

WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU FILL MY HEART WITH YOUR ABSENCE?

(P. Lagerkvist)

Meditations and Witness during
the GS Easter Triduum

Rimini, March 29-31, 2018

Greeting from Fr. Julián Carrón

March 31, 2018

Dear friends,

I cannot think of you without being moved, joining myself to this most beautiful and dramatic period that you are passing through at your age. How I would like to be close to you!

It is a time in which “the eternal mystery of our being,” of which Leopardi spoke, comes to the surface.

I know that sometimes the appearance of this great mystery in your lives baffles you, so much does it surpass you on every side, so immense that it cannot be mastered.

“Who are you, that you fill my heart with your absence?” Lagerkvist says.

But precisely the ability to perceive this absence, this “mystery of our being,” is the most important resource that you’ve received, a gift made to your human nature: the detector for discovering what truly responds to your expectations. Ernesto Sabato understood this well: “The nostalgia for this absolute is the invisible, unknowable background with which we face everything in life.”

I am always amazed when I think that Jesus bet everything on the heart of those first two who met Him along the banks of the Jordan, on the heart as the criterion of judgment: “Come and see.”

When He said this, Jesus recognized that they had the capacity to grasp what responded their boundless desire for happiness, making them aware of their dignity.

At the same time, he posed the greatest challenge to them: they could not cheat, not with their heart, not with what corresponds to it, once they had met Him.

Inviting them to walk with Him, He offered John and Andrew the chance to discover the breadth of His friendship, a friendship so decisive for reaching the happiness they sought, without taking the place of their freedom. In fact, He challenged their freedom like no one else could have done, so much did the attraction of His presence press on their hearts.

I dare you to find an adventure more fascinating than this!

Happy Easter

Your companion on the journey, Julián

Introduction, Pigi Banna

Sunday Evening, March 29

“That my joy may be in you and your joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11)

How greatly we are lacking, and how greatly we desire that experience of being truly loved, preferred, and unmatched in the eyes of another person. When Mary, a girl of your age, heard the angel’s message telling her, “you will be the mother of God,”¹ she felt preferred and chosen like no one else in the whole world.

From that moment on, no one was more of a friend to her, not even her mother or Joseph, her betrothed. A “Stranger” was her friend. “A stranger is my friend,” someone whom she had just met, and yet who was turning her life upside down with that look of preference that filled her heart. Her heart was full of nostalgia: “Because of him, my heart is filled with nostalgia.” She wanted to see him. “Who are you, that you fill my heart with your absence?”²

We ask that over these days each of us may have that experienced of being unmatched to the eyes of another person, that our hearts may be full of nostalgia for this Unknown Friend of ours who knows us better than we know ourselves, just as it was for Mary.

Angelus

“WHAT IS THIS LACK A LACK OF?” (M. Luzi)

Italian poet Mario Luzi wrote, “What is this lack a lack of, / O heart, / of which all of sudden / you are full?”³ Every day, we throw ourselves into a million things, one commitment after another with school, free time, meetings, and yet, when we’re least expecting it, suddenly our heart speaks up: something is still missing. Even when we manage to check off everything on our list of things we decided we needed to do to have a good life (and we rarely manage), when it seems like everything is in place, something is still missing. Who here has never experienced this? Many of you wrote about it in your contributions. I’ll read one:

“The question in the title for the Triduum is right on the mark, because this has been a really full and really beautiful time for me. I’m doing really well. School is good, I like it, it excites me, and I even see the results of my work. I started singing and am learning how to play. These are the two things I like to do best and that I’m best at. My friends are a constant discovery and I am able to share the struggle of schoolwork with them: basically, everything’s perfect.

However, when I’m alone, when the evening comes and all that is over, it seems almost as if they didn’t happen because I feel this ‘nothingness,’ this mystery that is still inside of me. What can I fill it with, if even the most concrete things seem like enough to satisfy me?”

This can happen when you get home Saturday night, or Sunday morning when you’re struggling to get out of bed because you feel a strange bitterness inside; or right in the middle of a party, or a really busy time at school: everything seems to be going well, and yet there’s something that’s not right; not outside of us, but *in* us. Overcome by a heavy and draining sense of emptiness, you can’t figure out what it is, you don’t know what to do with this thing you find inside.

Jovanotti describes it in his song *Sbagliato [Broken]*: “Wayward shepherd [...], / Broken / Disoriented / Since the day they threw us down / To the ground which consumes / Our brief lives like morning dew.”⁴ Broken: this is how we feel when we perceive this something that’s not right; broken because it seems like we are

¹ Cf. *Lk* 1:29-33.

² P. Lagerkvist, “A Stranger is My Friend,” from the booklet with the texts used during the GS Triduum, p. 4. The .pdf version may be downloaded in Italian from the CL website. Hereafter referred to as *Triduum Booklet*.

³ M. Luzi, “Under Human Species,” in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 5-6.

⁴ Jovanotti, “Sbagliato [Broken]”, in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 4-5.

the only ones who have this “manufacturing defect” in our hearts. Like De Gregori’s song: “Poor me! [...] / I look around and they’re all better than me.”⁵ I would have each of you read your contributions one by one; they all talk about this lack! You, my friend, are not the only one: 5,000 people are here today because they have the same lack. It must not be something wrong if all the poets, writers and singers whom you find cited in the booklet speak about it. This lack is not one person’s difficulty; it’s the great problem of life. I’d go even further: it’s what gives life its dignity.⁶

We all made the sacrifice of coming here—and I’m happy to see so many friends, welcome to all of you!—so that we might have a place where we do not look at this sense of emptiness as a sickness—this lack that comes over us when we least expect it, making us so impossible to understand, and yet so one-of-a-kind; that at times makes us feel alone, though in reality it unites us all in a deeper way.

We’ll sing *Ballata dell’uomo vecchio* [Ballad of the Old Man]:⁷ unafraid and without shame, let’s let out all that sadness that is inside of us, the love of which we are not capable, and the desire—seemingly impossible—to see God and “give Him a piece of my mind.” It’s not a sickness, it’s the truth about us.

Ballad of the Old Man

BETTER ALONE THAN BROKEN?

Why do we feel broken when we feel this lack? Why are we uncomfortable with our uneasiness? Last November, Carrón told the CLU, “It’s like this discomfort becomes a burden that we carry with us a lot of the time.”⁸ When the burden of our shame is so heavy, we are tempted to isolate ourselves, in the words of poet Piero Ciampi, “The temptation / to sit and never rise again,”⁹ or, as one of you wrote:

“So often, I perceive that my heart has a deep hole: an unfillable absence that I’ve always instinctively repressed.

Maybe I repress it out of pride, or because I pay more attention to other people’s lives and problems than to myself; maybe it’s because the people around me have always looked at me as the strong one, the one who never has problems or, if she does, finds a solution without asking help from anyone.

In my life, however, the opposite is true. When, at night, I think back on all I have lived that day, the only thing that comes to me to do is start to cry. I cry because this absence that I perceive, that I repress, is becoming stronger and stronger. The more I repress it, the more I feel it. This absence corresponds with my desire to be accepted by the people who surround me every day, with whom I’ve grown up the last few years.”

Why does our friend cry? Because she cannot completely repress this sense of emptiness; the more she tries to repress it, the more she feels it. But, why do we try to repress it? Why are we ashamed of it? She says it all: first and foremost because we’re obsessed with pleasing other people. We end up hiding the most fragile aspect of ourselves because we’re afraid that if other people figured out that, at night, once we’ve closed ourselves in our room, we start crying, they’d abandon us. That the second we fall short of their expectations, they’d leave us all alone. We grow up with this thorn in our side: needing to please others, needing to be accepted by others.

One of you wrote to me that his parents, during an argument, threatened him saying, “Look, if you don’t change, we’ll disown you!” The same thing can happen with your friends, too. They don’t necessarily say it explicitly, but if you say certain things, if you wear certain clothes, it’s as if they give you a look that says, “You’re going to make us look bad—come on!—you’re not one of us; if you can’t keep up, we’ll leave you behind.” And on the topic of not falling short of expectations, I’ll open and close the category of teachers here: if

⁵ F. De Gregori, “Povero me [Poor Me]”, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 5.

⁶ Cf. L. Giussani, *Belonging to Christ Today*: “Our life is without dignity if it does not carry, within it, an answer to this cry: we should live to respond to this cry,” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 6.

⁷ C. Chieffo, “Ballata dell’uomo vecchio,” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 6.

⁸ J. Carrón, *He Was Seen and Therefore Saw*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 9.

⁹ P. Ciampi, “L’assenza è un assedio [Absence is a Siege]”, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 7.

you don't pass an exam, if you don't do well on a test, "I'm sorry, you can't live up to the level of our class, or our school," they tell you. Therefore, a person thinks they have to always be at the same level as other people, meet their expectations. It's as if we're buried alive in the images of perfection that friends and adults make for us. You can't make mistakes, you can't be fragile. If you have a problem—as our friend was saying—you have to solve it alone, because a good friend, a good son, a good student is one who doesn't cause problems, who doesn't bother anyone. If you ask questions, "you're wasting our time; it's a burden on our evening together."

Still, as our friend said, our hearts cannot cheat: the more you repress this need, the more you feel it. So what do we do? When we can't resolve this sense of emptiness we have inside by ourselves, when we are ashamed to talk about it with our friends because we think we'll be rejected, what do we do? What happens to us? We isolate ourselves. To avoid feeling "broken" in the eyes of others, we isolate ourselves, thinking that sooner or later this "rough moment" will pass and hoping, with Balzac, for a "colorless, barren life in which strong feelings were misfortunes, and the absence of emotion, happiness."¹⁰

This is our biggest risk today: that after the formality of telling everyone you're doing well, you're managing everything, after having shown everyone your optimized profile, as if our life were a social media platform, we close in on ourselves, hoping for it to pass, almost as if we could block out all contact with reality just like you block contacts on *WhatsApp*. We try to build a wall around ourselves, as another friend describes:

"Whenever I think I've answered a question, it always comes back [it always comes back! The more you repress it, the more it comes back] and I have to start searching again. I'm sick of it. That sums it up.

I've build an invisible wall, somewhat poorly constructed, around me, built up each time I need a barrier. Every so often it crumbles and gets rebuilt, but with more cracks each time. This wall, sound-proofed from most of the things around me, occasionally lets in some sound through one of the little cracks."

We're here this evening to unmask a few of these lies. The first has to do with the futility of isolation. You can all think through it yourselves: after you've built this wall; after you've blocked all contacts; after you've isolated yourself, have you resolved the problem? Has that lack gone away? Has the emptiness disappeared? No, and sooner or later they come back. Isolating yourself doesn't help anything, and this is why you did well not to isolate yourselves during Easter break, making the sacrifice to come here.

