can only live this because of our certainty that we have a traveling companion like Jesus. "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (*Mt 28:20*).

With His companionship, we can boldly face any challenge, as one who was not afraid to become an adult, Pope Francis, witnesses to us: "Let us not be imprisoned by the temptation of staying alone and disheartened, of feeling sorry for ourselves, for what happens to us; let us not yield to the pointless and inconclusive logic of fear, resigned to repeat that everything is wrong and nothing is like it used to be. This is the *atmosphere of the tomb*; the Lord wants to instead to open up the way of life, that of the encounter with Him, of trust in Him, of the *resurrection of the heart*, the way that says 'Get up! Get up, come out!' That is what the Lord asks of us, and He is next to us as we do it" (*Homily in Carpi, Italy, April 2, 2017*).

Happy Easter!

Your friend Julián

## Introduction, Pigi Banna

Thursday Evening, April 13

### “How necessary it is that the human ‘I’ be great, my friend”

(Charles Péguy)

“We have never seen anything like this!” How we too desire to be able to say this at the end of these days. But we have an even greater desire: that already tomorrow morning, when we look at ourselves in the mirror, and in fifty years looking back at the entirety of our life, we can say: “We have never seen anything like this!” A life that is unique, special, great.

A girl your same age, named Mary, had that same desire. From the moment she received the announcement of the angel, when she said: “Be it done unto me according to your word,”<sup>1</sup> there wasn’t a day that went by when she didn’t say: “I have never seen anything like this!” We too have the same desire in these days. We just need to ask for the simple openness of that girl and God will do the rest in our life, because “nothing is impossible for Him.”<sup>2</sup>

We’ll pray the *Angelus*.<sup>3</sup>

*Angelus*

### “EVEN MY FRIEND IN WHOM I TRUSTED HAS RAISED HIS HEEL AGAINST ME” (Psalm 41:10)

Welcome everyone! Welcome, truly, I don’t say it just as a formality! Welcome, because we have waited for you here, in a place where finally we do not feel like slaves of the judgments of others, of those who call themselves “friends” and are not true friends, in a place where we don’t have to be at the mercy of a grade or the expectations of adults. Here we can finally be free of those slaveries—here we are embraced as we are—that always leave us more insecure and alone.

But are we sure we can do it? Are we sure that in the end life is not a deception? Are you sure that I’m not just messing with you? As one of you wrote dramatically: “How is it possible to turn the other cheek for a father who is absent from your life? How can I live the love that I saw, but which continues to be buried by hatred and insecurity?”

Our friend’s question is dramatic and radical, like so many of the questions that came up before this Triduum. This is the issue: are we sure that in the end, life awaits us, as Mannoia sings (*Che sia benedetta*), when we see our parents abandon us in order to build their futures, adults who are so cynical and who have so little hope for our desires, or friendships and loves that promise so much, so much, but suddenly make us sick, up and down, on the rollercoaster of emotions? Are we really sure that we are not kidding ourselves when we say that our life is special, that we can say about our life: “We have never seen anything like this”?

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Lk* 1:38.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. *Lk* 1:37.

<sup>3</sup> Prayers, songs and most of the quotations may be found in Italian in the booklet handed out during the GS Easter Triduum (April 13-15, 2017, in Rimini): “*We have never seen anything like this!*” [which you can download in pdf format from the CL website.](#)

Or isn't it rather true, as one of you wrote—this really moved me when I read it—that our life is like a spare tire that sometimes can be useful to someone, exploited by someone, then abandoned?

This is, as Father Giussani says, “what characterizes man today: doubt about existence, fear of existence, the fragility of life, the inconsistency of the self, the terror of impossibility; horror at the disproportion between the self and the ideal.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of this slavery to the perception of others (friends, parents, professors), in front of a bad grade, in front of a test, in front of an unexpected message from a friend, as one of you says in a poem she wrote, “we are weak / at the mercy of uncontrollable events.”<sup>5</sup> Anything but freedom from the judgments of others! In fact, maybe what characterizes our time is this lack of tenderness for ourselves, as we are tossed about from one side to the other by the claims of others, by the expectations of others, worried lest we disappoint anyone. But in the end, do we desire at least a minimum of good for ourselves?

It seems that the one who must pay the price for all these expectations is our poor ‘I.’ Gaber describes it in an ironic and funny, but also tragic, way in the song *L'odore*.<sup>6</sup> He thinks he's realized his dream; he goes with his girlfriend to the lakeshore; it is a romantic scene, for which he has waited a long time. But, at a certain point, he smells something terrible: it must be that area. Then he dares to break that romantic moment and move to another area. He needs a little bit of time to recreate the atmosphere with his girlfriend. Again the smell! She is the one who stinks! And so he tries not to notice it, kissing her while plugging his nose! But there's nothing that can be done, and he has to let go of his dream. He returns home resigned, closes the door behind him and breathes a sigh of relief. But he can still smell it. He has it! He is the one who stinks! And he can't get it off of him. This is the most terrible aspect of our time: thinking that we are the ones who are wrong, not that others expect too much from us or don't understand us, but that we are inadequate, unable to show the least bit of tenderness toward ourselves. On page 5 of the booklet, Father Giussani says: if someone steps on our toes on the bus, we quickly yell at them, ready to take it up with that person, but if they tell us that we are not good, that we are not dressed well, that we said something wrong, we feel like we are going to die inside.

To think that our humanity is irremediably flawed, always inadequate, never up to the expectations of others, is the great inhumanity of our time: “It makes the ‘I’ disappear,” as Father Giussani says.<sup>7</sup> When they tell you that you are wrong, you don't yell at them! We find ourselves in this nightmare in which fear assaults us and we want to scream, but our breath fails us, our voice can't get out. It is the greatest betrayal we can experience. This, in fact, is the greatest inhumanity of our time: not so much that we cannot do it, but the fact that we are in front of someone who tells us: “You are not capable.”

Now the temptation comes, as one of you writes, to renounce these desires as too big, to stop seeking the “We have never seen anything like this!” because it demands too much from us, having desires like this only disappoints us and makes us suffer. So we are devoured by apathy in our daily life.

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<sup>4</sup> L. Giussani, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, GS–Easter Triduum 2017, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

This great insecurity, this great fear of simply being ourselves, comes from the fact, as Etty Hillesum writes, that nobody “will thank you for this struggle or, to say it better, who will care about it?”<sup>8</sup> In fact, the fact that life is a deception can remain something theoretical, as a dear friend of mine from Rome said, because we can still talk about it; but when you sense that not only your father, not only your teacher—whom we can afford to lose—not only your girlfriend—because you can always find another—but even the friend in whom I trusted betrays me, that is, thinks that I am wrong, that my ‘I,’ just as it is, is uncomfortable for him (and then certain things are better not to talk about with him, certain topics shouldn’t be touched, certain phrases shouldn’t even be said), then I feel the greatest pain that a man can experience: the betrayal of a friend.

This evening we remember the moment in which Jesus realized that one of the twelve whom He loved most in the world, Judas, one of those to whom He had given everything, was about to betray Him. For Judas, the presence of Jesus was no longer fascinating, lovable, but had become uncomfortable. Jesus realizes that for this friend it would be better if He were dead.

Let us listen to the story of the moment in which Jesus becomes aware of the betrayal of Judas, as it is described in the words of John the Evangelist. And let us think about all those times when we too have felt betrayed, we discovered ourselves without a face, because we were without our friends, all those times when we felt our ‘I’ disappear, when we didn’t even have an ounce of tenderness for ourselves because we felt betrayed.

“Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus’ side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus’ chest and said to him, ‘Master, who is it?’ Jesus answered, ‘It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it.’ So he dipped the morsel and took it and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, ‘What you are going to do, do quickly.’”<sup>9</sup>

When we feel ourselves betrayed by a friend, we feel an abyss opening up within us and we find ourselves without a face. We’ll listen to the next song.

*Il mio volto*

#### **“DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED” (Jn 14:1)**

“Only when I realize that You exist / do I hear my voice again—like an echo.”<sup>10</sup> So then, it is possible not to succumb to the betrayal, to the disillusionment, and to have a bit of that tenderness for ourselves again! Our own strength cannot do it, a project of self-esteem or self-improvement, but only recognizing that there is someone in this world—it only takes one!—who does not expect me to be a superhero and who then at my first failure, throws me away and kicks me out of his way. I only need one who looks at me for what I am,

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Jn 13:21-27.*

<sup>10</sup> A. Mascagni, “Il mio volto” [“My Face”], in *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p. 6.

someone whom I can meet, touch, kiss. Like The Chainsmokers say in the lines of one song: “I’m not looking for somebody / with some superhuman gifts, some superhero, / some fairytale bliss, / just something I can turn to, somebody I can kiss.”<sup>11</sup>

One of you describes this with extreme clarity: “Right now I want: a new phone, an electric guitar, a tattoo, a piercing, money, drugs, two holes in my right ear, and to meet my idols. And when I’ve done all this? I will be sad because the new phone gets old, the electric guitar is not perfect because I can’t play it for the life of me, the tattoo is too small and I want another one, the money runs out and I want more, drugs cost too much and I don’t have money when they run out, I want a third hole in my left ear [what ears!] and then another in the right; and then [pay attention, this passage is spectacular!], after I’ve met my idols just one time, they soon forget about me. What do I want? I... I... I want... I want... to be cared for, I want to be look at, I want to be loved.”

Only when I realize that there is someone who is not like my idols—who push me, make me spend so much of myself, and then throw me down—but who loves me just as I am, then I am reborn. Cared for, loved, looked at for what I am, without being forgotten. It is only in the encounter with a friend who does not betray us, who tells us: “Do not let your hearts be troubled,” that we can begin again.

Just like what happened to that woman: for twelve years, she had an illness that made her continue to lose blood; she didn’t spend her money on tattoos, holes in her ears, electric guitars (also because she lived in another time), but she had spent all her money on doctors and none of them could heal her. Just think, after twelve years, what a sense of failure, of betrayal, she must have felt. She felt betrayed: not only by the doctors, but above all by life. Besides, because of the country where she lived, that type of illness was seen as a kind of divine curse, so that she had to stay far from the city and she couldn’t touch anyone, lest she contaminate them; in short, she was excluded, refused. Betrayed by life, by her friends, by her people and even by God.<sup>12</sup> Just this morning in an interview, Pope Francis spoke about this woman and said that she was excluded, discarded by society.

Now this woman—who could just as well be any one of us—finds out that a man has come to her town who is able to heal every illness, who is not scandalized by any evil. That man is Jesus. And what happens? The woman challenges all of the prohibitions: the prohibition of entering the city, of not touching anyone. She doesn’t care at all about the judgments of others. She has only one desire when she thinks of that man: to be healed. And she thinks: “If I can touch just the hem of his garment, I will be saved!”<sup>13</sup> Think how the presence of that man undid all of those betrayals and made the desire of that woman burst open: “If only I can touch him...,” if only I can contaminate him! She risks everything, reaching out to touch the purest one of all, Jesus, risking even death. Here, desire is totally reawakened by the figure of Jesus.

And so, when we meet someone who is not scandalized by us, when we meet someone who tells us: “Do not let your hearts be troubled,”<sup>14</sup> when we run into someone who demands nothing from us and who does

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<sup>11</sup> Chainsmokers feat. Coldplay, “Something Just Like This”, in *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p.7.

<sup>13</sup> *Mk* 5:28.

<sup>14</sup> *Jn* 14:1.

not betray us, but reawakens all of our desires, there is reborn in us that “craving for life,” as Lucrezio calls it, that we find in ourselves, that “craving for life that is so deep and obnoxious, that agitates us and pushes us to go through dangers and uncertainties.”<sup>15</sup>

And it comes to the point where we want to shout: “Help me!”, “Heal me!”, “I want to be with you!”.

You are truly welcome here this evening, because we are in a place where we can shout: “Help me!” without the fear of “contaminating” the others here present. It is this desire to be healed, that makes us shout, “Help me!” that is our true nature. And finally, we no longer feel like one among many, finally the desire to be special is reborn, to escape the anonymous mass of people, as the Polish intellectual Heschel writes: even if “in the eyes of the world... I am a statistical average, in my heart that is not who I am.”<sup>16</sup> That heart, which for others is only a statistic, is reawakened, is revived. That heart is in each one of us, that heart exists—it exists!—and it cries out: “Help me!”. Without being afraid of ourselves, with a renewed tenderness toward our true humanity, let us put our hearts into play again, listening to the words of the song *Il desiderio* by Gaber.