Even further, is the person who isolates himself really more mature, freer? No! It's the opposite, as Fr. Giussani tells us, "Man is *alone*, and thus [he becomes] *dominatable* [...] a prisoner of whomever, in whatever way, shows himself to be stronger."¹¹ Everyone believes they are thinking for themselves by isolating themselves but then—if you pay attention—they all dress the same way; think the same way. The lonely, "sad, fragile and depressed [...] are proud / to be enough for themselves,"¹² Gaber writes; they think they resolve the problems that way, but in the end, they find themselves thinking like everyone else. Thinking you're original because you isolate yourself is like "cutting off your arms and legs," as Saint-Exupéry writes, thinking then you'll be free to walk, but instead "becoming [merely] tame, polite and domesticated beasts."¹³ One thinks he is isolating himself and thus is freer, but in reality, he only becomes more a slave of fashion or of the dominant mentality. This is the first great lie. The price of isolation is not freedom, but slavery.

There's a man from history who will always remind us about the lie of isolation, a man who isolated himself and ended up thinking just like everyone else. It's Judas, the one whose betrayal of his best friend, Jesus, we remember tonight. Not understanding how Jesus behaved, instead of asking, he isolated himself; he cut himself off and after a few hours found himself thinking of things just as Jesus' enemies did, to the point of selling Him for a few coins. This is the bitter price of isolation: losing, betraying what is dearest to us in life.

¹⁰ H. de Balzac, *The Vicar of Tours*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 7.

¹¹ L. Giussani, *Belonging to Christ Today*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 7.

¹² G. Gaber, "I soli [The Lonely]," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 8.

¹³ A. de Saint-Exupéry, "A Meaning in Life," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 7.

Let's stand and read the description of Judas's betrayal.¹⁴

We'll listen to *Amicus Meus*. "My friend, you betrayed me with a kiss. / [...] / It would have been good for that man had he never lived. / The wretch returned the price of blood / and in the end he hanged himself."¹⁵ The music wasn't written yesterday, it's the expression of a sensibility that's different from our own, but has the power to keep us from remaining on the surface of our emotions; you'll hear how every word is measured: as if it's hammering on the superficiality with which we usually treat each other, that brings us back into contact with the truth about ourselves. My friend, why are you isolating yourself? We'll sit and listen.

Amicus Meus

"AND WHAT WORTH DOES LIFE HAVE EXCEPT TO BE USED AND GIVEN?" (P. Claudel)

Did you hear how that word "*infelix*"—wretched—echoed? Those who isolate themselves, like Judas, not only betray what they love, but are unhappy in the end. They're unhappy because you can't try to cheat your heart for too long. As the Pope said, "The heart can't be 'photoshopped.'"¹⁶ the more I repress it, the more it makes its voice heard. There is a contact that we can never block: the contact with ourselves, with the mystery that we are. Judas looks at that pile of money and things, "What have I done!" You have a heart that, even when you make mistakes, still works; it's anything but broken!

Here, a second lie worms itself into our way of reasoning: thinking that we are broken, because we have a problem and can't resolve it with our own strength. We are led to believe that someone is good, is not broken, when he knows how to respond to his needs by himself, when he knows how to put things right by himself. But who knows how to do this? Only animals, who know how to solve their problems on their own; in fact they don't ask questions, they just live. Instead, in us, there's something greater. The grandeur of humanity, the dignity of humanity is in the fact that there are 'problems' in us that we don't know how to resolve ourselves. And that is not a sign of defeat.

Even my dog knows how to solve lots of problems, it's a special breed, very intelligent. It's not for nothing he's named Aristotle, "Ari" for short. He can make out lots of names and does "problem solving" exercises. He knows how to do amazing things: you give him the little triangle and he knows to put it in the triangle; the circle in the circle, and every time you have to reward him with what at home we call the "wurstellino," a little sausage, and he goes on solving problems. Do you understand how we can treat our lives like that of my dog? I have an exam; I solve the problem and I get a reward, "Dad, I get to go on vacation; I get to go out." I do chores at home: I expect a reward. I get the girl: I have to have a reward. And we even think of God as the solution to the problem of our lack. Do you see that, like this, we treat ourselves like dogs? Not only do we treat ourselves this way, we let ourselves be treated like this by others too.

But there's something in us that we can't resolve as dogs do. The human heart has something inside it that does not allow itself to be resolved by our solutions. Is this a weakness, or is it not the greatest thing each of us possesses, that distinguishes us from dogs? The second lie, then, is feeling broken because we are presumptuous enough to think we are able to resolve this emptiness on our own, that we can find a solution to our problems, not realizing that the greatest thing in us (not what is most broken in us!) is precisely the fact that we have these problems, just as a girl told a friend of mine during religion class, leaving everyone speechless: "But you can think you're a failure because you can't do something, because life isn't how you'd like it to be, but the fact is, as you're thinking and saying that, you *are* something, you exist!" In other words, you are greater than your

¹⁴ Cf. *Mt* 26:20-25: "When it was evening, [Jesus] reclined at table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, 'Amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' Deeply distressed at this, they began to say to him one after another, 'Surely it is not I, Lord?' He said in reply, 'He who has dipped his hand into the dish with me is the one who will betray me. The Son of Man indeed goes, as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed. It would be better for that man if he had never been born.' Then Judas, his betrayer, said in reply, 'Surely it is not I, Rabbi?' He answered, 'You have said so.'"

¹⁵ T.L. De Victoria, "Amicus Meus [My Friend]," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 9-10.

¹⁶ Pope Francis, "Angelus, January 21, 2018," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 11.

defeat. You don't even know what you are, you are such a mystery!

The nostalgia that comes over us, rather than being a burden we're ashamed of, is the strength of life, what distinguishes us from dogs, what allows us never to settle for less. Who can respond to it? The issue, as Jacqui Treco says in *Be Still My Heart*, is whether we turn the things that we aren't able to resolve by ourselves into a question, if we do not look at it as "bad luck," but as the most precious thing we have. "'Cause if you stay still,'" it's true that, "you won't get burned," you'll feel a little less pain. "But if you stand still, you'll never know why you burn at all."¹⁷ Journalist Marina Corradi gives a magnificent description of how she discovered that the void, the fragility she felt inside, was actually the greatest thing in her life:

"Since my adolescence, and maybe even before that, I always had the sense that I was born with something wrong with me. Something that didn't work like it should, as if I were a house and that defect were a deep crack in a weight-bearing wall; as if I were a dam and that defect were a leak where water could escape. It seemed like my friends didn't have that weakness inside, or that it wasn't something you talked about. That you should appear calm, positive, successful, or maybe even angry, but only with society, the State or the social order, with something external. But I was not angry with the world [...]. That tear, which reminded me of the slashes in the canvas of a Fontana painting, was in me, but it was clear that you weren't supposed to talk about it. It was that malaise described by one of Montale's poems. 'It was the strangled rivulet gurgling, it was the shriveling of parched leaves, it was the horse falling heavily.' We studied it at school, but no one in the class asked if it might be talking about us. As a girl, I'd look at myself in the mirror in the morning, smile, think of that crack inside and say to myself: go on, what are you worried about? You're young, you're beautiful. However, as I grew older, the crack seemed to get deeper, a black mark on the white wall inside me. It grew wider, into a melancholy that became a disease: severe depression. I would go to doctors, they'd treat me, and I'd feel better, but then intermittently that crack would show up again, painfully, whispering, 'You're not healed.' [...] I read Mounier, who wrote, 'God enters through our wounds.' I thought about it: was that crack a hole in an otherwise impermeable wall, a necessary wound? Then I forgot all that, careful to take the proper dosage of one medicine after another [...]. I felt the pain like a lack that could never be filled, like a deep-seated, burning nostalgia [...]. A long time ago, I gave up any further seeking on account of that crack. It's there, and, I'd say, deeper and darker for every year that has passed. Tonight, however, as I read, that phrase touched the deepest nerve of my pain, and I was moved. Why this wound? Without it, I who am physically healthy, well-off, and quite fortunate, would not need anything. My salvation is that broken wall, that fissure in the dam: through it, a gush of uninhibited grace can enter, making fertile what was dry and hardened."¹⁸

Not only is it useless to isolate ourselves (the first lie), because this turns us into slaves; not only is a heart with this brokenness not wrong (the second lie), because it is a resource, the sign of our greatness; but, what is more, "the nostalgia for this absolute is like the invisible, unknowable, background, with which we face all of life,"¹⁹ as Ernesto Sabato writes. Which means: this fragility is the instrument, the weapon we can use to discover if someone is a friend or not, not something to be ashamed of with our friends.

Thus, we can recognize a third lie that has to do with friendship. We think that we can please others by hiding this nostalgia: if we are not a bother, then we'll have more friends; then we'll be accepted and preferred. Instead, if we face everything with this nostalgia, we will understand who our true friends are. The people that abandon you if you change, in front of whom you always have to put on a mask, are not friends, they're just exploiting our emotions. When, instead, you keep this cracked heart open, when instead of being ashamed of it you see it as the truest part of you, you're the one to say, "good riddance," to those friends who make you feel

¹⁷ "If you stand still, you'll never know why you burn at all," (J. Treco, "Be Still My Heart," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 11).

¹⁸ M. Corradi, "La mia crepa [The Crack Inside Me]," October 23, 2017, *Tempi.it*.

¹⁹ E. Sabato, "España en los diarios de mi vejez," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 11.

inadequate and abandon you, because you don't know what to do with friends like that. You'll unmask the lie of false friendship: friendship based on a "contract."

Thanks to the crack in your heart, you look for true friends who are able to live up to what you feel is most problematic, most incomprehensible, most mysterious and most unresolved in your life. A friend is a person who knows you better than you know yourself, not someone with whom you make an emotional contract. Of course, they don't take away the brokenness, they don't "pump your stomach" to rid you from your difficulties, as we sometimes think religion ought to do, too: "I'm struggling, and here I find consolation." True friendship is, instead, what finally allows you to look with sympathy at the crack in your heart. You know someone is a true friend if he or she makes you feel free, fully yourself, and completely taken seriously, even if he or she just met you. With such a person, you feel at home.

Chester Bennington from Linkin Park intuited that this nostalgia was the criterion for finding a true friend, someone who could love him just as he was: "I wanna heal, I wanna feel [...] like I'm close to something real. / I wanna find something I've wanted all along, / somewhere I belong."²⁰ What misery to think that he couldn't find this, and last July took his life for this reason! And what misery thinking of our peers who prefer to be alone! Think how many of your peers have the experience you do, but don't have the courage to tell anyone.