#### *Il desiderio*

#### **“IT WAS NOT YOU WHO CHOSE ME; BUT I WHO CHOSE YOU” (Jn 15:16)**

Like that sick woman, we have within us the engine that moves the world, that saves us from boredom, that stops our life from being reduced to a list of things to do, but makes it something that has never been seen before. Therefore, we are welcomed this evening, because we have these three days in which we can freely express all of our desire, without fear of being judged by anyone and, like that woman, we can cry out: “Help me!”

Among you not everyone is Catholic, there are people of other religions, there are people who don’t believe, but, like you wrote to me in your contributions, you are all here because you have given a minimum of credit to this desire to find something worthwhile for your life.

This was and is the power of Christ: to extract from the rubble of delusion and of betrayal all of man’s desire, to reawaken it! Thus Jesus—this is something really amazing—was not content just to heal that woman, but sought her out among the crowd. He wanted to find her. And she was scared, because she thought he was going to denounce her in front of everyone. Everyone will find out the sins that she has done, the error she committed in touching Him. Instead, Christ calls her in order to tell her that her desire was great, her desire was just. Therefore he says to her: “Daughter, your faith has saved you.” Like the phrase from Péguy that you’ll find in the booklet: it is as if He said to her: “Woman, *your human ‘I’ is so great, it is so great that it has moved the infinite. A God, my friend, was disturbed, was sacrificed for you!*”<sup>17</sup> Betrayal, defeat, judgment, powerlessness, delusion no longer matter; all of these disappear before that gaze. Christ gives his life to pull out of the rubble of betrayal and delusion the desire of that woman and of every man: “You were not wrong to seek me out, you were not seeking me out; it was I who was waiting for you.” “It

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<sup>15</sup> “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

was not you who chose me, but I who chose you!”<sup>18</sup> This is what I would like to say to each of you this evening: there is someone who has been waiting for you here. Why? To tell you, as the Pope said in an interview this morning: “Courage, come on! You are no longer discarded; you are no longer discarded: I forgive you, I embrace you,”<sup>19</sup> your desire is great.

Like one of our friends who is in jail told us, in a book I advise you all to read, also because it has lots of images and less text, a book that shows the religious meaning of the tattoos of the incarcerated. Massimiliano recounts that he had a phrase tattooed on his arm: “Better a ruler in hell than a slave in heaven.” Better a ruler of that hell which was his life, than a slave of all the false paradises that had been promised to him and that had brought him to jail, as our friend said a little while ago. In fact, as you can read on page 11, one day, Massimiliano told one of the younger inmates: “I murdered my brothers, but it is not the life sentence that condemns me, my condemnation is becoming aware of what I have done... Later, when you become aware, you look God in the face and you see that He loves you just like on the first day.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, after he, just like that woman, discovered himself loved just like on the first day, he had his tattoo changed: “Better a ruler in heaven than a slave in hell.” Because it is more beautiful to be with the one who frees your desire, than to chase after hell.

This also happened to one of our friends, whom self-hatred and betrayal could not conquer, because of a gaze of love that waited for him: “A little while ago, I was doing really bad for about a month: I wanted to hurt myself, I was always down; all this sadness came from the fact that, although my parents were in the dark about this, I had met my mother and we started to fight. She said so many heavy things to me: that my father was not my father, but my stepfather, that I was born from a rape and that she had wanted to abort me. I was truly shaken and I couldn’t bring myself to do anything, but then I finally was able to go out thanks to the Mass in memory of Father Giussani, where during the readings, I was struck by the words spoken by God: “Even if a mother forgets her own child, I will never forget you” (Cf. Is 49:15). In that moment, I felt myself called, directly, as if God had told me He was there, He loved me, He was with me right in that situation. I left the Mass saying something unthinkable to myself: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ that I was born from a rape,’ as a way of thanking Jesus for all that had happened to me, because thanks to this, I was able to truly discover the love of God.”

Each of us would like—like that woman, like the inmate, like our friend—in front of our betrayals, in front of the sense of abandonment and betrayal that we experience, to be touched by the gaze of Jesus, just like His last night on earth. In front of Judas’ betrayal, just as in front of all the betrayals of life, Christ understands that He can do only one thing: give His life for Judas, give His life so that Judas’ desire also can be reborn, give His life so that the desire of each one of us can be reborn.

Christ continues to look at each of us the same way He looked at that sick woman, the same way He looked at the inmate (“He loves you like the first day”) and at our friend, and He tells us: “You were not born by accident, I have chosen you, I have preferred you and I give my life for your desire, so you will no longer

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<sup>18</sup> Jn 15:16.

<sup>19</sup> Francis, “The Pope of the Least Ones,” interview with P. Rodari, *la Repubblica*, April 13, 2017.

<sup>20</sup> “We have never seen anything like this!”, op. cit., p. 11.

be a slave, no longer be betrayed by the expectations of others; so that you will no longer be a slave of hell, but a ruler in Paradise.”

Let us listen to a passage from the Gospel in which Jesus speaks about giving His life.

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another.”<sup>21</sup>

Now we will celebrate Mass, the gesture Christ instituted 2000 years ago on this night, the evening before His death, so that all men could continue to touch Him like the sick woman touched Him, like Massimiliano the inmate touched Him, like our friend touched Him. In this Mass, which will be celebrated all over the world, we want to remember in a special way our Egyptian brothers and sisters who, going to Mass last Sunday, spilled their blood when a bomb went off under a pew, just like Christ gave His body and blood for us.

In these days, there will be a continual struggle for all of us between the prejudices that we have about ourselves, which make us think that we have failed in life, between not being pleased with ourselves, between being slaves to the opinion of others about us, and the desire for our lives to be great, something never seen before. A struggle between prejudice and the craving for life that makes us cry out: “Help me!” “Heal me!” Think about the hemorrhaging woman who lost her blood: even she had experienced this struggle, had to push away the opinion of the gossips and of her whole people, what she had read about in the law of God. She had to conquer her regrets and her shame and let her desire win out, going straight through the crowd, straight toward her only goal, her one objective: to touch Him, to cry out to Him: “Help me!”

What do we call this putting aside the opinions of others and our prejudices in order to let this desire prevail? What do we call this attitude—because it is first of all an attitude...? It is called “silence”. Silence is not just being mute, but putting our desire ahead of everything, ahead of all our prejudices and the confusion of our minds, to let only this desire prevail in us. This is the condition—think of the hemorrhaging woman who reaches out, stretching toward Jesus, not distracted by everyone else—which we will be asked to respect at various times during these days. We require it in order to give voice to that desire, which can sometimes be tiring, but which is so great as “to disturb” God. But it is an attitude that we should carry with us even when we go to bed, when we are with each other and when we are speaking, at lunch, on the beach, and during free time. We require an attitude of silence so as not to let our comments prevail, but rather this

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<sup>21</sup> *Jn* 15:9-17.

unique desire. We are not here to waste time, but to touch Him, to see if there is Someone here who can heal us. We are truly fortunate, because in these days we can cry out with all of our need to be healed. So let's sing *Cry no more*, because we are happy to be here, welcomed, because there is no reason to cry anymore, because "a slave is now a son, [...] a feast awaits to celebrate you." Please stand.

*Cry no more*

## **Lesson, Pigi Banna**

*Friday Morning, April 14*

### **“We have never seen anything like this!” (Mk 2:12)**

This morning, we didn't stay back at the hotel, and we've come down to the meeting room because we are hoping that what happened to that woman, what happened to our friend, might also happen to us today. So we are here, full of expectation, and the greatest expression of that expectation is silence. If you're not here with this expectation, you may as well have stayed at the hotel. But if you've come with this expectation, try to live it within the tension of silence, listening to the classical music playing.

All that happened last night may already seem like a distant memory, because in the meantime so many emotions, thoughts and distractions have filled our heads. But where do we get our strength? In racking our brains and trying to muster up the emotions we felt yesterday? In deluding ourselves with something that's not real? No. Our strength comes from the fact that continues to happen right in front of our eyes, capturing our attention once again: the five thousand people who are here. Something that stubbornly continues to happen and gets our attention again. It's a fact capable of putting us back on our feet, conquering us again, rescuing us from the confusion of our thoughts and giving us new life. Just as it was for Mary: every morning, she could lose herself in thought, taking care of the house, thinking of the future, but looking at that son who was undeniably there, growing, performing miracles, going to the cross and being killed—today we remember precisely that—the sight of that fact was able to get her attention, taking her back to that first day when the angel brought her those tidings, when her heart was conquered and her life was changed.

We ask today that a fact capable of reawakening us might happen to us as it did to Mary, that His presence might be so visibly powerful as to reawaken us and take us back to that beginning through which we are reborn.

#### *Angelus*

Now, we'll pray Morning Prayer. Morning Prayer is a prayer of the Church. The Church, in the midst of the confusion of our thoughts, places on our lips words that are very profound, that are much greater than what I am immediately able to grasp. When I say Morning Prayer, I feel like when we're little and go hiking in the mountains with our parents, riding in a backpack carrier. You don't take a single step, because another person is carrying you, but from the carrier you get a spectacular view; but, if you were on your own two feet, you'd get tired quickly and, because you're still short, you'd see a lot less. The words of the Psalms are like a carrier in which the Church carries us to help us to reach a depth of intelligence, of heart, of sensibility that in the morning, or even in the evening, we wouldn't have. We say them simply, without presuming to understand everything—even I still don't understand everything—but looking for that one phrase or word that describes us better than any words that we could find in our own heads.

Morning Prayer is a song that we do together, a prayer we say together, like in a family. This is why we

carefully pronounce each word on the same note, quietly. It's called *recto tono*, where it's not a question of being in tune or not, of yelling or not, but that you hear the voice of the person next to you louder than your own, that your voice be one with your neighbor's. We all take part in a single cry. There's a brief pause, only after the asterisk, which helps us to be aware of what we've just said; as soon as the first choir finishes their verse, the second choir starts right away, without leaving a gap.

*Morning Prayer*

*Non son sincera ("I'm Not Sincere")*

**“YOU WILL WEEP AND MOURN” (Jn 16:20)**

The truth to which the song *Non son sincera* introduces us is striking. We can live, we can try to do something good in life, we can even decide to spend our Easter vacation not at the club, but at the GS Triduum, and yet there is a voice deep within us that tells us that we are not sincere. “My time goes by, I'm not sincere, / I love the people, I'm not sincere, / I love the present, I'm not sincere.”<sup>22</sup> We can even fall in love, live the good life, touch the stars, and yet those same errors and same incoherence returns, even in front of all the greatest emotions, all the enthusiasm we have for life. We have even said, in some rare moments, “We have never seen anything like this!”, but then it seems like the tables turn, and our expiration date comes; the effect vanishes, and we return to the normal life we had before.

We feel the temptation to no longer say that “cursed” phrase, “We have never seen anything like this!”, because sooner or later the effect ends, vanishes. One of you writes: “The phrase: ‘We have never seen anything like this!’ I no longer want to pronounce. Because I know from experience that, once the present emotion passes, in the long run, this position does not hold.” The poetess Alda Merini wrote something similar: “That which is passed [however great] / is as if it never existed [...] / That which has already been seen / counts for nothing.”<sup>23</sup> The question now arises that many of you shared in your contributions: “Is it worth it to be happy, if we are not sure that it lasts forever?” Or: “How can we have a thirsty gaze that is not extinguished in front of the first difficulty?” Another one of you writes: “It scares me to think that the 17 years of my life have been an indistinct and un-influential series of beautiful and ugly things; this makes me scared. How do we know if this beauty really exists? How is it possible to understand it effectively? Where is this thing that gives sense and order to all the confused anecdotes of life?” This is our question today. Try to focus on it in your life. Are we really condemned to the dictatorship of feelings, by which, once the emotion passes, any beautiful thing becomes an old memory?

Just think, even the disciples of Jesus had the same problem: on Thursday evening they were full of affection for that man: “Even if everyone falls away, I will not!”, Peter says, and adds, “I will even die for you”; and the others, “We will too!”<sup>24</sup> But, a few hours later, they get tired and they can't keep Him company while He goes through the most dramatic moment of His life. On the Mount of Olives, His disciples fall asleep.

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<sup>22</sup> Mascagni, “Non son sincera” [“I'm Not Sincere”], in *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p.27.

<sup>23</sup> A. Merini, “Il mio passato” [“My Past”], in *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Mt 26:33-35*.

And when Jesus is arrested, they all flee. Anything but dying for Him! They run away and abandon Him. As you see, we are like them. After the initial emotion, which makes us exclaim: “We have never seen anything like this!”, any little thing makes it all crumble.

The feelings of the Apostles are the same as ours: we have seen, been struck, made promises, but then we run away. Let’s listen attentively to the words of the Gospel. In the end, does everything have an expiration date? Are we all condemned to the dictatorship of feelings?

“They went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away, for it is written, *I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered*. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee.’ Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ But he said emphatically, ‘If I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And they all said the same. He came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’ And they all left him and fled.”<sup>25</sup>

“They all left Him and fled.” But how could they abandon the greatest thing, the greatest person they had ever met? Yes, under the wave of fear, of uncertainty, they abandoned Him. It seemed like a great friendship, that man seemed like the greatest friend they had ever known, and did it take so little to make them flee? It would seem like the song *A Beautiful Disaster* is right, a song you may or may not like, but which says something important: “I take those pieces of life that I lived by mistake [because living them by mistake has to be justified] and change them into small emotions.”<sup>26</sup> The dictatorship of small emotions! Sudden fear, anguish, rage, incomprehension shatter even the most beautiful things in life, just like for the disciples of Jesus. So many of you spoke about it in your contributions. The love you have been waiting for has finally arrived: she is just right and things are going well, also for her. What intensity! What understanding! “It seems like she has known me from the cradle. I have never seen anything as beautiful as this!” But one morning, everything goes wrong in an instant. Everything goes wrong: the alarm clock didn’t go off, your dad has already left, so you have to take the bus and don’t get to school until second hour, you’re in a hurry, everything in a hurry! Then you get interrogated and “she” starts sending you messages: “But where are you?”, “I’m waiting for you!”, “What happened?”, “Why didn’t you come?”. In the meantime, you think that maybe you should take the bus more often, because there is this beautiful girl, she is much simpler, she doesn’t attack you with messages, demanding to know where you are, what you are doing; one look and you understand each other. While responding to “her” is not so spontaneous, and then “But who does she claim to be in my life?” So, we think that it’s over. Small emotions are enough to topple even the greatest promises. Leopardi would say, “*But if a discordant / note assails the ear* [if an inappropriate emotion wounds the ear], / that heaven turns to nothing in an instant.”<sup>27</sup> That paradise vanishes, shatters. So it seems that we are constrained to this dictatorship of emotions, to change our mind from moment to moment, not to have true affection for anything, to be slaves,

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<sup>25</sup> *Mk* 14:26-31, 41-42, 50.

<sup>26</sup> “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>27</sup> G. Leopardi, “On the Portrait of a Beautiful Woman,” XXXI, vv. 46-48, in *Canti*, trans. J. Galassi, Farrar Straus Giroux, New York, 2010, p 257; our cursive.

thrown about by feelings. Father Giussani asked himself what was the enemy of friendship: “The enemy of friendship is mood,” because mood is the immediate reaction (sadness, boredom, anger), “it is like the flowers of the field [...]: in the morning they are there, and in the evening they are dried out.”<sup>28</sup>

We can even try to defend ourselves by our own strategies, but even these don't last: we try not to be overwhelmed by the wind of emotions, we try to repeat to ourselves and convince ourselves that it is useless to be enthusiastic and delude ourselves, because the emotion will pass, because we have seen it all before and we know that in the end we will not be happy! We say, “I am a piece of ice, no emotion can touch me. Because I know that it all passes, I will not let myself have affection for anyone.” We try to be cynical, like stones, flat-lined, deflecting everything that happens. I exploit every relationship that interests me, because I have already tried everything, I know how it's going to end and I try to be like a rock in front of situations. “Are you going to the Triduum? But you know they do it every year? Everyone arrives and exclaims: ‘Beautiful, beautiful!’ then they go home and it's all over. Calm down. You're in your first year, eh! Wait until you get to your fifth year. You'll understand that it's just a cycle that repeats itself.” Like one of you wrote, very poignantly: “What use is the stupor given by this embrace that has been given to me, if tomorrow morning I will live my life exactly like yesterday and the day before, without anything having really changed in me?” This is truly inhuman: to be cynics already at fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old! To think that nothing can really change, to know already that it will all come to an end.

So, should we just get rid of all our emotions? No! Listen to how Father Giussani continues, “Friendship is not against emotion.” Because a man without emotions is a dead man. If you renounce the stupor of the beginning, how could you fall in love? Who would renounce “that most sweet, and tender, and surprising sense of panic”<sup>29</sup> that grabs hold of us when someone attracts us, in front of a person that finally understands us? But who would renounce this? It would be truly inhuman not to be enthusiastic, not to get upset, not to be sad. Reality, by the very fact that it happens, awakens a feeling, provokes emotions that break open the heart.

True friendship is not against emotion, but “true friendship is against emotion without reason,”<sup>30</sup> because an emotion without reason makes you taste a thousand things, but the sense of them escapes you, you cannot grasp their meaning. Like Eliot says: “We had the experience but missed the meaning.”<sup>31</sup> What is an emotion without reason? I will give a very banal example. You will say: but this is too simple! And yet, it happens like this. I go into a forest and I see a beautiful mushroom, really beautiful, it seems to come from the world of the Smurfs, the top has symmetrical dots, some bigger, some smaller. Beautiful! What a beautiful mushroom! It will be the best mushroom I've ever tasted. I can't wait to eat it. I'd even eat it raw. A little bit of oil on top: incredible! In front of me there is an old sign that says, “Attention: poisonous mushrooms!” No, but this is too beautiful to be poisonous! Come on! It is so beautiful! I am moved. I take it. I should follow this emotion. I take the mushroom, I have to eat it. It is so beautiful that it has to be good. It is so good that... it kills me! This is the emotion that confuses the heart, without reason. On the wave of this emotion without reason, we behave a

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<sup>28</sup> “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

thousand times a day with different mushrooms (and it as happened to us), but above all with friendships, which is the most serious thing: “But she brags a lot, what’s wrong with that?” Use your reason! You are a man, thanks be to God. When we follow our emotions without reason—you know it well—what we talked about last night happens: we fool ourselves and we can’t blame anyone else. Like the song that we are about to sing says, everything turns to dust in our hands, having wrecked even the most beautiful experiences. Just like what happened to the disciples: dust in our hands, names with no reason. What had they done to their relationship with Jesus? “What remains is the regret of wasted time / and maybe, the expectation of you.” We’ll sing *La guerra* [*The War*] together.

### *La guerra*

#### **“NOW MY SOUL IS TROUBLED” (Jn 12:27)**

Even Jesus experienced sadness, fear, anguish, that night: the same feelings as His disciples. He says: “Now my soul is troubled!” But He, unlike His disciples, did not run away, tossed about by the wave of these feelings; nor did He remain like a piece of ice, with great self-control, un-moveable in front of His imminent death. He acknowledged and lived His human feelings with deep reason. Fear and anguish had opened His human heart and He was not blocked by the dictatorship of feelings.

He didn’t run away. Why? First of all, because He, the greatest of all—the Master—was not afraid to acknowledge His feelings, His infinite sadness. Therefore, *the first condition* for not becoming enslaved to feelings is to recognize them, to acknowledge them: they are the most human thing, they are an expression of my humanity; they enlarge my heart and my reason, they open up my need. How human my feelings are! I recognize the fact that I am angry, bored, sad or thrilled, and I am not ashamed to say so. This is truly human. Even my dog experiences feelings. When he sees me, it is clear that he is happy: he wags his tail, comes to meet me, jumps up; when I close the door and don’t bring him outside with me, his eyes become sad. I believe that my dog has feelings, but he “coincides” with his feelings. My dog is the feeling he experiences; he cannot say: “Ah, today I am sad, how human these feelings are!”, because he is a dog! But we are able to say to a friend and to ourselves: “Today I am sad” and begin not to be dominated by this feeling. This is the first step.

Father Giussani had a profound respect for the feelings that put the human heart in motion, not permitting them to be reduced to instinct, nor to a cold and unfeeling mechanism. In one of his books, he tells about when he went to the party for the end of the year for one of the classes he taught; at one point, the kids started to dance. He sees a girl who is a little bigger, who dances well; he sees those bodies that were normally stuck to their seats turning around, spinning each other around. Dancing in the style of the 70’s. He tells how beautiful it was to see them twirling around, but at a certain point, toward the end of the night, he stopped them and told them that, when they went home, just like after every evening of dancing, a shadow would come over them, a sense of sadness—a sadness that slowly arises, clutches them and from which they can escape only by going to sleep—but the next morning, or another time during the day, that sadness will

return. And he concludes: “This sadness is the sign of man’s greatness.”<sup>32</sup>

The first step, therefore, is to recognize how human this sadness is. Father Giussani recounts this episode, which helps us understand the esteem he had for human emotion. How human is this sadness from which philosophy is born, which distinguishes man from the animals! How human our emotion is: anger, boredom, anxiety, everything, everything that is human must be recognized, welcomed. It would be inhuman to pretend like it wasn’t there, to censure it—like we said last night—with that lack of tenderness we so often have for ourselves.

Let us try to identify ourselves with the feelings Jesus had that night. He was not afraid to recognize and look His feelings in the face. Let us stand and listen to what He says on that night of profound sadness and anguish.

“They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Sit here while I pray.’” He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’ Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. He said, ‘Abba, Father! Everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.’”<sup>33</sup>

Please remain standing, and we’ll listen to a song that repeats these same words of Jesus *Tristis est anima mea*. “My soul is sorrowful to the point of death; stay here and keep watch with me. Now you will see a crowd that will surround me. You will flee and I will go to sacrifice myself for you. / Behold, the hour is near and the Son will be handed over into the hands of sinners.”

*Tristis est anima mea*

“You will flee on the wave of your emotions; instead I, who have these same emotions, stay and go to sacrifice myself for you.” Why didn’t Christ run away? Because His sadness opened His heart to attach itself to the only One who could live up to the height of that emotion: His Father. His emotion, welcomed and taken seriously, pushed Him to cry out, to ask the Father: “Everything is possible for You! Yet not my will, but Yours be done.” Therefore, “Emotion is not [...] negative”, but “it must be ‘registered’, it must [...] be allowed to take you where it wants to go, to that capacity for an affective relationship that can be lived.”<sup>34</sup> That sadness allowed Christ to rediscover His relationship with the Father, wagering everything on the relationship that constituted Him.

This is the point, the key point for today, you guys! All of our feelings—all, nothing excluded—can be useful, once they are taken seriously, for discovering what is true in life. Looking at Christ, we can understand that there is a way to face up to all of our emotions, without being overwhelmed by them. Once they are welcomed, *every emotion can become a way to recognize and attach ourselves to what is true in life*. It is possible to look at any emotion because every emotion—like Lady Gaga said very well in her song

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. L. Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà [Event of Freedom]*, Marietti 1820, Genoa, 2002, pp. 70-71.

<sup>33</sup> *Mk* 14:32-36.

<sup>34</sup> L. Giussani, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 31.

*Million Reasons*<sup>35</sup>—that makes you want to run away from a relationship, all the doubts that come over you, all the sadness that assails you, can help you find “one good one to stay,” to see if there is a good reason to attach ourselves. All the doubts, all the uncertainties, if we do not stop at them, can be a path, *first*, to realize how human we are, and *second*, to discover what is true in life. Every feeling, rather than confusing us or being something to avoid, can become a path.

To make this point, let me give you an example from *The Religious Sense* by Father Giussani.<sup>36</sup> I see a beautiful mountain, and to see it better, I get out my binoculars. As soon as I look, everything is blurred because apparently the lenses are not in focus. Father Giussani says: our emotions are like the lenses that are not focused. What is our temptation? To say, “I was wrong, the mountain is ugly,” to throw out the binoculars and leave. Instead the most beautiful thing in life, the most human thing is to recognize first of all, “Oh, the binoculars are not in focus,” and then focus the lenses—which serve to help us see better the objects that are far off—and say, “What a beautiful mountain!” This is why we have emotion, but they need to be focused, in order to see what is true for my life, what is noble, what really lasts!

Many times we find ourselves in front of feelings that appear unfocused, we only see fear and sadness, joy and enthusiasm, and we either run away or try to stay unmoved. The strong temptation is to stop as what happens to us, saying that everything is beautiful or everything is ugly. Instead any emotion put in focus, understands how sadness, boredom, anxiety, joy, wonder, can help us see reality better, discover more of what is true, attach ourselves more to what is beautiful. In a word, they have to be focused.

Emotion is precious because it represents the first reaction in front of what happens, but this state of the soul is not an end in itself. It serves to put the heart in motion, those criteria that bring you forward and allow you to say, “This is really beautiful, true, good, just!” The heart says, “This is not focused, this could go better, this looks good”; and then it can judge, “This sadness is good, because it pushes me to adhere to what really counts; this other sadness, instead, is a lie, because it makes me doubt something true! This enthusiasm is false, because following it always makes me feel more alone; instead, this other enthusiasm is true, because it is for someone who embraces me even when I am sad.” With just the emotion, it is possible to get confused, but with the emotion united to the heart, it is not; the heart does not err, as Dostoevsky says,<sup>37</sup> because the heart goes in search of what remains, what lasts, what is beautiful, what doesn’t deceive. With the heart, you recognize what satisfies the open abyss of your emotion and what leaves you more alone and afraid.<sup>38</sup>

So, we have to compare the emotions, as Christ did that night, with the heart. Because emotion can confuse us, but the heart cannot. For example, after a beautiful night together, my girlfriend invites me to have a drink and smoke something: it is so beautiful, so rich, so wonderful! But I have such a great esteem for each of you that I think you can all realize that there is a way of loving, of being with your girlfriend, that chases emotion and then leaves you empty, and there is another way of giving focus to that enthusiasm, of

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Cf. L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queens, Montreal, 1997, p. 28ff.