This evening, however, you are here. You haven't chosen isolation, and you want to look at this lack as your most precious possession, not just as a problem to resolve, like dogs would. And in doing so, you can discover if our friendship is capable of embracing you just the way you are. The game is not over: there is a place that can welcome us, where we feel at home and our questions can be taken into consideration, as one of our friends wrote:

"My father abandoned me when I was five years old. Since then, so: for eleven years, I've continued to ask why. This fact made me refuse from the get-go to trust any other person. I started to believe that sooner or later everyone would abandon me, that no one stays forever; it doesn't matter how much they say they love you.

I spent eleven years trying to cover up this emptiness, looking at it as a shame. I fooled myself that by doing this it would disappear. And this made things even more complicated. I believed that I was just used to having a missing piece, but instead, this last year I started to pay attention to it.

It has been and still is painful, an excruciating pain, but one that I am taking on. And I am here to write about this because I have a desperate need to understand the reason for certain choices. I need someone to help me; by myself I can't do it [She stopped being someone who thinks she can solve her problems by herself. What freedom!] I met this 'someone' in the GS community, who led me to think about Someone much bigger."

We are here together to see if this Someone much greater, if this Unknown Friend I mentioned at the beginning is so present, so concrete, as to make us look at what we usually consider with shame as our greatest resource. We are together to see if there is an Unknown Friend for our heart, a true friend, who understands us better than we understand ourselves.

But there's something we have to do: if you want to understand if a person is your friend, without deceiving yourself, you have to look at him, and not only when he speaks to you, because many people are good at "duping you." You have to observe him in action, see how he acts in relationships with other people, for example how he acts while shopping, how he looks at the world in the most daily, ordinary activities. What is the word for this looking at another person to understand if he is right for us? "Silence." This the one reason we ask you to be silent during this time together, not to impose a rule, but to finally open our hearts to see if what we have in front of us is all a show or a true friendship. It's "to see," as one of you wrote, "if Jesus is the biggest hoax in history or if He's truly the secret of how to look at everything, even the saddest, ugliest realities." The one who wrote this is a man; a person who does this is really a man, and if he is faithful to this question, it's impossible

²⁰ Linkin Park, "Somewhere I Belong", in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 11-12.

for him not to remain in silence, totally at attention to try to understand and to see, unabashedly risking all the nostalgia in his heart to catch a true friend in action.

What happens this evening? This evening, the Church reminds us that Jesus, to be a friend to the very depths of this fragility in us men and women, to be a friend for Judas who betrayed him (this is why He calls him, “my friend”), and to the other disciples who they were confused and afraid at his being betrayed, understood that He must give His life for them. This is a true friend, not one who expects or demands something from you, but one who, for love of you, begins to give His life for you. He does not claim anything from you for Himself, but is the first to give His life for you. Is He a true friend or a crazy person, this man who gives His life for His friends? We’ll listen to *Cristo al morir tendea*.²¹

Cristo al morir tendea

Jesus dies so we are not left alone; He dies that we might feel a bare minimum of sympathy for our own heart, that the lies we just described no longer imprison our lives. He gives His life that the joy that is His life might begin to penetrate our lives. “That my joy may be in you and your joy be complete.”²²

Now, we’ll celebrate Mass. I invite all of you to stay, even those who usually get bored, those who’ve never been to Mass and those who don’t believe or don’t understand, because all you have to do is look and listen with this question in your heart: “Is this man who gives His flesh and blood for me the Unknown Friend, the preference I’ve been waiting for in my life?”

²¹ Br. Marc’Antonio da San Germano, 16th century, “Cristo al morir tendea [Christ,at the Point of Death]” in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 12-13.

²² *Jn* 15:11. Similarly, during the Last Supper, Jesus prayed to His Father about his disciples, saying, “When I was with them I protected them in your name that you gave me, and I guarded them, and none of them was lost except the son of destruction, in order that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you. I speak this in the world so that they may share my joy completely. I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. Father, they are your gift to me. I wish that where I am, they also may be with me, that they may see my glory that you gave me, because you loved me before the foundation of the world. (*Jn* 17:12-19. 24).

Lesson, Pigi Banna
Friday Morning, March 30

**“I could no longer live if I no longer
heard Him speak” (A.J. Möhler)**

Al mattino

Like a “pitcher empty at the font.”²³ this is how Mary must have felt the day of Jesus’ death. The same way we feel in facing the death of a child, of a dear friend. Finally, we had found a person who preferred us, who gave his life for us, and now they take him away. Where is God in all of this? Mary asked these questions and, full of questions like this, followed Jesus on the way to His death; she didn’t leave Him because she was certain of one thing: how could she live without hearing Him speak anymore? Let us ask today that we, too, can be like her: full of all the questions we have, but without running away; trying to follow.

Angelus

We’ll say Morning Prayer together. It’s a way to wake ourselves up again, to become aware of ourselves again. For me, Morning Prayer is like when you’re driving—for sure at least some of you drive a scooter. In the morning, you always go the same way; you’re on “auto-pilot” and let your thoughts wander since you pretty much know the way by heart. At a certain point, a car coming from the opposite direction honks its horn to warn you to stop: something happens that wakes you up. The Church is like that approaching car: it wakes us up saying, “Do you realize that you are here in the world, and you can’t take for granted the fact that you woke up this morning? Who can you thank for your life? What are your hopes for today?” The Church wakes us up, using the words of men who lived an exclusive relationship with God. Now, I’m not saying that you will understand all the words we’ll read, but I know that there will be at least one phrase that will be like a horn to wake us up. So, let’s hang on to that phrase that wakes us up again for today.

How do we recite Morning Prayer? Even though many of you already know, let’s not take it for granted. We pray all chanting on the same note—it’s called *recto tono*—because, as we said yesterday, our friendship exists so that each of us can cry out without being ashamed. With *recto tono*, each person’s voice can be amplified by every other voice; this is why we have to listen to each other. It’s the opposite of what happens in a dance club, where you have to yell in each other’s ears in order to make your voice heard above all the noise. Instead, here your voice is amplified by the other 4,999 people, that you can bring all of your ‘I’ forward.

Morning Prayer

SEEING FILLS US WITH WONDER

“In the morning [...] my pitcher is empty at the font.”²⁴ How true is this sentence, if we only think about how we’re surprised to find ourselves each morning: stuck in our thoughts and entangled in plans of all we have to do that day. Inertia keeps us moving a little bit, but is there something to make us look up and get a fresh start?

Those of you who woke up early this morning to go see the sunrise know: there is always something around us that’s greater than our thoughts and our worry. There’s a reality out there greater than our thoughts, one we don’t make ourselves. We just need to be like children to realize this, or like a friend of ours who was in a coma for eight days. Describing the moment when he regained consciousness, he wrote, “I opened my eyes. I don’t remember ever having been so happy! God gave me the gift of reliving everything as if for the first time.” Before

²³ A. Mascagni, “Al mattino [In the Morning],” in *Canti*, Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2014, p. 180.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

any thoughts comes a concrete thing: reality! It would be enough to raise our eyes to the heavens every morning to become aware of that reality, as we hear in a short story written by one of you:

“That day did not begin as usual. After getting up, getting dressed, and distractedly downing breakfast, he left the house in an asphalt-gray suit. Everything around him was moving, as always. Coming to the end of the block, he turned right, passing the newspaper stand right on time for the morning edition. Quickly skimming the headlines and reading snippets here and there, he came to the crosswalk. He looked up to check for traffic and his gaze captured by something else: across the street on the sidewalk was a boy standing straight and tall with his backpack on, ready for school, but his face was perfectly still, his eyes raised to the heavens. That gaze, that was what brought everything to a halt. In his dark eyes, you could catch the clear and luminous reflection of the sky. The boy stood taking in the sky, which was mirrored in his gaze, and it was hard not to notice all the light shining forth, bright with a color that stood in contrast to everything and everyone in that city. He found himself staring at the boy, his mouth wide open, frozen in the middle of the crosswalk, still clutching his newspaper. He decided to lift his head to the sky and let that deep blue paint his eyes, too. A surprising lightness came over him as his eyes took in every corner of the spectacle above him. A new light suddenly filled him, and he stayed there, immovable in the midst of a time and silence that the city had stolen from him.”

The sky itself is enough to lift our gaze and get a fresh start. I understand that those of you from Milan have a harder time, since you don't have the privilege of the bright blue sky in Rome! In any case, something so small is enough, as Gaber ways in *Illogica allegria* [Illogical Joy],²⁵ “Just a small nothing suffices, a small glimmer, an apparently insignificant goad from reality, one provocation, and our ‘I’ is reawakened.”²⁶ It's just what that young man did taking his telescope to the streets to show everyone something that is in front of our eyes every day: the moon.

*Short Video*²⁷

Watching the video, we all had the same reaction: “wow.” It's wonder.

And just think how often there's something greater than our thoughts right in front of our eyes, not just the moon, not just the sky, but people who are waiting for us whom we don't see. The poet Patrizio Barbaro describes it, “The problem is having eyes closed and not knowing how to see, not seeing the things that happen. Eyes closed. Eyes that no longer see. That are no longer curious. That no longer expect anything to happen.”²⁸ Another one of you described it well:

“Everything becomes predictable and taken for granted. What amazed the child in his simple capacity for mystery and was expressed with a simple, but so eloquent, ‘oh!’ [wonder] is reduced to a humdrum and habitual, ‘ah.’”

So often, we find ourselves stuck in this “ah!” It's that sense of “already known,” a skepticism that can already be there at your age. It makes life completely monotonous; it's always the same story. “What newness could there be in my life,” people ask themselves, as early as 15. And so they get all wrapped up in negative sentiments: it's as if that sentiment blinded their eyes, so that even if a miracle happened right in front of them, they wouldn't see it. In situations like this, as a number of you wrote, God seems like a great absence, like when you make a phone call, and no one answers: just silence.

Yesterday, the figure of Judas helped us to understand ourselves better, and today, too, we have company in being bogged down by our sentiments: the disciples. When they see Jesus weeping tears of blood, when they see Him sad and troubled, the disciples panic and think, “It's all over! They'll get rid of all of us!” They're

²⁵ G. Gaber “Illogica allegria [Illogical Joy],” in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 27-28.

²⁶ J. Carrón, *He Was Seen and Therefore Saw*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 27.

²⁷ A. Garosh, *A New View of the Moon*, March 13, 2018: <https://vimeo.com/259818647>

²⁸ P. Barbaro “Ah uno sguardo [Ah, a Gaze],” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 29.

afraid. They can sense the shadow of death approaching. They can no longer see anything past their fear. In terror, they abandon Jesus and run away.²⁹

Everyone abandons him and runs away, but by doing so they miss the miracle: He doesn't run, He goes and dies for us. What did Jesus see, beyond His fear, that kept him from fleeing? This is the guiding question for the rest of the day up until this afternoon: what did Jesus see that the others didn't? Still, He was sad, as is expressed in the song we'll listen to now, *Tristis est anima mea*: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death; / stay you here and watch with me. / Now ye shall see a multitude, that will surround me. / Ye shall run away and I will go to be sacrificed for you."³⁰

Tristis est anima mea

THE "I" IS REBORN IN AN ENCOUNTER

What makes it possible for us not to run away? What helps us to open our eyes again to reality, so we can see? What keeps us from remaining closed, isolated and entangled in our own moods? We have to acknowledge that—and admitting this is not a defeat—we can't make it alone; we need someone to come and wake us up. Carrón says, "We need someone who can restore our capacity to see. [...] That someone look at me, realize that I'm here; that I count for someone: what an impact when this happens! [...] It's the grace of being chosen,"³¹ of being preferred.

When a person comes and loves us, we wake up. This is what we need to open our eyes again. We're not all Catholic here; we don't all go to Mass every day, and yet we've all accepted the invitation to come. Why? Because we all, at least once, felt looked at by someone. This poem by Salinas describes it:

"When you chose me /—love chose—/ I came out of the great anonymity / from everyone, from nothing. / Till then / I was never taller than / the sierras of the world. / I never sank deeper / than the maximum depths marked out / on maritime charts. / And my gladness was / sad, as small watches are / without a wrist to fasten to, / without a winding crown, stopped. / But when you said: 'you,' / to me, yes, to me singled out, / I was higher than stars / deeper than coral. / And my joy / began to spin, caught / in your being, in your pulse. / You gave me possession of myself / when you gave yourself to me. / I lived. I live. How long? / I know you will back out. / When you go / I will go back to a deaf / world that does not distinguish gram or drop / in weight or water. / I'll be one more—like the rest / when you are lost. / I'll lose my name, / my age, my gestures, all / lost in me, from me. / Gone back to the immense bone heap / of those who have not died / and now have nothing / to die for in life."³²

We need someone to say, "you," to us and bring us out of "the great anonymity," like a true friend who suddenly appears and says to us, "There you are! I've been waiting for you!" or a beautiful girl who cries out, "I've been waiting so long to meet you!" We need to be preferred, know someone is waiting for us; we need someone to rejoice in our existence; otherwise we will never open our eyes. We'll stay isolated, alone with our sentiment and our reflections. One of our friends describes it simply, but stupendously:

"Before going to my birthday party, I had no desire to go there, because I've never parties for me, because I was always the center of attention, in an exaggerated way. I spoke to a teacher I'm

²⁹ Cf. *Mk* 14:42-52: "[Jesus said to them:] 'Get up, let us go. See, my betrayer is at hand.' Then, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, arrived, accompanied by a crowd with swords and clubs who had come from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. His betrayer had arranged a signal with them, saying, 'The man I shall kiss is the one; arrest him and lead him away securely.' He came and immediately went over to him and said, 'Rabbi.' And he kissed him. At this they laid hands on him and arrested him. One of the bystanders drew his sword, struck the high priest's servant, and cut off his ear. Jesus said to them in reply, 'Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs, to seize me? Day after day I was with you teaching in the temple area, yet you did not arrest me; but that the scriptures may be fulfilled.' And they all left him and fled. Now a young man followed him wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body. They seized him, but he left the cloth behind and ran off naked."

³⁰ L. Perosi, "*Tristis est anima mea*," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 29-30.

³¹ J. Carrón, *He Was Seen and Therefore Saw*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 30.

³² P. Salinas, "My Voice Because of You," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 30-31.

friends with about this, and he said something simple: 'You don't necessarily have to be excited about the party. Go and be there with all of yourself, as you are now; be there with that sadness inside without hiding anything.'

I went to the party without putting up any fronts, you could say: without pretending to be happy, (without pretending to be excited). I went as myself. The most amazing thing was what my friends did to organize the evening. They got together almost every day for a week, taking on assignments for me. That really struck me, partly because I'd been feeling alone for a while. So the party started: they had organized games, a video, a present and songs for me. They did all that for me. I went there sad, but I was coming to see that I wasn't alone in all of that, because I had these friends who loved me. I was so happy to have those friends and to be loved so much that my heart was bursting at the seams. My heart was full of something truly great. When the video ended, the only thing I could say was, 'Thank you.' I was grateful for feeling preferred. It's the most desirable thing in the world: to have friends who love me for what I am: dyslexic, chubby, fumbling and incapable of doing much of anything; most would say, 'worthless.' But I have friends who love me and make me feel worthwhile. That fact is incredible, and I'm always moved by it."

This is what frees us from solitude, from isolation—from the feeling of worthlessness, of uneasiness at our own shortcomings—and makes us start breathing again; start seeing again.³³ It's not in demonstrating that you aren't dyslexic, or starting a diet so you won't be chubby, it's a living encounter that "provokes us to see that our heart—and all that constitutes it: those needs that make up the heart—is there, it exists."³⁴ It's an encounter with a person, not an inanimate object. I'm insisting on this, because I was struck by the fact that, in responding to the title for the Triduum ("Who are you, that you fill me with your absence?"), many of your contributions revolved around the word, "absence," as if you didn't see the first three words: "Who are you...?" I'd ask you: is there anyone in your life—one person! One is enough!—who is happy that you exist? One by whom you feel preferred, by whom you don't feel judged? Because what you need is one person, not an inanimate object or a concept, but a person in flesh and blood who is able to remind you who you are.

Fire of Time

All it takes is someone who demands nothing of you, but simply—as Jovanotti says—"comes to find you / Because he cares about you / To shout, 'I love you.'"³⁵ You are not the one who has to win over his respect by proving whatever: by posting pictures on social media where you can't see that your nose is too big. No! He comes to find you just as you are, just to tell you, "I love you," not, "I need something from you." Unfortunately, we've become accustomed to this instrumentalized kind of relationship,³⁶ which means I come looking for you because I need something from you, so you start to think: "And what about when he doesn't need me anymore; what will he do? Abandon me?"

Instead, there's a person who says, "I'm coming to find you just because you exist. Period. Because I love you, because I'm interested in what you are, the need that you are, not in what you know how to do or not." A person who looks for you even before you look for Him, that you let gaze upon you. Pope Francis is always saying this:³⁷ we are not the ones who search for God—we rarely do so (when we feel enthusiastic and devout,

³³ As is expressed in a poem by one of you: "On my soapbox I stood to preach / A love I had learned proudly / Taught by a man in shabby clothes / Stripped bare by a naked gaze [...]. Hardened as sculpted stone / The heart asks for / The fervor of forgiveness," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 32.

³⁴ L. Giussani, *L'io rinasce in un incontro [The "I" is Reborn in an Encounter]*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 31.

³⁵ Jovanotti, "Ragazzini per strada [Children in the Streets]," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 32.

³⁶ "When a man loves a woman, the highest moment of his affection is when he watches her working and thinks of her destiny. Without this it is a relationship like you have with a pen, purely instrumental, or with a dog or a cat." (L. Giussani, *Spirito Gentil*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 32).

³⁷ "How beautiful it is to think that Christianity is essentially this! It is not so much our search for God—a search which in truth is tenuous—but rather God's search for us. Jesus took us, grasped us, won us over, never more to leave us" (Pope

or when we're depressed and miserable)—it's rather Jesus who surprises us first, who grasps us and wins us over: you discover that He's been waiting for you.

WHO ARE YOU, THAT YOU FILL MY HEART WITH YOUR ABSENCE?

As the great poet Betocchi wrote, “What is needed is a man / it's not wisdom that's needed.”³⁸ A man, not a lecture. It's not like learning English [for an Italian]: first you learn it and then you can speak it anywhere with anyone. We're not here to learn a technique so we will no longer be sad when we go back home. We're here because there is a person, not a discourse, who came looking for us and with whom we want to remain. “It's something that [...] *comes before* everything [...] that has no need of explanation,” Fr. Giussani said, “but *just needs to be seen*, intercepted. It's something that evokes wonder.”³⁹

Let's try to imagine that poor, ignorant fisherman who was Peter. Peter never completed impressive diplomas or degrees, he didn't take a course on managing his emotions, or even a class on Christianity! He simply could not separate himself from Jesus after that moment when he was called. He spent every day with Him, from morning to night. When he got home in the evening, he couldn't wait for the next morning to see Him again, because it was “good to be with Him.”⁴⁰ He didn't say this just because of Jesus' words, His teachings, or the things He did, but, above all, because it was beautiful to be with Him.

Peter never could've imagined meeting a man like that. What was the most he could hope for in life? To make a lot of money, be comfortable and satisfied by all he had. But a man like Jesus, who surprised him so often every day? No, he couldn't have imagined it. You could say, in the words of the song by Ornella Vanoni, “Your eyes, no; your mouth, no / I could not make them up myself / your presence, no; your absence, no / I could not make them up myself.”⁴¹

Do you see what difference there is between our thoughts and a person who prefers us? We cannot “make up” a person; each time we are surprised, seeing how this person pulls us out of the shell of our thoughts, leaving us on the edge of our seat with that spontaneous question: “Who are you? I thought I knew you, but now... Who are you?” Ask yourselves: has there not been at least one person in your life about whom you find yourself asking, “Who are you?” Without an encounter like this, we could not open our eyes to discover what's beautiful in life. We don't need to encounter a person who can explain things to us; we need someone who fascinates us with their presence, and so we stay stuck to them like glue.

But, so often, what happens? Just two weeks after starting to date a girl, you start thinking, “Oh, I already know her.” Look, when you start to say “I already know” this or that person, it means you've buried them in the tomb of “already known,” and you think you have to wait to encounter another one who can surprise you for a while longer. Imagine if, instead, fifteen or twenty years after meeting a friend or falling in love with a girl, you find yourselves repeating, full of wonder, “Who are you? You are more and more a mystery to me,” “Your presence, no; your absence, no / I could not make them up myself.” Our friends from the Christ the King group in Rimini asked me, “How can we be friends?” I sent them a letter in which Giussani writes to a friend, “You are exactly like this sea: immense and mysterious.”⁴² When a friend leaves you on the edge of your seat, leading you to ask, “Who are you?” this is the sign that we are in relationship with a living presence, not with our ideas or something that we “already know.”