<sup>37</sup> F.M. Dostoevsky, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. E. Dickinson, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 32.

giving it a credit that does not leave you empty, does not ruin everything, but which lasts. This is emotion compared with the heart. Thus, even during the entrance, I start speaking with a friend and I think, “Eh, I started talking, and what should we be doing?” You can recognize your tiredness, your distraction and ask yourself, “But why am I here?” “I am here because I expect something for my life”; then I focus my distraction and, instead of distracting my friend, I hold back from speaking and think, “Wow, I am here because I am expecting something great.” Or I can follow the wave of emotion and keep talking, forgetting why I came here.

So how can we understand if our feelings are truly in focus and are not being trampled underfoot by our emotions? From the fact that the feeling, when focused, makes you breathe, attaches you, makes you stop spinning around in the void; the feeling becomes a new energy that makes you set out again and attaches you to what is true on the path of life; it makes you live, it doesn't make you a slave! You become master of your life.

A girl who sent us an impressive contribution says it much better than I can. “Exactly a year ago, when I was at the Triduum, I began to have health problems, I had a terror of being abandoned which kept me from being with people and conditioned my behavior. I tried to dismiss my condition and got angry, because I didn't understand the reason for such great pain, why it had to happen to me. I had a great desire to live and to really enter into the things I was doing, but I was inevitably limited.” Do you see? Rightly, in front of her sickness, our friend experiences certain emotions: anger, fear of abandonment, not understanding, incomprehension. But then she continues—listen to the voice of her heart—“Everything became a demand for fullness, every relationship cried out for freedom. At that point, I took up the most sincere position: I found myself needing Someone to whom I could entrust all my misery.” Do you understand? Had that emotion not been compared to her heart, she would have said, “My life is crap”, she would have thrown herself on the ground and said, “I am so unfortunate”. Instead, because of that condition, compared with her heart, she experienced a will for life and a unique question. I envy this friend's desire for life. I always want to have friends like her, who look at their emotions like this. To the point of asking, “I want to carry this cross, but I can't do it by myself. Give me the courage to be in front of my wound.” Maybe she was not aware that she had repeated the same words that Jesus used when he went to die: “Father, I know that everything is possible for you. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”<sup>39</sup>

When someone faces his anger, his boredom, his incomprehension like this, what humanity, what capacity for gladness, what fullness of life can emerge!

Our friend, like Christ, understands that every emotion, compared with the heart, can be an occasion to open up life, to discover what is true, what remains, what truly enflames us. Christ understood that every one of His human feelings (sadness, anguish, fear) must not be lost, or escaped from, but must be put in order, in focus, toward the “good reason” for which life is given: His relationship with the Father, who has never betrayed Him: “Not what I will, but what you will.” If He had stopped at the crest of His reaction, He would have run away, like His disciples did. Instead, He did not ignore His emotion, but understood that this human

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. *Mk* 14:36.

sadness and fear of death opened up His heart, served to rediscover and reaffirm His relationship with the Father, what had kept Him going His whole life.

**“WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!” (Mk 2:12)**

“Jesus replied, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces much fruit. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me.’”<sup>40</sup>

This was the great reason which dominated all the feelings of Christ. It is not a philosophy. And let’s please not say: “He is great, but I could not do that!” I am the first one who could not do that. This is not the problem now; in this moment we should simply look at the “good reason” of Jesus: “Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces much fruit.”<sup>41</sup>

Guided by this good reason, Jesus is moved and begins to cry because His friend Lazarus has died,<sup>42</sup> He gets angry with those who transform the temple into a religious market,<sup>43</sup> He even gets tired from so much healing and speaking<sup>44</sup> (cf. John 4:6), always searching for all men, because they are like sheep without a shepherd.<sup>45</sup> All these feelings, so profoundly human, that filled His heart, all the hardships that He willingly, freely faced, were ordained toward one purpose, in the obedience to the Father who had never betrayed Him, they had only one reason: to give His life in order to release man from his conditionings—as we said last night—to free man from this dictatorship of feelings, to break open the heart and mind of man.

We do not already need to be Catholic to understand all this. It struck me that some of us who are here, non-Catholics, responded to the question: “Why did you come?”, with: “Because here my humanity comes out, here you are speaking about me.” And another told me: “When you speak about God, I don’t follow so much, but when you talk about relationships, you say many true things.” Jesus does not need, as Pope Francis would say, proselytes, people who have a ticket and pay the entrance fee, saying: “Yes, yes, don’t worry, I’m coming to the meeting.” Jesus has only one interest: to free man and to make him finally feel like himself. Even if a man refuses Him? Even if a man hates Him? Yes! Even Judas, even me. He was so moved by the nothingness of man, to the point that He was moved even by the betrayal of His own friends. Like Father Giussani says: “God was moved by our betrayal, by our crude, forgetful, and treacherous poverty, by our pettiness. ‘I was moved because you hate me.’ [...] is an emotion, it is like an emotion; it is being moved, it has being moving within it.”<sup>46</sup> From the first day of His mission, all His feelings were ordained to this being moved by each of us, He lived everything consumed by this passion for man, until death. He does not

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<sup>40</sup> Jn 12:23-26.

<sup>41</sup> Jn 12:24.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Jn 11:33-35.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Mk 11:15-19.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Jn 4:6.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Mk 6:34.

<sup>46</sup> L. Giussani, in *“We have never seen anything like this!”*, op. cit., p. 33.

die because of hatred, but for love of man. So let us listen to *O côr soave* (on page 34), which says that Jesus was not so much killed by a piercing knife, by the violence of men, but He sacrificed Himself, He was killed for love, by an arrow generated and let loose by Love in person.

*O côr soave*

“I was moved because you hate me.” It seems impossible that a man can love so much that he offers his life for those who hate him. It seems impossible, but it happened. His friends saw Him continually live like this and they kept saying: “We have never seen anything like this!”, from the first day they met Him, because of this continual passion for man, this passion for me, for me just as I am, with my obvious limits (even the ones that aren’t so obvious!). From the day those first disciples met Him, they continued to repeat this phrase (“We have never seen anything like this!”), surprised at His personality that was so capable of penetrating to their core, of revealing their character. It was not just an occasional impression, a fleeting sentiment.

So many of you have described your encounter with GS like this: no longer judged, set free; not perfect, but preferred, and not because of you perform particularly well; simply embraced. Like one of you says: “For the first time in my life, in front of difficulties, I have met a presence for me, that goes beyond what I am and is always able to go beyond my discomfort, pushing me to bring out the best in me.”

So, to say: “We have never seen anything like this!” in front of certain experiences that bring out the best in us—is this not an emotion that passes? No, because certain facts continue to happen, facts that are so “explosive” that every time they embrace us again, they make us start again, they conquer us again and they do not make us drunk with emotion, but make us go to the depth of these emotions and make us fall deeper in love, they fill us again with a question—it is a good sign that questions are born. “But who are You that in front of me, my smallness, my nothingness, you give me all of this?” one of you writes. Another friend of ours, speaking about all that happened after the death of her mother, asks: “Who is this who can make even a tragic fact something wonderful?” Another is conquered by the movement and says: “It is going well, because it is the beginning!” But then he invites his parents and even they are happy. And then he is able to say: “Yes, but I am not capable of this. The emotion has passed.” And instead he invites his grandparents and even they are fascinated. Then he does something “impossible”, something comparable to the resurrection: he invites his math teacher! And even she is interested! Do you understand? The math teacher: it is the revolution of the cosmos! If it can grasp the heart of a math teacher, that means it can conquer everyone! I do not say this because I have it out for math teachers—I have the greatest respect for them—, but to underline the greatness of Christ.

From the first day to the last day of their life, the apostles were continually put in front of certain facts that threw open their questions; it was a continual surprise at what He did, how He looked at illness, how He never condemned sinners, how He put the wise ones of His time to shame, but most of all how He grasped the depth of their humanity, so much so that they kept repeating: “We have never seen anything like this!” And like our friend who invited his math teacher, even the disciples will ask themselves: “Who are You who take such initiative in our lives and who conquer us like this? Who are You? We have never seen anything

like this!” And even I repeat it, but not impulsively like I would say it in front of a sunset or a beautiful night. I say: “We have never seen anything like this!” in front of a presence, wanting to get behind it, wanting to know it better, not wanting to let it go. Like another one of you says: He met some people from GS working at a hotel over the summer and was amazed at how they treated him, like a brother, that they even invited him on vacation; but he told them: “No, I don’t belong to the Church,” and left it at that. The shift changes and some other kids from GS come, who didn’t know the ones from before, but he sees how they also treat him like a brother, like a friend, and he likes them; and then he asks: “But who are you?” “We are from GS.” And he: “Then I am going on that vacation!” It is not the emotion of an instant, but a presence that continues to happen and deepens his affection for these new friends. The vacation is beautiful. After the summer, this guy thinks: “So, now I’ll return to life like it was before” (remember the song *Non son sincera* we listened to at the beginning?). He returns to school, but changes classes. He has a new classmate who says: “Let’s get together and study some afternoon.” What beautiful discussions he has with this classmate! He has such a straightforward humanity. So he starts to tell this classmate about his summer and this guy tells him: “You know, I met GS too.” And so they started GS in their school. Our friend ends his story: “Today this companionship is part of me every day.” An affirmation like this does not depend on the fact that our emotions last; the point is that certain facts are stubborn and don’t give up on us. And we, with all the spinning of our emotions, should come to grips with these facts; because we can see if our emotions, our doubts, our questions, can be focused in order to understand if these facts are true or not.

The last fact that truly moved me, because it seems to return us to the very beginning of the Church, has to do with a friend who comes from a family that is atheist, who knew nothing about religion. But one Sunday his little brother went to play soccer at the parish came home and recounted what happened there. “We were surprised—our friend says—that he went to the church on Sunday. After a few weeks, he came home and explained the Mass to us; another time we were amazed. We let him be; he’s a kid and everything is surprising for him. In the following weeks, the same thing happened and then my mom started to get interested [Do you understand? In the end, all of our possible emotions have to come to grips with the facts that continue to happen]. We moved to another city [everything seemed to be over]; almost right away I met GS and my parents met CL. One weekend, when we were at the house, we started to speak about this: one reflection after another proved my brother right [they focused their binoculars in front of these facts and said: “Maybe he is right”]; there is something truly beautiful that we didn’t know existed. We didn’t even know what the Mass or Christianity was, and we ended up deciding to get baptized. It doesn’t end here, though [the emotion about being baptized is not enough], it was not only the change from being atheists to being Christians, but everything changed. The way we looked at things, our attitude, the way we were at home... before my parents we so superficial, incomprehensible in their daily life, while now the way they are is beautiful; sometimes they pick me up from GS waiting for me to tell them how it went. Respecting the topic ‘We have never seen anything like this,’ I can say that I have never seen anything similar, nothing at all! Has something changed? Yes, everything has changed!”

For 2000 years, stubbornly, obstinately, irreducibly, facts happen in each of our lives—they are repeated

in time, not by our strength or by the conviction of people, but simply by the initiative of the Mystery in our life, they happen—facts that sustain emotions, emotions that ask us to go behind them, that provoke questions, that generate affection and attachment, if only we do not remain on the surface of our fear or our amazement.

“Who are you?” “This companionship is a part of me every day.” “Everything has changed!”: is this an emotion without reason or a new feeling in life, the fruit of a comparison with the heart, which makes us live and makes us more attached? It is not a simple emotion that leaves us empty, but, like Giussani says, “the initial amazement [of the disciples], was a *judgment*,” and it is not a cold judgment, but “*a judgment that fused them*,” “it was like a glue”<sup>47</sup> that attached them more and more to Him. It is a judgment full of affection, it is not an emotion, but the discovery of someone whom I love, to whom I can give all my weakness and all my questions, to whom I can say: “I am struggling, I don’t understand,” without shame. I can finally be myself, because I have never felt so human as when I am with Him. Full of this affection, we can begin to look at our humanity, like He looks at it: we can, like Him, not be afraid of any aspect of our humanity.