Francis, *General Audience*, 19 April 2017, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 34).

³⁸ C. Betocchi, “Ciò che occorre è un uomo [What's Needed is a Man],” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 35.

³⁹ L. Giussani, *Something That Comes Before*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Mk* 9:5-8: “Then Peter said to Jesus in reply, ‘Rabbi, it is good that we are here! Let us make three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.’ He hardly knew what to say, they were so terrified. Then a cloud came, casting a shadow over them; then from the cloud came a voice, ‘This is my beloved Son. Listen to him.’ Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone but Jesus alone with them.”

⁴¹ O. Vanoni, “Io come farò [What Will I Do],” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 36.

⁴² L. Giussani, *Lettere di fede e di amicizia ad Angelo Majo [Letters of Faith and Friendship to Angelo Majo]*, San Paolo, Cinisello Balsamo-Milan 2007, p. 49.

Even Peter himself—like all of us in the deepest relationships in our lives—stops being amazed at Jesus after a while and starts thinking he has understood Him. In fact, when Jesus started talking about death and resurrection, Peter “took him aside and rebuked him.”⁴³ He thought he had understood Christ better than anyone, just as many of us think they understand who Christ is, that they know where he is; they see him everywhere but, truly, they do know Him. They’re dreamers: that’s not Christ, it’s just thoughts about Christ, the projection of our emotions onto Him. I would ask those who say that they see Christ everywhere: “Has Christ ever surprised you, as He surprised Peter? Have you ever found yourself saying, ‘Who are you?’ with Him keeping you on the edge of your seat?”

Christ is not the problem, it’s a question of whether we have in front of us a life, a living presence that shifts us away from our own thoughts. For this question, the response comes from Him, not from you: “I am God,” and you adhere to it. If it doesn’t fill you with questions, with wonder and curiosity; if you aren’t broken out of your own logic, then it’s not Christ, but merely your image of Him. The danger of “already knowing” is lurking, even at your age; a person has seen and thinks he or she knows how it will be. You think you already know who Christ is, that you already know that God is the answer to the retreat’s title question. You’re wrong! That’s your *idea* of God! You already know that the Triduum will be beautiful, but then you’ll get depressed again. Yet there is a person who can make your heart throb so much that you ask, “Who are you?” God is there, behind that, not in what you think you already know.

This is why I am always struck thinking of a fact I learned about the life of Fr. Giussani, a man who was passionate about Christ from the time he was 15—think about it!—who spoke about Him with everyone, setting generations of people on fire. Do you know what he asked the people living with him to sing a few days before he died?⁴⁴ A song that says about Jesus: “We don’t know who He was...”⁴⁵ The more you get to know a person, the more you love them and the more you can’t possess them, because you continually let yourself be surprised by them. We’ll sing this song, too, to strip away all our ideas about Jesus, because we think we already know who God is, and then we complain that He’s not responding.

Noi non sappiamo chi era

What happens when we think we already know who Christ is; who God is? When Peter, at a certain point in his life, thought he already knew who Christ was and understood His message, he distanced himself from Jesus. Fr. Giussani wrote, “The temptation is to ‘detach ourselves’ from this following, out of the presumption that we already know what we are asked to follow.”⁴⁶

What does a person do, instead, when he finds himself sad, when he’s disappointed because things are going wrong, or when he falls in love? He asks. Like a beggar, he seeks the person he loves, crying out, “Where are you, who fill my heart with your absence?” hoping that person will come and surprise him again.

In contrast, what does the person who thinks he already knows everything do at the first sign of sadness, of a bad mood? He doesn’t look for his friend, but rather detaches himself, full of accusations: “It was all false. None of it was true. I deluded myself. You tricked me.” Just as Pink says in her song: “We came when you called / But, man, you fooled us, enough is enough.”⁴⁷ Just as Peter did. When a maid saw him and said, “This man is one of them,” [...] he began to curse and to swear, ‘I do not know this man about whom you are talking.’⁴⁸

⁴³ Cf. *Mk* 8:31-33: “[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days. He spoke this openly. Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples, rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.’”

⁴⁴ Cf. A. Savorana, *Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen’s Press, Montreal 2016, pp. 1130, 1147.

⁴⁵ A. e G. Agape-A. e G. Roscio, “Noi non sappiamo chi era [We Don’t Know Who He Was],” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ L. Giussani, *Dalla fede il metodo* [From Faith, the Method], in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 40.

⁴⁷ Pink, “What about us?,” in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 40.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Mk* 14:69-72: “The maid saw him and began again to say to the bystanders, ‘This man is one of them.’ Once again

When a person thinks he already knows, at the first hardship, he betrays his friend. "I don't know him!" He who thinks he understands his friend, who thinks he already knows who Christ is, detaches himself, stops asking questions and, sooner or later, betrays Him. Just as a friend of ours wrote:

The first months of the school year were a constant challenge for me, yet, despite the difficulties, and in fact, precisely because of them, they were full of beautiful discoveries, both about my school-work and the relationship with my classmates. Around December, however, that 'excitement' started to leave me."

This is the first way we distance ourselves from experience: was that newness in life excitement, or was it a presence? If it's excitement, a sentiment, then once you've lost it, it's over; but if it's a presence, then you can search for it, you can beg for it like a woman in love. She continues, saying:

"That emptiness that I have often experienced recently, which seemed to have finally been filled over the summer, came back to weigh on me heavily again, and I was tempted to say that what happened was just an illusion [Just like Peter did, when he distanced himself from Jesus]. What I realized later was that I, without realizing it, had started to take that 'famous' encounter we talk about so much for granted, and tell myself that after all this time I knew that the lack I felt inside of me was the lack of Christ [No! This is the Christ of your thoughts, your emotions!] and, now that I had understood, after having had the encounter, I knew how to face all of life's circumstances, no matter how negative. That confidence immediately fell to pieces, the wound became painful gain and the emptiness demanded to be filled."

Thank God that emptiness returned, my friend, because the more you love the more you beg; though we think that the more you love, the more that desire for the beloved calms down until you don't even need Him anymore. The idea that finding God, or finding these friends, fills us enough to exhaust every question... in reality all that it fills in is the dirt above our graves! Rather, the more you love the more you desire. Tell me now if, with your girlfriend, one kiss is enough. It would be absurd if, after the first kiss, you told her, "Thank you, now I've understood what a kiss is, you don't need to give me any more for the rest of our lives." The more you love, the more you desire. The letter continues:

"A formal response is not enough; I have to truly rediscover who can fill this chasm. I think that the question of who can fill our hearts with his absence is one that is never exhausted; in fact, it grows deeper and more urgent every time it emerges."

That's exactly how it is: the more you love, the more this question, this chasm, grows. One of you asked me yesterday, "You tell us to come to the Triduum with questions, so what questions do you bring?" I answered him, "I come with the same question in title: 'Who are you, that you fill my heart with your absence?' Today I stopped to pray, repeating this question, but while, for you, it's still a somewhat uncertain and unclear question, for me the One to whom I pose the question is more and more familiar. For example, the question of love is still uncertain and unclear for you, but the question is even greater for your father, after being married to your mother for many years, if he really loves her."

When Peter realizes that he has abandoned and betrayed Jesus, he cries bitterly. Just imagine Peter, his face streaming with tears, pounding his breast and repeating the title of our Triduum, "Who are you that fill my heart with your absence? I'm a wretch; I need you; come back and call me like the first day. Where are you?" Those who encounter Christ recognize Him not because they "see" Christ everywhere, in the tiles on the floor like an idiot; you understand a person has met Christ because they are more human, because they beg like children, even when they are old, because they feel their humanity pulsating; they cry and are not ashamed. So Jesus surprises Peter again: He appears, fully alive after dying, He comes to meet him and calls him, just as his mom did, "Simon!" and asking an unexpected question three times, "Simon, do you love me?" The third time

he denied it. A little later the bystanders said to Peter once more, 'Surely you are one of them; for you too are a Galilean.' He began to curse and to swear, 'I do not know this man about whom you are talking.' And immediately a cock crowed a second time."

He asks, Peter answers, “Lord, You know everything; You know that I love you.”

“You know everything; You know that I love you.” This year, I went to the Holy Land with some friends, and in the place where Peter betrayed Jesus, you see the depiction of two scenes, one right in front of the other: Peter’s betrayal and this dialogue between Jesus and Peter. In the first Peter says, “I don’t know Him;” in the second, he answers, “Lord, You know everything.” It’s the same verb, “to know,” but everything’s different. In front of this, I understood the big question in life: either I am what I know and what I do, and in the end, I find myself not knowing, distancing myself and betraying; or my life is intact because there is a person who knows everything about me, more than I know myself. Life truly changes when you encounter someone—someone, not something—to whom you can say, “You know everything about me. I’m a wretch, but you know me better than I know myself.” Therefore, when I am sad, I call You; when I am in need, my need is for You and I ask, “Where are you? Who are you that you fill my heart with your absence?”⁴⁹ It is not we who know Him, it is He who knows everything about us.

“HE WAS SEEN AND THEREFORE SAW” (St. Augustine)

We can put ourselves in the shoes of another person who followed the same journey as Peter: Mary. She, however, didn’t think she already knew everything and didn’t abandon Jesus. She never ran away; she followed her son all the way to the end. She never left Him, despite her suffering and tears. She followed, because she was certain that God would never betray her. Through her life, Mary verified that, following that child that continued to grow, she would never be betrayed. In time, she learned to be a daughter of her Son, as Dante expresses magnificently.⁵⁰ Following Him in the midst of trials, she lived with “a great and unconquerable heart, [...] with a wound that that will not heal until heaven.”⁵¹ Let’s say the prayer together:

Prayer by Fr. L. de Grandmaison

Right from that first day, the angel’s announcement, Mary saw that following the lead of the whirlwind that Christ introduced into her life made her increasingly open and interested in everything, it stretched her heart: she took an interest in Elisabeth,⁵² she took an interest in those who ran out of wine,⁵³ she took an interest in those who were needy. Her heart kept growing, and she kept becoming more herself. This is why Mary didn’t run away, because she saw that following Jesus, following that man—a presence, not an idea—make her increasingly human, it made her experience things with even more fervor.