**“LORD, IF WE LEAVE YOU, WHERE WOULD WE GO?” (Cfr. Jn 6:68)**

At the conclusion of this morning, I return to that which, with the other adults, my heart most desires to tell you. We might not have understood anything, but we realize that even our incomprehension, as we saw this morning, can be useful. We can forget everything that we’ve told ourselves and fail a thousand times, but even our error can be useful because we learn more in our failure than if we did the right thing by accident. We can forget, get distracted, be bored, tossed by all kinds of contrasting emotions, spoil everything as soon as we get back to the hotel, but all this can be the occasion to start again and rediscover what is most dear to our lives: the discovery of a Presence that lives up to our humanity, so unique in this world.

To help us understand this, when we went to see him the other day, Father Carrón gave us a powerful example: “If you are walking down the street and suddenly someone looks you in the eye and hits you, what do you do? You hit him back! But if, when you get home, you open the door, and your mother is waiting to give you a slap, what do you do? You ask her: ‘Why?’” Do you see? When one encounters a presence in which he trusts, he does not react on the wave of his emotions, but all of his emotions, his wonder, his anger, his pain become the occasion for a dialogue, they push you to ask: “Why?” “Why am I distracted now?” “Why did you do this to me?” “Why this pain?” You can turn to someone; life is this wonderful dialogue. Like the dialogue of Christ with the Father, that night: “Why, Father?” This question attached Him more radically to the Father, to the point of death: “Not what I want, but what You want.”<sup>48</sup> So all of our feelings, all of our misunderstanding, all of our distractions, are not an obstacle, but can serve to attach us more closely to Christ, not to flee from Him, but to rediscover that He never abandons us. And life becomes this dialogue.

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<sup>47</sup> L. Giussani, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>48</sup> Mt 26:39.

“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”<sup>49</sup> So—I can assure you—in time maybe we do not become better, but we become more attached, ever more conquered by this Presence that happens in our life; our affection grows and our desire to follow faithfully, not tossed about by the waves of fading sentiment, but as the fruit of being in focus, judging every feeling, the fruit of a recognition full of affection, of true emotion, because of what has happened to us. Like Father Giussani says, “Affection is not a wave,” like our feelings, but it means “...to give ourselves over continually to the attraction of the truth, to be prisoners of truth, beauty, justice. Prisoners?!” No. “Followers!”<sup>50</sup>

The witness of our friend helps us understand what it means to follow, to compare everything with a presence. He describes a situation in which many of us have found ourselves. “One evening, while the whole class was on the bus [on a trip], some friends from GS along with another friend of mine began to sing together, a bit wildly, but passionately. I was together with some of my ‘jock’ friends, who immediately started insulting the kids who were singing, but without trying to make my friends from GS stop singing together. In the midst of all this, a question came to me immediately and almost violently: am I happier, constrained as I am to remain mummified so as not to be judged negatively by my jock friends, or are they, who are together so freely that, if they desire to sing at night on a bus in front of everyone, they don’t hesitate a moment to do it?” Do you see? It is clear. At first he was ashamed and despised them. But the heart is infallible, and so, putting that shame and contempt in focus, in front of such an irreducible presence, he asked himself: “But who is more free, who is more happy?” Thanks to his shame, thanks to his not feeling himself “one of the guys”, he could rediscover, he could become attached again to those who loved him more. So he continues: “The answer was clear, between the two, I was the sad one, the one who was not free to be himself. And it soon became evident that a friendship that accepts me just the way I am was something I had never seen before.” Focusing our feelings is not the fruit of self-analysis, but a surrender to the evidence, to give precedence to this evidence in front of our preconceptions, to move our affection from that which dominates (thoughts, prejudices, ours and others) to a presence that keeps happening and allows us to be faithful to it.

The path of the Way of the Cross this afternoon, like the whole path of life, is to make this comparison, like our friend made: what makes me more free? What makes me happier? What makes me more myself? Even when starting out from our own prejudices or those of others, in the end one must move his heart from what he thought, from what others think of him, to that which really holds, even if he must sacrifice, even if he must lose face. There will come, in life, just like this afternoon during the Way of the Cross, moments in which not everything will be clear, moments in which our limits, our images will seem to take the upper hand (boredom, distraction, enthusiasm, etc.), like the unfocused lenses of the binoculars. And right then we can say, full of this affection, like Peter did one day: “Even we do not understand, but if we leave you, where will we go?”<sup>51</sup> All this confusion is useful for me to understand that only You make me truly human. Therefore I follow Him, not blindly, but faithfully, reasonably, with all my affection, with all my heart. Like

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<sup>49</sup> Mt 26:41.

<sup>50</sup> L. Giussani, in “*We have never seen anything like this!*”, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Jn 6:68.

the beautiful novel of de Wohl, *The Spear: A Novel of the Crucifixion*, which I recommend to you, which recounts the life of Jesus from the point of view of a Roman centurion. At a certain point, the figure of a sinful woman is described, who finally felt forgiven and freed by Jesus; her family rejects her and she goes looking for His friends—not finding Jesus; and Mary Magdalene asks her: “What do you want from Him?” and she responds: “I don’t know where else to go.” I say the same thing: I don’t know very well what I want from life; our friend last night wanted tattoos, piercings; I don’t want those things, but neither do I know what I want from life, what life has in store for me, but I have at heart only one thing: I want to walk with Him, because I don’t know where else to go. I want to be a “follower” of this Man, who has made me be myself like never before, even if it means work, even if I will fail so many times. Even if sometimes I can go astray, I know that I want to walk with Him, I don’t know where else to go.

Do we have a place to turn, a presence to follow, not because we don’t mess up anymore, not because we don’t forget, but because where, if not in front of Him, is my humanity, without shame, finally embraced for what it is? Like the last contribution of one of you, who writes at the end of his last year of high school, and says, “I often still find myself tired [you know, my friend, even I still feel it!], I find myself wounded and skeptical, but at a certain point, I cannot do anything but go back to what I have seen in the encounter with so many people and think with simplicity: ‘I can run away as much as I want, but I have never seen anything like this.’”

You guys, each one of us is called to this judgment of the heart, to search for a place of which he can say, not just on the wave of emotion, but with a true movement that lasts in time: “I have no other place to go, because I have never seen anything like this!” So, full of affection, we are followers of this Man who is moved even by our hatred. Christ does not stop in front of our fear and distraction, He is not afraid to look our sadness in the face and to take our Cross upon Himself. He continues to die like the grain of wheat, so that we can be released from the slavery of our feelings and emotions, which leave us with dust in our hands.

Full of affection, we put ourselves in the footsteps of God who never stops passing through our life, filling us again with wonder. This is the meaning of the Way of the Cross this afternoon.

With at least a minimal amount of affection, and of curiosity, that even a non-Christian could have, we walk asking ourselves, “Who are You? Who are You who give your life for us all?” We all follow the cross with at least this minimal spark of curiosity. It’s not a nod to the past or a kind of military order asking each other to maintain silence. We are like the friends of a person who is walking to his death, and so we ask ourselves, “you’ll go so far? You’re so moved on my behalf, moved by my distraction—even though I continue to get distracted—and by my confusion—even though I continue not to understand—that you’ll go so far?” But let’s make this distraction, this lack of comprehension, or that word that we let slip to a friend during the Way of the Cross, all into opportunities to ask ourselves, “Who are You in my life?” and to rediscover the affection that we have for this Man. So let’s seek out those true friends, not those who ride the wave of emotion, because they are complicit in our distraction, but rather those who know how to call us back, to correct us and help us to be fully ourselves, not what they want us to be. This afternoon, two friends who

look at each other in silence, reminding each other to look at the cross, are two true friends. Yesterday evening, as I was gathered to sign with our friends from Bologna, I said, “There is nothing that is more like silence than singing like this,” when you sing together. Just as we sang well last night, following the director of the choir when we needed to lower our voices, when we needed to yell, when one person was singing and the rest needed to be quiet; we were like a single voice, and yet each of us felt that we expressed ourselves better than if we’d just said what we each had in mind. Do you know what is even closer to this singing together, and that I’d say is even more profound? Silence. Because, in silence, the same thing happens: you follow what’s happening like you would the conductor’s signal, and try be attentive to when you need to speak, when to watch, and when to listen. Silence is not filling our heads with thoughts, because, I know, we’re afraid of that, it’s rather pulling out your heart, your eyes, your ears and your emotions and fixing them all on what is happening, fixing them on that cross, fixing them on that word in your booklet, fixing them on the voice of the friend who’s singing with you, and letting your eyes and hear be filled by what is happening. Who are you when you are in silence? You are the depth of what is happening. When you live silence this way, when you—just like the choir fixes on the conductor who is leading - you’ve seen it—you stand at attention with your whole self, you are more yourself than if you were to turn to your friend to say the first stupid thing that comes to mind.

It’s a battle, but I wouldn’t propose it to you if I weren’t so sure of how beautiful it is for me. So, please, give it a try! You can say the first thing that runs through your head any other day, but at least this afternoon, give it a shot! Let’s try to be the friend who helps us all to watch, who helps us to follow in silence.

We’ll conclude by listening to *Dulcis Christe*. Let’s begin right away by fixing our hearts, our eyes and our ears on every word. Think of this Man who is so moved for us because we hate him. Please stand.

*Dulcis Christe*

*Angelus*

## **Witness by Giorgio Vittadini**

*Saturday Morning, April 15*

**Pigi Banna.** Every morning we have to, just as Christ will this morning, come out of the tomb. Not just the tomb of our bed, but a tomb that's sealed even tighter, which is that of our thoughts, of our confused emotions that are still not in proper focus, and of our disappointments; it's the tomb that leads us to say we made mistakes last night and we'll make more again this morning.

And we know that to escape from this tomb, our strength is not enough. If you came here looking for a survival technique, I assure you that we didn't want to give one because it doesn't exist. If you were looking for something that can make the emotional impact of this Triduum last, I assure you right now it doesn't exist, that the feeling will wear off. But I'm glad it will wear off. If you were looking for an intellectual understanding of things, I assure you that's not what we wanted to communicate to you.

What we do want to communicate, what we can place our certainty in, is to show you the life of a man who, 2000 years ago, broke open the doors of His tomb and continues to cry out to the tomb of your bed, of your thoughts and emotions. As the Pope said: "Come out, life is waiting for you."

For 2000 the companionship He generates has been shouting, "Come out from the tomb, because you're life is something great." We don't have a guaranteed survival technique or particular morality; we have the certainty of a presence that brings us these tidings every morning: "Wake up! Look! I am with you!"

*Angelus*

**Alberto Bonfanti.** Like every year—and I don't say this as a formality, but because I'm really struck and edified—we received many faithful and sincere questions about what we've lived over the past days. The common theme of all the questions, in their various formulations, was definitely the connection between our emotions and the heart that Father Pigi was talking about yesterday. All of the questions that you sent are an expression of your desire to grow, to become mature and take your life seriously as protagonists, without offloading your freedom onto someone else, to live at the highest level of your desire. Even though it's a commitment, even though our desire can end up seeming like a pain, as one of the girls here said during the assembly at my hotel. I would like to say first of all that these questions have come out of what you've been living, of what you've heard. As one friend here said, "you've helped bring out questions that I had within me, but that came out in the context of what Father Pigi was saying." And this is not unimportant, because it tells us the method, it tells us that the road to follow is becoming aware of what we have seen, what has happened, what has been said. We will go over the content of these days again together within the journey of the School of Community in the coming months. You've communicated more about what we've seen through your eyes than through your words since, as one of Chieffo's songs that I really like says, it's one's eyes that you understand that life is starting anew. You've communicated what we've seen through your eyes, your participation, the attention to silence that you kept despite a thousand difficulties along the Way of the Cross, your capacity to focus again after being corrected, like when Father Pigi reminded us to be silent because of the distracted way many were entering the room yesterday morning. Briefly put, we've been overcome by

something that has attracted us, something that has moved us and allowed us to breathe, as one of you from France wrote, “It’s as if you’d given me new lungs.” This is important, not to avoid any question you might have, any question we might have, but because it’s only if we become aware, if we notice that this wonder and emotion are the fruit of a presence that can say to our friend (we heard about him yesterday) in such dramatic circumstances, “even if there were a woman, a mother who forgot her child, I will never forget you.” If we become aware of this presence, we can face all of our desire and all of our questions without looking for answers in definitions or a set of rules to live by, as we are so often tempted to do, or trying to reduce them, but rather facing these questions fully certain that each is a step toward our destiny. Just listen to how relevant the message that our friend Carrón was eager for us to have again this year is to all we’ve lived these days, and that I’ve just tried to reiterate. I’ll read it: “Dear friends, I’m thinking of each of you, dominated by your desire to become an adult. Growing up means taking the reins of your life into your own hands. But this isn’t always easy. Sometimes we even want to go backwards. It was easier, less demanding when other people were thinking of how to face problems for us. Often, we go back to the question: do I really want to grow up, or would I prefer to keep being a child? Following this desire to become an adult takes a real love, a passion for our self. Living at the height of our desire takes work. And it’s only for the audacious, as I often tell you; it’s for those who want to be protagonists, on the front lines, not offloading our freedom onto other people. It’s I who desire to discover how beautiful it is to live, what intensity of experience my life can reach. Discovering this, Fr. Giussani reminds us, is “a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously,” not leaving anything out: “love, study, politics, money, even food and rest, excluding nothing, neither friendship, nor hope, nor pardon, nor patience.” The reason for this audacity is Fr. Giussani’s unshakeable certainty that “within every [...] gesture lies a step towards our own destiny” (*The Religious Sense*, p. 37). It gives you chills to think of it: to wake up every morning, curious to discover how every gesture can be revealed as a step toward our destiny, in every challenge that we face! We can only live this because of our certainty that we have a traveling companion like Jesus. “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (*Mt 28:20*). With His companionship, we can boldly face any challenge, as one who was not afraid to become an adult, Pope Francis, witnesses to us: “Let us not be imprisoned by the temptation of staying alone and disheartened, of feeling sorry for ourselves, for what happens to us; let us not yield to the pointless and inconclusive logic of fear, resigned to repeat that everything is wrong and nothing is like it used to be. This is the *atmosphere of the tomb*; the Lord wants to instead to open up the way of life, that of the encounter with Him, of trust in Him, of the *resurrection of the heart*, the way that says ‘Get up! Get up, come out!’ That is what the Lord asks of us, and He is next to us as we do it” (*Homily in Carpi, Italy*, April 2, 2017). Happy Easter! Your friend Julián.”

We need to crash into, to encounter, to stay together with people who aren’t afraid of maturing, like the Pope, Carrón, like Father Pigi, but also like many of us. This is the value of our mutual witness. This is the reason we have invited, and we thank him for coming, a dear friend for me, personally, and for all of us, Giorgio Vittadini—professor of Statistics at the Bicocca University of Milan—to whom I now give the floor.

**Giorgio Vittadini.** I hope the applause is for “Albertino,” because you don’t know how things will go now...! I want to tell you about how I’m on a journey at age 61. I’ll start by saying that the two songs we started out with, *I*

*Cieli* and *Ballad of an Old Man*,<sup>52</sup> have been the two *leitmotifs* of my life. In *I Cieli*, “He gave me,” this is for sure: I have been overtaken by a loving presence through all the good I have received. I’ll try to describe it to you. And I say that I’ve been overtaken not because I’ve seen apparitions, but through “ordinary” reality. The first part of reality in which I’ve been overtaken is through my desire. Desire up to the point of sadness, like in *Ballad of an Old Man*. The first part of what I want to say is a commentary on this passage from Julián Carrón: “Following this desire to become an adult takes a real love, a passion for our self. Living at the height of our desire takes work. And it’s only for the audacious, [...] for those who want to be protagonists, on the front lines, not offloading our freedom onto other people.”<sup>53</sup> I want to show you how this desire has been manifested in my life, even though in the beginning I was not fully aware. To help with this, I’d like us to begin with a song by Enzo Jannacci, *Pedro Pedreiro*,<sup>54</sup> because what you will hear in the song is what I was at your age, and still am.

*Pedro Pedreiro*

I was a normal guy... well, maybe not quite “normal”... Anyway, I did really well in school, but in everything else, nothing was ever enough for me. I played soccer and it wasn’t enough. Doing well in school wasn’t enough. My friends weren’t enough. I had this great restlessness inside. Because it bothered me that people looked at the fact that I was smart and threw away the rest, I would do strange things. For example, I bet 100 *lire* that I’d jump into a mud puddle, or that I’d eat the cardboard coaster under a beer glass. Acting like a clown was the expression of my desire not to be “bought” by others. I remember one of my middle school teachers told me, “I punish you because you—as they always say—are intelligent but undisciplined.” In the end, I didn’t change and she got worn out.

You can understand that, when you have something like that inside, such an unbridled desire, you easily get the feeling that everyone wants to make you “normal,” though at the same time they’ll praise you for something that comes so easily for you, but doesn’t matter much to you, which for me was academics. But it never works for you, because what you hope for is something else. Like the song says, “He’s waiting for something beyond his own world / even vaster than the sea.” I remember that they made me write a paper about the importance of Europe. I wrote that not only Europe, but also Italy, my neighborhood, and school were all suffocating to me, and that to belong to any kind of place seemed oppressive to me. They crossed out my whole paper with a red pen; a little more and they’d have sent me to a reformatory. I don’t know if you’ve ever had this experience of having something so crucial inside of you that other people don’t understand... Like Saint Exupéry’s little prince, who showed the grown-ups a drawing of a boa constrictor that had swallowed an elephant, but all they saw was a hat... You have to understand that if you hope for something great, “normality” will seem suffocating. At the same time, though, I had the suspicion that something great and beautiful was happening in reality, that mine were not impossible dreams. For example, I listened to my grandfather tell about the wonderful life he led in the country, with people who stuck together and loved each other, and I was sad, thinking that it no longer happened. Anyway,

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<sup>52</sup> C. Chieffo, “I cieli” [“The Heavens”] and “Ballata dell’Uomo Vecchio” [“Ballad of the Old Man”], in *Canti*, Società Coop. Edit. Nuovo Mondo, Milan, 2014, pp. 194 and 218.

<sup>53</sup> See above, p. 1.

<sup>54</sup> *Pedro Pedreiro*, words and music by Chico Buarque; text in Italian by Giorgio Calabrese and Enzo Jannacci, from the album *Vengo anch’io. No, tu no, [I’ll Come, Too. No, Not You]* (1968).

the idea of “making it” in a life made up of a good career, nice clothes and parties drove me crazy, it didn’t “fit” me. Luckily, along came the tram. Along came the tram, which for me was the encounter with the Movement, first through a high school teacher and then at my university, with a companionship who, for the first time, instead of focusing on “being normal” like everyone else, focused on this strange restlessness, the need that I had inside without even knowing what it was.

That encounter was “the night I saw the stars,” as the Claudio Chieffo song says.<sup>55</sup> The “night I saw the stars,” I didn’t sleep for a minute, but I was able to dream of everything that life could be in a world where I finally focused on the wound I have inside, those questions that define me, the unwieldy desire for happiness and anxiety that nothing out there would work for me. And so began an adventure, a total adventure. During the years of high school and college, I lived a complete adventure, from my studies to my friendships, thanks to a fully human companionship. Up to that moment, the friendship I’d found in the Catholic world always seemed like a “functional” one: “We need to stay together so we can be good,” “We need to work together so we’ll study and improve ourselves.” Instead, with these new friends, I started to spend time with them for the taste of it, for the pleasure of being together, of sharing life and understanding it better, too. Those years weren’t easy; while I was at the university there was a lot of terrorism. Together with my friends, we wanted to understand and judge at a deeper level what was happening in our country as well, beyond the ideological battles taking place even in the newspapers, beyond the over-simplifications of “the terrorists are right, even though they’re violent,” or “the police should throw them all out.” We wanted to look at things in a new way, based on the experience of good and of faith that we were living. Then, we tried to help those who were most in need, for example to find an apartment that didn’t cost too much, making copies of the packets of supplementary texts for classes or studying together (as the Portofranco organization does today). We dedicated a lot of time to moments when we could discuss the experience we were having, our search for truth, and what we desired.

Up to that point in my life, most of the adults I’d met made me feel “peeled” like an apple: “You’re talented, intelligent...but let’s take the peel off—that irrational part—that way you’ll be better, all ‘flesh’...” Instead, for the first time in my life, I found someone who didn’t want me peeled, but understood that the truest part of me was the peel, the weak part with the mud puddles, the part with that question in *Pedro Pedreiro*, a bit confused but sincere. For the first time, I found someone who took me as I am, who understood that this restlessness expressed a desire that was true and profound. Now, think about what you’d like to change about yourselves. Really, those aren’t things you need to eliminate, but before all else, they’re an expression of something profound that you have yet to discover. They’re a sign of the fact that we can’t be “fixed,” that it’s normal to feel like you “don’t fit.” There’s no perfect model we fit into. There was a time the model was: a nice marriage, a good job, working in a bank... Which certainly aren’t bad things in and of themselves, but they’re not enough. What you have inside, that strange restlessness, those questions: this companionship takes all of that seriously. Father Giussani understood what I had inside, and it was thanks to this that I was able to start over again.

However, since the Lord continues to build, it wasn’t enough to experience it just once. I finished college within this companionship, with perfect grades in Economics and an offer to continue at the university. And then

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<sup>55</sup> C. Chieffo, “La notte che ho visto le stelle” [“The Night I Saw the Stars”], in *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 236-237.

the first major trial in my life hit: someone who was very dear to me became ill, became deeply depressed. Imagine a 19-year-old who spent all day at home with all the shades down, without doing anything for a year, with no aspirations, unable to live. I couldn't handle it.

I asked what sense there could be in all that pain. And even if everything else in the world was going well, if my life was going well, but that person suffered that way, what good was life? For the first time I felt that sadness that Chieffo talks about, the sadness of “many, many years,” that it was impossible to live. I still didn't have any particular ideas about a vocation; I didn't have a girlfriend, but I had also never thought of the path of virginity. After that experience, I had an intuition that I went to tell Father Giussani about. “If things like this happen, if a young guy has to live such suffering, there are two possibilities: either everything is absurd, even all the beauty that I've encountered; or the only option is to join yourself to He who makes everything happen. Because He has to reveal to me the reasons things happen in life.” I told him, “Maybe my path is with the *Memores Domini*, a life of virginity as a lay-person in the world.” Giussani told me that mine was a good reason to start verifying that path. And so, my vocation to virginity was born, as a challenge to God, as my request that He reveal the reasons behind all that reality holds, not only the beautiful parts that corresponded to me: “Instead of fighting a war with you, I'll join you, but I want to understand.” And there, my vocation was born and then continued on in *Memores Domini*.

I'll tell you just one more thing on this point: my life has been a continual history of encounters with people who, like Giussani, underlined the presence of this disproportion between what we desire and what we are living. In other words, in the face of questions, even burning ones, rather than giving me theoretical explanations about the world and what happened, God made me encounter certain people. And for me, each person is unique, unrepeatable, is fascinating in their own way. Because within the Christian vocation, everyone counts. Like the homeless man in the song *El portava i scarp del tennis [He wore tennis shoes]: tennis*.<sup>56</sup> he seemed like a nobody, but not for Enzo Jannacci who sang the song. I'll give you two examples of what this different way of living out relationships with people has meant. One is actually about Jannacci. After the Rimini Meeting in 2009, after he mentioned the caress of the Nazarene when speaking about the death of Eluana Englaro—an incident that shook all of Italy—a close friendship between us started. And what united us were exactly those two things I talked about. When he came to Portofranco, Albertino asked him, “What would you wish for these kids?”, “I wish for you all the happiness that the Nazarene promised you through his caress and through our wounds. The caress, given on that day to that person, in its poverty.”<sup>57</sup> Every one of the friendships I've had in my life has been sharing this wound, the need for something impossible that constitutes us, and the caress, the sign from the Lord who tells you: “Don't be afraid of this wound, we'll walk together.”

The second example has to do with interacting with women. That could seem strange for someone living a vocation to virginity, but this is actually something that has allowed me to experience the true depth of a relationship: it's not possessing the other, but being passionate about their life, about the fact that he or she is fulfilled. In *Is it Possible to Live This Way?* Giussani talks about the relationship between Mary Magdalene and

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<sup>56</sup> *El portava i scarp del tennis [He Wore Tennis Shoes]*, words and music by Enzo Jannacci (1964).

<sup>57</sup> E. Jannacci, “The Wound I Have in my Heart,” interview by Paolo Perego, *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, January 2012, p. 88.

Jesus and asks, “Who possessed Mary Magdalen more, all the lovers she had, or Jesus, in the way He looked at her? You love a woman more deeply looking at her from a meter away than through sex. I really wish everyone could experience it, because it’s a truer way; it’s infinitely more profound and satisfying.

I could go on, but what I want to say is that my life from that moment on has borne so much fruit at an affective level.

Before going on to another topic I’ll say this: there’s a kind of fruitfulness in life, a kind of affection and different kind of pleasure that comes from sadness, from focusing on the wound you have, looking at each other’s destiny like the apostles did with Jesus. And this is what I’m living. In fact, from that point of view, I don’t feel like I’m 61; I feel like I’m 20.