Christianity, in fact, doesn’t resolve our problems; it doesn’t make us flat—without any needs, as we sometimes expect. Instead, it makes us 100 times happier and 100 times more sensitive to sadness; it pushes us to take an interest in things that we never would’ve imagined. “Christianity,” Fr. Giussani writes, “must leaven everything, making everything—everything, even Math!—more vibrant, more savory, truer.”⁵⁴ Look, I’m sorry, even Math! It’s in our interest to follow Christ, because by making us more ourselves, He makes us more interested in everything. We start to get interested in politics, as well, as some of our friends in Milan did and, around the elections, wrote a letter to politicians and received responses from some. Or as our friends in Ferrara did, who asked for a classroom during a student sit-in and proposed an assembly for the whole school. One of them commented, “This companionship even has the power to get you to do things you never would’ve done.” When a person is seen, he sees and so takes an interest in things that he didn’t even see before: “He was seen, and

⁴⁹ “Who are You, Christ,” as Carrón once said: “Who are You, Christ, whom we cannot do without, once we have met You? [...] Now, who is this man whom we call Jesus?” (cf. J. Carrón, *La preferenza che ci salva dal nichilismo [The Preference that Saves Us From Nihilism]*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 41).

⁵⁰ Cf. Dante, *Divine Comedy, Paradise*, canto XXXIII, v. 1.

⁵¹ “Prayer of Fr. L. de Grandmaison,” in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 51-52.

⁵² Cf. *Lk* 1:39-56.

⁵³ Cf. *Jn* 2:1-11.

⁵⁴ L. Giussani, in A. Savorana, *Life of Luigi Giussani*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 43.

therefore saw.”⁵⁵ Our two Muslim friends here today are a witness to this. They wrote us saying that meeting us made them take their own tradition more seriously. When a person is seen, he looks at things differently, even his own classmates on a field trip, as one of you told us. After years of thinking her classmates were “complete idiots,” she wrote:

“Speaking with my classmates, I understood that they have the same questions, doubts, and desire for life that I have; it’s just that no one ever offered them a better alternative, because they have never met Christ. I, however, have; I’ve seen how He changed me, I remember how I was before, and so I cannot stop seeking to be 100% myself.”

This is how you recognize that Christianity is true: because it rekindles your humanity, it makes you more human. It doesn’t make you more like everyone else; it makes you more yourself. That pain, that begging is still there, but with a great certainty like Mary’s: that God would never abandon her, that he would continue to make her life great. “Because through magnificent things / Because through horrible things / I have the hope of seeing something more / Something that goes beneath the surface / That goes beyond the depths,”⁵⁶ wrote one of you, whose family is going through a hard time. The heart can finally voice its pain and absence, because it is certain of the One who can bring happiness, as our friend Miriam told us in speaking about the death of her brother Francesco:

“Why was February 10 (the day after Francesco died) the most beautiful day of my life? I ask myself every day. I don’t exactly know how to answer. I only know that after days of anxiety and desperation, I felt overwhelmed with serenity. And that there were thousands of people everywhere. Thousands of people around. A thousand people who were serene. The evening of February 9, we toasted ‘Francesco, who is in Paradise,’ and the morning of the 10th I was at Rocca di Manerba, in peace with Elisa (a friend of mine). She was there every evening that week before Francesco died. With me, for me. She explained how all of it is a miracle, that the sacrifice Francesco made was not in vain. She helped me to understand that Francesco had saved my life, because, in the face of a fact, you cannot remain indifferent. In the face of something that is so evident, you become certain. I am certain. Because for me to be serene, and even happy, in this situation, I either have to be crazy or there’s something much greater. This is the most beautiful time in my life. It’s paradoxical, discovering the greatest beauty in the ugliest time of life. Yet that’s how it is. As Elisa said, this is my measuring stick for the rest of my life, for every moment in which it seems easier to say that life is a trick and that there isn’t really something greater out there.”

It’s paradoxical: you can be joyful and sad at the same time. When someone is looked at as Miriam is, not only do they look at death with pain but, at the same time, with certainty, but they also begin to look at themselves in a different way: they love themselves. This is the greatest miracle today; I challenge you to find another place that can give you this gift, because today no one likes him or herself; everyone wants to change his or her image. Not here! The sign that you’ve encountered someone who loves you, who tells you He is God, is that you start loving yourself just as you are.⁵⁷ As another friend wrote: “Adhering to the Movement made the most impossible thing of all possible for me: to like myself and see I’m beautiful.” And beautiful not because you look like Chiara Ferragni, or because you have tattoos like Fedez. You’re beautiful because you are loved, because there is someone who gives His life for you, because you start to look at yourself with His eyes, and say, “Then, I must be something completely different than I thought!”

We’ll listen to a song by Adriana Mascagni that’s remarkably deep, *Amica del Mistero [Friend of the Mys-*

⁵⁵ What St. Augustine said, referring to Zaccheus; cf. St. Augustine, *Sermon 174*, 4.4.

⁵⁶ Cfr. *Triduum Booklet*, p. 44.

⁵⁷ “So now you can understand the greatness and value of your own ‘I,’ and begin to have an esteem and tenderness for yourself; you begin to be aware of your own value just as the Mystery was aware, so aware that He troubled himself for us, for you and for me.” (J. Carrón, *He Was Seen and Therefore Saw*, in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 44).

tery].⁵⁸ Who am I? I am loved by the Mystery, friend of the Mystery. Let's try to listen to each word thinking of this question: Who am I? What is it that makes me beautiful for the world?

Amica del Mistero

We can follow like Peter: like children in love, fully aware of their mistakes, who ask themselves, "Who are you who fill my life?" or like Mary: living pain and sadness, but certain and glad because He will never abandon us. But the question remains: why didn't Jesus, who was God, come down from the cross? Why didn't he ascend straight into heaven? Why didn't he spare His mother all that suffering? Why didn't He spare Peter the temptation to betray Him? Why does He walk toward death, saying nothing? Where is God in all this? What answer does He give?

This is the why we will do the *Via Crucis*, the Way of the Cross this afternoon, to listen to God's response to these questions. We can follow the path of the cross standing like Mary, one who suffers carrying all the difficulties of life, but who is certain; or like Peter, who is deeply pained by his own sin, but full of affection and the desire to be reborn like a baby. To live it this way, to discover how God responds to our questions, we have to be silent and follow, without letting ourselves be blinded by our sentiments, as were the disciples who ran away.

If you are not coming to listen to Jesus' response to this question, it's best for you to stay at the hotel. We think of silence as a constraint. When a person thinks of himself, he sees all the confusion inside, and this is why we're afraid of silence. But think of when a girl is about to kiss you: do you start wanting to talk? Talking isn't needed; it's better to remain in silence. To welcome God's response to our question, we have to stay in silence, where silence is understood as being totally attentive to listening, listening to Jesus' response to our questions.

We have one single duty in life, my friend, on which all our other duties depend: not doing well in school, not making a name for ourselves in the world, not having a family or even finding a successful career. We have one single duty: to be ourselves, to be happy. In fulfilling this duty, I can discover if Christ makes me more myself in everything I have to do, as it was for Peter and Mary. The opportunity we are offered today is to discover if Christ is *the* presence that can make us happy. And we only have to do one thing to discover it: to be ourselves. This is our only major duty.

Dulcis Christe

Angelus

⁵⁸ A. Mascagni, "Amica del Mistero [Friend of the Mystery]," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 44-46.

Way of the Cross, Pigi Banna

Friday Afternoon, March 30

First Station

JUDAS, PETER AND PILATE: OUR BETRAYAL

Jesus goes to His crucifixion. We follow this cross in the same total powerlessness Jesus took on. Why doesn't He speak? He knew Judas better than anyone; He could've stopped him, but He doesn't. He knew Peter better than anyone; He could've stopped him, but He doesn't. He was more intelligent and much more powerful than Pilate, but He says nothing. He knows all of our betrayals, our sins, but He doesn't condemn us. Why not? Many of us have similar questions: "Where is God? Why did he allow our friend to die? Why does he permit such terrible family difficulties? Why doesn't he fix everything for me?" We think God isn't responding; that He is powerless.

In the end, what are 5,000 people gathered here today compared to the 75,000 who are flocking to the soccer stadium? Nothing. What are you, who have come here, compared to all your other classmates? Nothing. What are this Triduum or the most beautiful moments in our life compared to our distraction, our sins and the thoughts that usually fill our heads? Nothing. When we think, "It's all nothing," we betray Him; we're like Peter, Judas or Pilate. "He's nothing; He hasn't done anything!" If we think that way, we can quit after this station. Peter and Pilate quit after this station; for them, it was all over. Our temptation is to say, "What good is GS, what good is the Church compared to all the confusion in today's world." We quit, and we betray Him.

Alternatively, we can begin to walk, without having understood everything yet, to see how He will respond, how he will show us His power by dying. This isn't rhetoric. Those who don't understand the meaning of this gesture and want to stop here may do so, thinking, "A man who goes to his death like this is powerless; I have no use for him." Those, however, who want to follow this cross, who want to see if it has anything to say to our lives, can start walking.

We'll walk to the second station silently, so we can hear if Jesus has something to say to all our questions. We follow a man who goes to die like an innocent lamb,⁵⁹ hardly saying anything. Therefore, we need silence to be able to hear His response, staying close to those who help us gaze on the cross without distracting us.

Second Station

MARY, SIMON, DISMAS: BEHIND THE CROSS

Mary followed. How many times did we hear that verb repeated in the reading we listened to by Péguy? "She followed, she followed..."⁶⁰ And we, too, are following; we didn't quit after the first station.

Following requires sacrifice. For Mary, it required the sacrifice of her tears. She, who was a woman of remarkable goodness, whose purity was recognized by everyone, now appeared as "one who begs pity."⁶¹ We, too, in following, make the sacrifice of staying silent, as you have done quite impressively so far. It's a silence in which, at times, we simply find ourselves distracted, in which we don't know what to think or say, discovering how confused and superficial we are. Yet we go back to following, looking at the cross, trying to follow the footsteps of that man to understand what answer He has for us. This is why I was struck by the two girls in the choir who sang *Ognun m'entenda*.⁶² At first, they were looking at their music, but at a certain point they started singing it while looking at the cross.

The true sacrifice of silence is not so much obeying—because a person can force himself to obey in a passive way—but in exposing the weakest part of oneself within that silence. For Mary, it was letting her tears be seen, let-

⁵⁹ T.L. De Victoria, "Eram Quasi Agnus," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 60.

⁶⁰ Charles Péguy, "The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 63-65.

⁶¹ Charles Péguy, "The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 65.

⁶² Anonymous, from the Marciana Library in Venice, 15th century "Ognun m'entenda," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 62-63.

ting everyone see her as a poor woman who was weeping. For Simon the Cyrene, it was letting everyone see that he—a strong working man—was a friend of Jesus, without being ashamed. And for the thief, a man whose heart was hardened, a man who wasn't afraid of the cross, it was a sacrifice to let his childlike heart be seen, saying to Jesus, "It's true, I did everything wrong, but remember me!"⁶³

This is the kind of sacrifice asked of us in this last station nearing the death of Jesus: keeping our eyes on the cross and not just forcing ourselves to stay quiet, but carrying in silence all that weighs on us the most, all that makes us ashamed of ourselves. This is the true sacrifice.

This is the time to entrust some friend we have, a person dear to us who is sick, a situation we can't manage to resolve on our own, as well as situations that embarrass us, as Mary was embarrassed by her tears or the thief was embarrassed to reveal he was like a gentle lamb. Each of us has the freedom to accept this sacrifice: letting oneself be seen for what he or she is, in continuing to walk behind the cross.

Third Station

HE IS HERE AS HE WAS ON THE FIRST DAY

Did you hear Jesus' response? Those who didn't quit, even at the intellectual level, after the first station, for those, like you, who followed Him to the point of death, within that sacrifice, carrying the things in life that most weigh on us to him, have had the possibility to hear Jesus' response.

Did you hear it? It's that terrible cry on the cross. That is His answer: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"⁶⁴ This is the answer Christ gives to our question of where God is in the most difficult moments of our lives. He Himself shoulders the burden of our pain and our death. This is Christ's response. He doesn't come in with "plastic surgery" to alleviate our pain, resolving things with a snap of His fingers; rather, He takes on all our pain, all our evil and carries them with us, for us.

None of us could ever have imagined a God like this, yet, deep down, it's what we all needed. Would you prefer a God who took away all your weakness and takes off up to heaven, or a God who loves you, taking your weakness upon himself? This is how Christ's death challenges us. This is how the centurion, someone who showed up at the last minute—it could be someone whose mind was wandering along the whole *Way of the Cross*—seeing that man die as He did, could say, "Truly, this man was the Son of God."⁶⁵

Conclusion

At the end of this *Way of the Cross*, I am here with a question in my heart: who is it that brought us here, once again today? Who made us into such a sight to see, even for ourselves, once again? Who has held us in such unity for over 2,000 years? We will never finish understanding the answers to these questions, but the first seed you can see sprouting is definitely the seed of happiness. This is what I hope for you as we go: let this little seed that has begun to blossom in your life grow. Do not be afraid if it seems like the world is going a different way; don't be afraid if it seems like your life is going a different way. That seed is there, it has continued to grow for over 2,000 years, and has touched your heart, as well. According to the time and modality of God's choosing, it will become the joy of your lives.

This is Christ's resurrection: a seed that has broken through the stones of that tomb for 2,000 years and that touches us even today.

⁶³ Cf. *Lk* 23:41-42.

⁶⁴ *Mk* 15:34.

⁶⁵ *Mk* 15:39.

Witness by Rose Busingye*
Saturday Morning, March 31

Barco negro

Pigi Banna. You should have seen your faces as we listened to *Barco negro*.⁶⁶ Your faces the last three days reminded me, in the most beautiful and lively sense, of the faces of Peter and John depicted in the Easter Poster.⁶⁷ Look at their eyes: you see the reflection of much of what you have experienced. At this point, a light has come on; for your heart, the game is on. It's true: it hurts; it's true: you forget; it's true: you can repress it. But it's there! A light has come on. When everyone is saying it's all over, that Jesus is dead, their eyes cannot believe it; He's there, He has to be there, and they run to the tomb to see what happened. For you, too, the game is on: will you put more stock in your heart or in the fear of those who are saying it's all over?

Angelus

I saw what you're writing about Morning Prayer on Instagram. Some people think it's a total bore! But I accept the challenge! Some people get up and go out for a break already, during Morning Prayer. The loss is his! Those who only do things halfway will only understand half of everything. Let's try not to say Morning Prayer today like whiny old ladies, but rather like men who want to wake up; not like those who already know what's going to happen, but like a person awaiting a single word. We will say, for example, "Can a woman forget her child?"⁶⁸ Unfortunately, in today's world this happens; sometimes a mother kills a baby before he or she is born, and yet there's someone who never forgets us. So now, not like old ladies, let our prayer be like the wailing of a newborn, who cries as if to say, "I'm here, I'm here in the world! And I am wanted!" Let's try to stay, let's try to let out our cry like the wailing of a newborn.

Morning Prayer

*Be Thou My Vision*⁶⁹

La canzone della Bassa [Song of the Bassa]

Alberto Bonfanti. What I'd like to say to all of you first is a sincere "thank you," to each of you for the way you've helped me to live the Easter Triduum, to personally follow in the footsteps of Christ's cross and, "come to see myself walking behind an Other," as one friend said yesterday. We experienced a gesture. We didn't just listen to words and music; the words, the singing, walking behind the cross, and the conversation among us were a gesture of friendship for each of us, in which each of us is a protagonist to the degree that he participates with his heart, because his heart was called upon to respond as never before by the proposal of these days. Yesterday, one of you said to me, "I really savored the present. I savored what was happening for the first time without thinking about the next moment, what will happen tomorrow, about how much of all the truth I've perceived these three days I will be able to apply to my life after." I jumped in my seat when I heard that. What made it possible? This is the most sincere question in the face of what we have lived. What made it possible for

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⁶⁶ "The old women on the beach say you will not return. / They are crazy! They are crazy / *I know, my love, that you have not even departed / for everything around tells me that you are always with me,*" (A. Rodrigues, "Barco Negro [Black Ship]," in *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 85-86).

⁶⁷ E. Burnand, *The Disciples Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on the Morning of the Resurrection*, 1898. Paris Musée d'Orsay.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Is* 49:15.

⁶⁹ "Be Thou My Vision," traditional Irish hymn.

our friend to savor the present? What made it possible for many of us to savor what was happening, as it happened? It's such an important question that we can't settle for formal or partial answers. Many of us can put our own name, mine included, behind that affirmation, not only based on what you said in the assemblies, with so much participation—in my assembly, for the first time one of you said, “It's already over?,” after an hour, one that usually says, “Can't we make the Radius a little shorter?”—but based on the attention we all maintained, the passion that those who were singing put into the music, the passion with which we were welcomed Thursday evening, yesterday morning and this morning by our friends who played music for us to welcome us. You could also pick up on how many were savoring it by the joyful and attentive service of many of our friends ushering, for the real attention, not military discipline—because by now, thanks be to God, you can no longer have military discipline—with which you took in the lessons, the songs, the *Way of the Cross*. That attention was moving for many adults, too (and it's not easy to move adults); it was visible in your eyes, like the eyes of Peter and John, in your words even more than in the words you spoke. “What make all this possible?” That is the fundamental, decisive question that each of us has to carry in our hearts, and which is the source from which all the other questions that you sent flow, and they were all questions that demonstrated your attentiveness once again, and how relevant what was proposed to us was. They are all questions to be hold on to, because they are the opening through which God, that “You” that fills our hearts with His absence, wants to enter our hearts. “What made all this possible?” It's only by looking ourselves and this question in the face that we will be able to make out the answers to all our other questions from within our experience, and with the logical explanation that we—more often adults, but we all do it a little—try to “plug” all the sincerest questions, as if we were like Aristotle, Father Pigi's dog. Of all the topics that have come up and that you brought up, the most crucial is surely the lack that each of us feels. A friend from Milan articulated it this way, which struck a chord with many other contributions, “How can I see this crack inside as a resource and not a curse?” Each of us, staying in front of the question, “What make it possible to savor the present on the Triduum?” can find, not a logical explanation, but a road to follow to live this dramatic relationship with our hearts.

It's the same question we'd like to pose to our friend Rose, who came from Uganda just to tell us about her experience.

First, I'd like to read you the letter that our friend Julián Carrón wanted to make sure to send once again this year, that each of us can judge how relevant what he says is to what we've experienced these three days together, to the witness Rose will give by communicating her own life, and to the truest questions that have emerged in response to the proposal we have lived here together. “Dear friends, I cannot think of you without being moved, joining myself to this most beautiful and dramatic period that you are passing through at your age. How I would like to be close to you! It is a time in which ‘the eternal mystery of our being,’ of which Leopardi spoke, comes to the surface. I know that sometimes the appearance of this great mystery in your lives baffles you, so much does it surpass you on every side, so immense that it cannot be mastered. ‘Who are you, that you fill my heart with your absence?’ Lagerkvist says. But precisely the ability to perceive this absence, this ‘mystery of our being’, is the most important resource that you've received, a gift made to your human nature: the detector for discovering what truly responds to your expectations. Ernesto Sabato understood this well: ‘The nostalgia for this absolute is the invisible, unknowable background with which we face everything in life.’ I am always amazed when I think that Jesus bet everything on the heart of those first two who met Him along the banks of the Jordan, on the heart as the criterion of judgment: ‘Come and see.’ When He said this, Jesus recognized that they had the capacity to grasp what responded their boundless desire for happiness, making them aware of their dignity. At the same time, he posed the greatest challenge to them: they could not cheat, not with their heart, not with what corresponds to it, once they had met Him. Inviting them to walk with Him, He offered John and Andrew the chance to discover the breadth of His friendship, a friendship so decisive for reaching the happiness they sought, without taking the place of their freedom. In fact, He challenged their freedom like no one else could have done, so much did the attraction of His presence press on their hearts. I dare you to find an adventure more fascinating than this! Happy Easter. Your companion on the journey, Julián”

Now we're all attentive, ready to hear about the experience and the witness of our friend Rose.

Rose Busingye. Good morning, everyone! My Italian will not be perfect, but my heart is burning, and I could almost cry seeing your faces. As Fr. Julián says: concepts become flesh and blood: Christ. Seeing each of you, these faces you have, I am certain of something: there is a hand that offers It to us now. Seeing this sea of faces—I didn't know I'd find all this—I would almost be overwhelmed. But this hand that offers It to us now—which become His flesh and blood that runs in our veins, that gives us life—makes us all one, united. I would be embarrassed to stand here to tell you only words, if not that He is here. This is exactly what moved me, because when I was your age, or maybe I was only 12 years old, I “met” this word: He became flesh; because when I met the CL Movement I really had no idea what CL was, but reading that God became flesh, I ran to the priest of the Movement and I asked him, “But does this flesh have to do with my flesh?” and he answered, “Yes, because God came for you and for me, who are incapable, fragile, nothing. Because if we were capable, we would have become God Himself and it would not have been important for Him to come down to earth.” For me, that was the moment that life started to be interesting, and so was God. Because before I thought God was for those people who were capable, like my mom who invited me to pray the rosary in the evening, and I fell asleep and she woke me up for the “Our Father,” and I said, “Hail Mary.” So, then, I thought, “There is no room for me in God's heart,” there's only room for my brothers and my mom. I lived that way thinking I wasn't worthy of God's heart because God was so pure and a person like me had no chance. That God should become flesh in my flesh seemed almost like blasphemy to me. I knew who I was. Entering God's heart seemed like something out of this world.