Now I’d like to comment on the second half of the quote from Carrón, which is, “It’s I who desire to discover how beautiful it is to live, what intensity of experience my life can reach. Discovering this, Fr. Giussani reminds us, is ‘a goal which is possible only for the individual who is involved with life seriously,’ not leaving anything out: ‘love, study, politics, money, even food and rest, excluding nothing, neither friendship, nor hope, nor pardon, nor patience.’ The reason for this audacity is Fr. Giussani’s unshakeable certainty that ‘within every [...] gesture lies a step towards our own destiny.’”<sup>58</sup> The richness of my life, which I mentioned before, is not a daring feat; it takes what Carrón is describing here. As the Pope said in Monza, talking about the Angel’s tidings to Our Lady, it’s this encounter that introduces the impossible within your life. Seeking for Jesus doesn’t mean waiting for something to happen without doing anything. *And* He doesn’t happen by merit of something that you do. That the impossible happens in reality means that I can continue to look for it, without ever losing the strength to wait for it and so recognize the unmistakable signs of His presence where it happens. The fact that Jesus is there means that I’m capable of never giving up on life, no matter the situation.

Let me explain this point by talking to you about my work. Many people come to ask me suggestions about what job to do and, rightly so, tell me what they’d like. Right here, I could see the fact that you can always keep moving forward, that life doesn’t betray because Jesus is there, because I was completely mistaken in my choice of work. I wanted to be a historian; I’m a statistician. Why? I liked history, but my dad insisted that studying history I couldn’t make a living. We spent the summer after high school graduation in tense arguments. At the beginning of September, I still hadn’t decided what to do. I remember that, one afternoon, I took my bike (the form of transportation I still use today because I don’t have a driver’s license), went to Piazza Piemonte, walked into a telephone booth (and you may not even know what that is...), put in the coin and called one of my high school teachers. “Listen, everything’s a mess here, I don’t know which major to pick.” He suggested that I enroll at the school of Economics because the coursework included a lot of history. And I, with no interest in economics, and the only newspaper I was aware of being *La gazzetta dello sport* [*The Sports Gazette*] and definitely note *Il sole 24 ore* [Editor’s note: an Italian business newspaper], 20 minutes later was there at Catholic University to enroll for Economics. Thanks in part to the friends that I met from the Movement, I started to like what I was studying; I even started to fall in love with it, it opened up questions for me, for example about the relationship between economics, work, and people’s lives. After I graduated college, an opportunity opened up for me to continue my studies

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<sup>58</sup> See above, p. 1.

abroad, but I turned it down because of some family issues. That's when Father Giussani suggested that I try to continue my studies at a university in Milan, but at the time it didn't seem like there were any open positions. In a meeting with a few adults the topic came up, and each of them gave their recommendations. In the midst of it, one professor said that there was a new opening in the Statistics department.

Once again, I found myself in a seemingly limiting situation: I had to do statistics when I had no love for math, in fact I'd left it as the last subject for my high school exams.

I found myself immersed in books in English, full of formulas made up of Greek letters. For a long time, I was disgusted with what I had to study; I felt like it had nothing to do with me. It seemed like I was dying; the sun was outside and I was stuck with that stuff in front of me.

I'll tell you right now that I consider the fact that I love the work I do today to be the biggest miracle of my life.

Which shows that facing the impossible, you can start again. Just as Manzoni wrote about the nun from Monza: accepting a condition even if you didn't choose it, even if it was the fruit of a mistake, can become the first step that leads to a turning point.

The crucial moment in this shift happened when, at a certain point, Giussani said to me that, even if he wasn't sure that I'd make it (my studies were really difficult for me at the time), he knew if I offered my studies to the Lord, who is there, present, then what I was doing could become interesting. And that is the turning point that all work throughout time has in common, for all believers. Those who went to work in the mines, or emigrated, certainly didn't have it better than I did. I can imitate the Lord by accepting the conditions in which I live. We can do what we do, whatever it is, with You, Lord, because you are here with me. This newness that comes with offering started making formulas less hostile to me. A little while after that, I met a professor who was interesting and I a passion for what we were working on together started to grow.

And now I'll tell you how it happened: I started to perceive that those formulas explained a little piece of reality, and so, mysteriously, they were related to a piece of what is true. Demonstrating a theorem was like reaching a person who was waiting for me at the end of the formula, and what I was working on wasn't just a search for nothing. And look, this applies to studying any subject because—think about it—can you communicate really beautiful things in a foreign language without studying grammar? Can you learn karate without the “wax on, wax off,” like you see in the movie *Karate Kid*? You have to learn how to enter into reality, even the things that seem hostile to you, but that always have a narrow opening at the end, with someone there who's waiting for you.

And so, little by little, a fascination for research grew in me; I fell in love with this discipline that seemed to be against me. And I stayed within the humanities, in fact in my free time I read a lot from that genre. If I managed to overcome mistakes and fears, so can all of you. We're all afraid of making mistakes; I made a mistake and I'm happy... Imagine that! A person who doesn't make a mistake might not be any happier than I am.

Still, this *gusto* is still lacking something. Because after the beauty of the discovery of what you find correspondent, you have to bend to reality. For me, since I'm somewhat disorganized, finding myself, for example, having to become very precise (because if you misplace a comma, it throws off the whole proof), wasn't easy. I remember my first task like it was yesterday: I had to calculate how many commuters there were in the province of Bergamo. I built my nice little statistical algorithm, I was all pumped up, and I went to see the professor. He looks

at me, and after a moment he said, “You’ve done good work, but are there a lot of hotels in Calolziocorte (LC)?” “Why do you ask?” I say. “Because from your calculations, 100 people enter in the morning, and 30 leave in the evening, so 70 must be staying the night.” I had build my statistical model and I was satisfied. Too bad that I hadn’t taken the time to double check my calculations. At that moment, I understood for the first time that just as a mother who loves her child also has to clean her rear end, you have to bend to the various aspects of reality. When you study Greek verbs, all the suffixes, when you study English... you have to deal with boredom because, apparently, being fascinated is not enough to change us. And even this aspect, which was a pain in the beginning, became something pleasant, the beauty of following and loving reality just as it is, and not just doing the more attractive parts of you work. What did the pagans do? They only took on intellectual work and made slaves do all the manual labor. Then Jesus came and was a carpenter, saying all things are good, and from that time any kind of work took on dignity, meaning it can be yours, lived in a way that’s not against you.

We make so many mistakes, and we’re always afraid of them. In my work, you can spend as long as a year working on an article, and the journal it’s for can reject it, or point out all that’s wrong with it. I remember one time that I went to a conference to present an article that was criticized. I went back to my professor and told him that really, I was right and—as a typical Italian would say—the judge had been paid off. He answered saying that the person who had criticized me was right, and suggested that I go to ask an explanation, because that’s the only way I would learn. The humiliation of being wrong, of getting an F, of realizing that you don’t know, of having to start over again admitting you’ve failed. Even this, over time, has become interesting for me. Because recognizing a mistake becomes an invaluable opportunity to evolve, to change.

Now I like my work, even if it’s not what I was most predisposed toward, because it’s become mine. At the beginning of my career in academia, I had another objection: that I wouldn’t have enough time to do anything else except what was required to be a professor. Instead, the opposite happened. I got involved with an association of businesses, the Company of Works, and of many non-profits, like AVSI and the Food Bank, and cultural organizations, like the Meeting. The Christian experience makes you curious, it makes you want to understand the context in which you live. If I just think about the opportunities the Meeting has given me to meet so many people, including some of the most important figures for Italian public life. I didn’t do it out of a taste for prestige or for power, but precisely because of that desire to know, to understand and verify our experience and compare it with that of others.

Now I want to talk to you about the last part, on the dark side of the force. Just like in *Star Wars*, there’s a dark side which is when desire fails, and it happens even in a life that is as full and as satisfying as I think my life is. Related to this, I’ll read a quote from Pope Francis. “Let us not be imprisoned by the temptation of staying alone and disheartened, of feeling sorry for ourselves, for what happens to us; let us not yield to the pointless and inconclusive logic of fear, resigned to repeat that everything is wrong and nothing is like it used to be. This is the *atmosphere of the tomb*.”<sup>59</sup> I sometimes find myself living the atmosphere of the tomb. To introduce this last part, I’ll have them sing another song by Jannacci, *L’uomo a metà* [*The Half-made Man*].<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Francis, *Homily in Carpi*, April 2, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> *L’uomo a metà* [*The Half-made Man*], words and music by Enzo and Paolo Jannacci, from the album *L’uomo a metà* (Ala Bianca, 2003).

## *L'uomo a metà*

What does it mean that “life will fix itself, but we don’t be there?” That in my life, that life that’s so rich, I can fail to even notice the battle taking place. I tell you this because that you you’ll understand that if I do it, anyone can do it.

This dark side comes out in so many different ways. I just think of how much certain sporting events can dictate my moods, for example the exploits of my favorite soccer player, Antonio Cassava (one time Giussani told me, you’re either diabolical, or you’re neurotic, you decide. I picked neurotic); or how easily I can space out or get bored; or how many times I don’t take responsibility for my decisions (work in particular, because before accepting my path, for a long time I blamed Giussani for that decision). So many times I’ve gotten angry at the world because of the things that weren’t going well, because of projects that didn’t sail easily into the port. So often, like in *Il monologo di Giuda* [*Judas’s Monologue*],<sup>61</sup> I thought: His reign is not coming. I remember one time when I was in New York visiting our community there. I was going through the Bronx and I thought: faith is supposed to be visible, it’s supposed to change the world, but here we’re just a handful of people and we fight on top of it. This is going to be the salvation of the world? I didn’t doubt that God and Jesus were there, but how could you say that Jesus is victorious when you see all these limits?

And then there’s the evil you do. When I go to confession, I tell the whole list. The problem is that the list is always the same. Every time I say to myself: shoot, just like last time...

Not to mention innocent suffering: looking at tragedies, at victims of war, the unknown soldiers, or earthquakes. There’s a section in *Brothers Karamazov* where Ivan talks about a child torn to pieces because the owner is cruel and he says, “Listen! If all must suffer to pay for the eternal harmony, what have children to do with it, tell me, please? It’s beyond all comprehension why they should suffer, and why they should pay for the harmony. [...] While there is still time, I hasten to protect myself and so I renounce the higher harmony altogether. [...] And if the sufferings of children go to swell the sum of sufferings which was necessary to pay for truth, then I protest that the truth is not worth such a price.”<sup>62</sup>

I think about how many reasons I have in life to be happy, and yet how many things make life dark, despite the Movement, despite *Gruppo adulto*, despite Jesus, despite everything. I’ve never used drugs, but I understand the need to forget all of this pain, because at times it’s too piercing. And if you’re smart enough not to use real drugs that can do serious damage, you can always use friends, or things to do, like a drug...

In this, at a certain point, I took a big leap in terms of my experience. One day I tried not resisting all the pain, the solitude, the evil and the wound I felt. I didn’t fight against the sense of emptiness, the abyss it tried to suck me into. I said to myself: I want to see where this pain leads me; I don’t want to gloss over it with answers, I want to see where it goes, because I can’t live like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, looking nice in public and an abyss in private. And I started to sense that, at the bottom of the darkness, just as *Il mio volto*,<sup>63</sup> the beautiful song by Adriana Mascagni, says, something was there, another person who is in me and keeps me from feeling alone. Because man

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<sup>61</sup> C. Chieffo, “Il monologo di Giuda” [“Judas’s Monologue”], in *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

<sup>62</sup> F.M. Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*, Random House, New York, 1995, pp. 271-272.

<sup>63</sup> A. Mascagni, “Il mio volto” [“My Face”], in *Canti*, op. cit., p. 196.

is made for happiness. And if you get to the bottom of the darkness, your voice is reborn (to cite another of her songs, *Povera voce* [*A Poor Voice*]). At the bottom of the darkness, the things that were overshadowing me faded away, and there was light again. And I was filled with the desire to get down on my knees. Since then, a cry has been reborn inside of me at the depth of the darkness. At the depth of the darkness, because we're made for happiness, we can't tolerate darkness, but we can't be lazy in the darkness, we can't stop halfway in the darkness, because drugging ourselves is stopping halfway in the darkness. You cannot deny that the darkness exists. Then, the only thing you can do is cast yourself onto your knees. Like that time that Giancarlo, a good friend of mine, suddenly lost his wife. I didn't know what to do. So in the middle of the night I had someone take me to [the shrine of] Caravaggio, which was of course closed; and I wandered for an hour outside the chapel. At that moment, my life was purely begging. When you're at the bottom of the darkness, that poor voice is reborn, a light is reborn, that begging to see meaning is reborn, in a way that's truer than in any other moment. In that moment there's just the desire for the true you, "the sadness that I feel." "Stay on here with me."<sup>64</sup> That song is born again in you, precisely because the darkness stripped away all that reassured you every day, but it wasn't able to cancel out that pulse of life flowing in you. Your life is reborn if you accept to be alone, deep down, with this question that belongs to all men, that belongs to those who haven't encountered Christ and those who have encountered Him, to those who drug themselves, to those in misery, to those without hope; the same question you have.

I'm a Christian, but I haven't reached the finish line; I live with this darkness. But rediscovering that question pushes me to start again. And I experience what Pirandello describes in marvelous fashion in his short story *Ciàula Discovers the Moon*, which tells the story of a boy working in a sulphur mine, pushing along carts of sulphur. Let me read you a few lines. At night, while *Ciàula* is deep in the dark pushing the sulphur cart, he realizes something. "He only noticed it when he arrived at the last steps. Before, as strange as it was to him, he thought they must be the last lingering rays of the day. But the brightness grew, it grew more and more as if the sun, that his own eyes had seen setting, had sprung out again. Could it be so? He stood—once he'd crossed the threshold—mouth agape. His load toppled to the ground. Raising his arms from his sides, he opened his blackened hands under the golden light. Grand and tranquil, as if floating in a cool and luminous ocean of silence, he found himself facing the Moon. Yes, he knew, he knew what it was; but it was as with many things that are known but never considered of much value. And what value could there be for *Ciàula*, that the Moon hangs in the sky? Only now, having crept out in the night from the belly of the earth, did he discover it. Ecstatic, he flopped down on his cargo, gazing up at hole. Look! Look there, look there it was, the Moon...It was the Moon! the Moon! And *Ciàula* began to cry, without knowing it, without meaning to, moved by the great comfort and the great sweetness that filled him, having discovered there, as she climbed into the heavens, the Moon, with her flowing veil of light, heedless of the mountains, the plains and valleys she illuminated, heedless of him, and yet because of her he was no longer afraid, he no longer felt tired in that night now filled by his wonder."<sup>65</sup>

When someone has a wound, and goes all the way to the bottom of it, he comes to see the beauty again, he comes to see the moon, like *Ciàula*. And what was in the place of the moon in my life? I realized at a certain point

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<sup>64</sup> C. Chieffo, "Ballata dell'Uomo Vecchio" ["Ballad of the Old Man"], in *Canti*, op. cit., p. 218.

<sup>65</sup> L. Pirandello, *Novelle per un anno* [*Short Stories for the Year*], I Meridiani vol. II, Arnoldo Mondadori, Milan, 1985. Our translation.

along the way, like in that of Dante in Hell, that, for example, Carrón was joyful, and that Jesus' presence in his life was a concrete fact. When the child of a friend of ours died in a car accident, he said to the friend, "He was turned over by Christ. Christ wanted him with Himself, fulfilling his destiny." So I started again in following this adventure that is faith with a greater profundity, to peek through the oddity of those could see the beauty, fully aware of the negative, of our limits; to see that Christianity was more profound than I had ever imagined because there were people who could live every circumstance and still continue to see the moon.

Through this, I started to see that the life of the Church has always been this way: in every age, in the face of the most tragic times, there have always been saints. Like those from the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century who, in the face of the plagues, while the pagan doctors in the line of Galeno ran away, stayed to take care of the sick and often died with them. St. Cyprian said, "Are you Christians afraid? Can you not give our lives?" And this became a great source of conversion. Then, think about St. Peter Claver who spent his life on the ships with the slaves who left Africa in chains to comfort them. Or St. Vincent [de Paul], who invented the modern model of charity with the poorest of the poor. St. Camillus, who was a failure, an ex-soldier, who managed a gambling den, thrown out of a religious order, found himself in a hospital for the terminally ill in Rome with a cancerous leg and started working to help the sick and invented the modern hospital. St. John of God who started to take care of the mentally ill who everyone abandoned. And St. Francis Cabrini who dedicated her life to immigrants in America, like the "boat people" we have along the Mediterranean now. And St. John Bosco, who took care of the ragged children living in the streets. Or Don Gnocchi, who accompanied our Italian alpine troops as they went to combat in Russia. And then there's Mother Teresa, or Don Orione who, when there was the earthquake in Messina that killed 120,000 people, stayed for three years to help the people who had nothing. When evil strikes, you see this life that's reborn.

The place I've seen this the most is in those who, though sick or facing some kind of difficulty in life, radiate hope. I'll give you an example: my mom. My mom died in 2005 after being sick for eight years. She had also met the Movement. When she got sick, she told me to ask Giussani whom she should offer her illness for. Right away, Giussani replied, "Tell her to offer everything for the *Memores Domini*." And so she did it. Four days before she died, she wanted to celebrate her 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary in the same church where she was married, the same church where, four days later, we celebrated her funeral. She held on because she wanted to celebrate, to thank the Lord for the life He had given her. The priest told me that she'd told him that when she got married, she was full of emotion because she had a presentiment that the day would be the beginning of a rich and wonderful life. During the party for her 50<sup>th</sup>, she could hardly stay standing, but she wanted to thank the Lord because that presentiment on the day of her marriage had proven to be so true, within all of life's difficulties. She was full of life up until the end and the day she had to go to the hospital, as she left the house she left her spiritual inheritance to her family: "You'd better take care of the flowers and the dog." I guess our whole family is bit materialistic! In his homily, the priest told us how she often said, "The tumor is difficult, but I offer it. And because of that I stay positive." What I saw in my mother, through and through, was a hymn to life, the miracle of accepting the dark door, the miracle of life that is victorious. Like that other friend, who was also sick. As he was dying, he worked with wood and his compass, and two days before dying he gave me something he made that is still on my desk. It's the word "you" made out of wood. He wanted to tell me that that's the only thing that counts. This is my life's miracle: that the darkness that I

experience always opens up into something else. A while back, during an audience, the Pope was stopped by a middle school boy who said to him, “I have a friend who is sick with a tumor.” And he added, “Why does God asked something like that of a boy my age?” “There are questions to which not even I know how to answer. It’s mysterious,” the Pope responded. “What helps me is looking at God on the Cross.” “Why is it mysterious?” the boy insisted, stopping the Pope, who was about to move on, in his tracks. Francis stopped and answered him, putting his finger to his forehead. “With your head, you’ll never understand it. You have to look at Jesus on the Cross.”<sup>66</sup> “Christ Jesus, a root stripped and naked.”<sup>67</sup> That heart of life, that can give you hope and grants all fruitfulness: is it something we give ourselves? No. That heart tells you that at the depths of the darkness there is light. Like the thief on [Jesus’] left, after a life that was probably terrible, at the end on the cross, He finds a presence with which to dialogue. My wish for all of you is that your lives, like his, might also consist of a continuous dialogue with Christ.

**Pigi Banna.** We *could* stop here, “reasoning with our heads,” as the Pope would say, complicating our lives and reducing what has filled our hearts the last two days to a line of reasoning. Instead, placing the life of a friend in front of our hearts, as we have done listening to this witness, has showed us that there is no darkness that, if you follow it all the way to the bottom (which is, not stopping short with a drug that tries to ease the bitter taste), doesn’t reveal at the bottom, a light; a light to which many of you, as Albertino says, have given witness by the way you’ve been attentive. From the depth of darkness, you can glimpse a light capable of filling your heart, of embracing “the entire apple, peel and all,” that doesn’t censure any part of us. This is the experience of the resurrection.

We don’t see any shortcuts in the Gospels: they were sad, disillusioned, and go to the bottom of their disappointment at seeing Him die. “Some women are saying He is risen. But we don’t believe the women.” And yet they meet someone who, going to the depth of that darkness of disappointment, is capable—as they say—of making their hearts burn within them, of embracing them with all their outer shell, so much so that they say to him, “Remain here. Don’t go away.” There are some encounters that take place in life in which we are joined by a familiar face, one we can describe at the level of appearances, and even list all the defects, but, at a certain point, we recognize there is another face peering through behind the first. There’s a sign that helps us to take notice: our hearts burn within us, just as it did for those disciples with Jesus. This is the glaring sign of the truth, the reality and the contemporaneousness of Christ’s resurrection: the fact that our hearts burn, a correspondence that before was unheard of.

It’s not a question of whether or not we’ve understood everything; thank goodness, because we will never cease understanding more and being surprised. We have not resolved our lives. The boredom stays with us, but we never again want to separate ourselves from the One who reawakened our hearts. This is the resurrection: that we’ve found someone like this.

So, let’s stand and sing *Christo resusciti* [*Christ, Be Resurrected*], not like before, which was a B-, a C-, but with the word Christ, with the word resurrected, you have to let out that full cry to the one who has taken you, peel and all, in the midst of the darkness. This is not the resurrected Christ of a boys’ choir, it’s the Christ of the criminal

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. G. Vittadini, “Good Friday, the Victory of the Defeated,” *ilsussidiario.net*, April 14, 2017.

<sup>67</sup> “Christ Jesus, a root stripped and naked,” hymn for Friday Evening Prayer, in *Book of Hours*, Cooperativa Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan, pp. 170-172.

on the cross who enters paradise with Jesus. Please stand.

*Cristo resusciti*

I want to thank you all for the way you participated here, and give you my Easter greetings by speaking to you about the city where I live, Rome, though it's not the city I'm from. The highest point in Rome is "Monte Mario," (they call it *monte*, "mount," but it's only 135 meters high) and you can see all of Rome from there. It's an incredible panorama. So, what is Easter? It's like if your father took you one day, unexpectedly (you'd never have expected it) to Monte Mario (obviously, in the example, you're all Romans) and you say, "Look, there's our house. You can see it clearly today," and he responds, "And do you see all the houses around it? The whole block? Ten houses?" "Yes, of course, if I can see our house." And then your father tells you, "Today, now that you're 16, I can tell you. We own the entire block." "Wow!" And he goes on to say, "Someday, all this will be yours!" And you think, "I'm set for life!" Then, you go home, and walking in silence around the block you think, "This is my house." Seeing litter on the ground you say, "What a mess!" and you pick it up. You're about to throw your cigarette butt on the ground and say, "No, wait, the trash can's over here." Then you see a broken window, and you tell your father and offer to help fix it. Those who experience the resurrection receive the promise they can live all of reality that way.

I'm happy this Triduum is coming to an end, because they are like Monte Mario for us. After having seen Vitta, after having listened to many of your witnesses, it's as if we were being told, "Look, everything is yours." Everything belongs to you. Everything belongs to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.<sup>68</sup> It makes you want to go back to the classmate you don't like much, to go back to the teacher you like so much because she teaches math; you listen to a piece of news and say, "This is mine." "Aww, I can't stand that guy, it's hard being in class with that other one:" that's yours, too. It's just a matter of time before you discover how Christ will find the way to win over his heart. All we have to do is one thing: to keep going, to go out to meet others and ask Christ to show us how He is victorious there.

This is the moved reaction of those, as the Pope says, go out to meet all of reality, not to take Jesus there, but to seek Him and discover how He comes to meet us in the most unexpected places. This is the power of the resurrection. So we can see how He possesses all things. We start to notice, in the midst of a world that has so many problems, the yellow leaf (as Giussani said),<sup>69</sup> we recognize the hints of the truth that every person carries, we even come to the point of inviting that math teacher to GS, not to increase our numbers, but because I want to discover that truth that there is in your life.

This meeting room is our Monte Mario from which Christ is telling us, "You see all that I have shown you these last few days? This is all of life. This is all of reality. Now, go out and knock on the doors even of those who seem most indifferent," just as our friends in Rimini did. As young as they are, they went out to all those affected by the earthquakes, and not because they're such good people, but because they wanted to discover how Christ was present there. Or just as our friend, who saw a school full of potheads and was on student council, invited the people from the "L'imprevisto" organization to talk. Everyone was rapt with attention and, miraculously, the next day (truly a miracle!) in the basement where they usually smoke pot, no one was smoking. So then he, having to

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. *1 Cor* 3:22.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. "*We have never seen anything like this!*", op. cit., p. 73.

choose between the Triduum and a class trip, went to the vice principal and said, “No, I have to go to the Triuduum because, if I am the way I am, it’s because of the Triduum,” and the vice principal says, “But, because of how good you are for the school, you have to come on the trip. We’ll pay for you to go.” And how does he respond? Full of gratitude, he goes on the trip thanks to a collection taken up by the teachers and invites the vice principal on the Triduum. We no longer have anything to fear. All of reality, even our misery, is for us, because there is One who is victorious.

We go back home with our hearts burning and full of desire to go out, because even in the best-sealed tombs we find Christ knocking, ready to come out. With hearts burning and the desire to go out, we’ll say goodbye singing the *Regina Coeli*, which is the prayer of the Church for the entire season of the resurrection.

*Regina Coeli*