When I was 19, I wanted to meet Fr. Giussani, because at that moment it seemed like life truly became interesting, God became interesting for me, too, whereas, before He was for my mom and my brothers. When I met “don Gius” and I told him about my nothingness, I had just read the interview with Fr. Giussani about the *Memores Domini* and the first sentence was, “Those who live the presence of Christ in every aspect of their lives.” My goodness—I said to myself—even my nothingness! I went back to school and studied. There was a burning fire that no one could put out, so I went to a priest and said to him, “Can I go see Fr. Giussani?” and he let me go. I thought, “Jesus, I want only You.” So I went to see Fr. Giussani. When I met him, he asked me, “Do you love Jesus?” and I said, “Yes, I can say yes to that.” “Do you want to give your life to Him?” I said, “No.” And he asked me, “Why not?” and I said, “Look, Fr. Giussani, I don't have anything in my life to give to Jesus, but I want Him to take even the nothing that I am.” He pounded his fist on the table and said, “You have to tell everyone that, always! Tell everyone because everyone thinks they are giving something important to Jesus, and so it's as if their whole lives, they're waiting for something in return; instead, it's really He who takes something that was nothing, and saves it.” After that, I started to tell him about my life and he said to me, “Look, Rose, even if you were the only person on the earth, God would come for you all the same, for the only person in the world.” Then, he paused for a moment and said, “No, He came for you, because in the eyes of God, every person is the only one, is like the firstborn, only child. He came for you. He died for you, that your nothingness would not be lost, and He will be with you every day up until the end of time.” For me, that is when everything was really turned on its head. It was like my life was... turned upside down, all of it, down to the way I thought of everything: how I thought of drinking, eating, how I thought of my friends; it was then that my life took on that beauty, that dignity, as “don Gius” said, with a capital “B.” It was then that things took on this value, this density, as if God had said to me, “You are mine.” Fr. Giussani didn't know me; it was the first time he met me and I thought, “But what could he see in me?” It was evident that I was still nothing, and yet I felt embraced and desired. It was as if his gaze told me, “I want to remain with you. You have an infinite value.” Everything was born from that gaze. It was in that gaze that I discovered that I am not defined by my limits, but by the personal relationship with God who is making me and makes me infinite desire for Him.

In that gaze, belonging to Christ and the Church became the experience of a bond that always defines me,

and that is manifested in all I am and all I do. I started to glimpse a meaning for my life. It was as if a light illuminated everything. I started to discover the truth of my life and from that there started to be an attraction, a tenderness for my own life and for the lives of other people. I started to live. I started to truly live and work, because I knew a concrete answer to the question, “Who do I belong to?” The answer to that question had particular faces, with first and last names. I became free. Paradoxically, I became free by belonging, by being tied to someone. When you are free, you can finally face all of reality without fear; you can face everything because you know whom you belong to. People who are free don’t make demands from others, because they already have everything. I felt free, I felt great; a protagonist in reality because Fr. Giussani revealed to me who I am. With his gaze, he fixed the content and the method for all my work: being moved and communicating that deep affection for the boundless greatness that is the existence of each person and offering that same companionship to destiny that embraces my life.

My work now is letting the value of each person come to light, become clear, so I can offer a precise friendship to which everyone can belong because an “I” that belongs, that has a tie, having a face to gaze upon, and receiving a unifying awareness of oneself and of reality, becomes a protagonist. If you become the lord of reality, it’s not because you possess reality, but because you acknowledge that you depend on Another and on a design that is not your own.

Yesterday, one of you asked me a question. It was like a wake-up call to me; let me tell you why. One time, I took some of my kids, about your age (about 60 of them), to go on safari. Don’t go thinking that we, walking out of our bedrooms, run into an elephant or a lion. We, too, have to go find them! So we went off (on an 8-hour trip) to go see lions and elephants, and finally, we found them. I was so happy, because we saw lots of lions, elephants and giraffes, so I thought, “A job well done!” As we returned, a girl named Michelle started to cry, and for the whole bus ride back she kept crying. I asked her, “Are you hungry?” “No.” “Did someone you know die?” “No.” “Are you sick?” “No. I’m sad. I see you who are happy, but I am sad.” She seemed totally humiliated. But I’d prepared everything to make everyone happy. She went on all night, she didn’t sleep, so I gave up and called Fr. Carrón. “Look, I prepared everything; we saw the elephants, the lions, we saw everything, but someone is here crying;” and he said to me, “Now, you didn’t really think you could fill a girl’s heart with an elephant, did you? An elephant may be huge, but not even it can fulfill the thirst of our heart.” In fact, this is why, where I work, we use the Matisse painting of *Icarus*. I wanted all the people who came to be able to fix their eyes on that red heart, a tiny spot, one that seems like almost nothing but, instead, as your teachers will have already explained to you, it’s the part that makes the whole painting great, it represents a part inside a man. Man seems like nothing; I seem like nothing in the face of my poverty, a person in the face of his or her sickness—like we have in Africa, but you have sickness here too—in the face of our wretchedness, in the face of our nothingness. Instead, that spot, that little spot that seems no more than a breath, that we don’t even pay attention to, is irremovable, in the image of the One who draws us into Himself.

And so I’ve seen what happened to me happening again for others. For example, there was a woman who had escaped from the rebels who came to us physically and psychologically disfigured by the violence she endured. She rediscovered herself when I told her, “You are not the horrors that happened to you. You are the infinite value that comes from God, God who makes you and who loves you.” One day, we hosted 11 students from Eichstätt (Germany) with three of their teachers. We prepared a witness and dancing. I work in the “mud,” in the poorest parts of the city, and one of the teachers was wearing a nice, white linen shirt that day. I looked at her and thought, “Oh my!” When we entered the room with the women (after this, I’d like to show you the video), they pulled everyone into their dancing, with tambourines, and that teacher, forgetting his elegant attire, let herself get caught up in the wave of music and dancing. Then, all sweaty, we went out and sat and the women started to give their witness, to speak about themselves: we were almost done when a woman named Tina, one of my patients (I work with people sick with AIDS and their children), who wasn’t supposed to talk, at a certain point came up—a woman only this tall—and going right up to this well-dressed teacher, said

to him, "Excuse me, Sir, are you free?" And you could see that he didn't understand; he was looking around, but she insisted, "Are you free?" And she threw out, as if issuing a challenge, her own affirmation: "I am. I am." Then she said, "Look, I lost my husband two months ago to AIDS. I'm sick, too. I will die soon. See? The medicines aren't working," and she showed the wounds all over her body, "but I am free; I am free!" She said it like she was joking, but it couldn't be a joke seeing how she showed her wounds. She went on, "My son went to Carrón's exercises, and Carrón told him that I am the dwelling where the Mystery lives. That is my identity. I am free; I am free; I am free, and are you free?" I had gone to those Exercises, and with Fr. Nacho we were trying to translate them into English; looking at her I thought, "She beat me to it!" Talk about infuriating... The gentleman from Germany may not have understood, and didn't understand what she said to him, but that question was meant for me. That morning, I went to Mass, did silence, and translated those words into English, but how in the world could that little, sick woman, who sleeps on a mat on the floor, eats one meal a day, beat me to it? And, in that moment, I wanted that same freedom, that identity where the Mystery lives, for me, because this Mystery, as Carrón says, is what makes us human. We are human, but even more human, because it's He who makes us. That morning I wished I'd beat her to it.

Where I live, before discovering the value of their lives, my women didn't take their medicine. They would say, "In the end, life is useless. Why should we take care of ourselves?" They were sick with AIDS and let themselves go. I would buy the medicines and find them still sitting on the shelf. But after discovering the value of their lives, the young people and adults for whom life had no meaning now know that their existence, and everyone's, is infinitely great and they are forever tied to a companionship that helps them to live up to this dignity.

What I do is not an extra added on to my vocation as *Memores*, it comes from the fact that my affectivity is fulfilled. What I give to others is what overflows from my relationship with Christ, in a specific place. It is like the flower of my vocation, the overabundance of the fullness of my belonging to *Memores Domini*, which is an ongoing discovery of a paternity right in the daily happenings in my life.

One time, Fr. Giussani said to me, "If your relationship to Christ is true, if you remain true, your work will flow forth even from stones. They could shut you in a cage, but if you are true with Him, even the stones will begin to sing." And he added, "But a person who doesn't belong fills up his emptiness, that emptiness he can never fill, with frenetic activity. That unfulfilled affectivity is filled with activities, but then such a person is just a bundle of reactions. The original attraction fades into estrangement, pride and the presumption of measuring things himself, but all this leaves him confused and insecure. He loses the value of himself and everything else, putting his personality in crisis." Then, he took me by the hand and said to me, "You know Rose, newness comes to the world if a person belongs, because in a belonging, everything changes. This is what generates a society, a new civilization."

I could end here, because that says it all, but I'd like to tell you another small thing. In life, an existential search, measuring oneself, is not enough; neither is an instinctive reaction enough, because that doesn't bring us out of the confusion that marks our days and keeps my face from shining through, your face. That spot we talked about, the heart of Icarus, is like a grain of salt, like dust, tiny; that little red spot Icarus has, this nothing that I am, cannot be itself without belonging. Without belonging, you grasp onto things at random, to what happens, to what you manage to take, but after a while, as Carrón says, it leaves a bitter taste in your mouth.

On day, I was going to Madrid to give a witness for Beginning Day: "Living the Real Intensely." I went to the Italian embassy, and they gave me a travel visa. Some friends had bought my ticket for me: from Uganda to Amsterdam, Amsterdam to Malpensa [Milan], Malpensa to Paris and Paris to Madrid. I was mad, so mad! Have you ever been angry? I found everything irritating. I didn't want to be with anyone; I was bent in on myself. Early in the morning at Malpensa, it was cold. I was playing with my phone and then I thought, "I'll see if Carrón is awake." I called. He answered, "How's it going?" I said, "I'm so angry. Every little thing is irritating me. I'm confused." I went on, "You told us at the Beginning Day to, 'Live the Real Intensely,' but what am I living right now?" He answered me, "Look at reality with the eyes of Christ." I said, "I told you that I'm

mad. Everything I see irritates me. I am not looking at reality; maybe He is looking at it, but I'm not;" and he said, "Exactly. Christ's eyes that are looking at reality are also looking at you." "Of course!" You know how sometimes a light comes on? I got up and said, "Now I just lived the real intensely," even if I was in the same situation, angry as I was. It's not that I look at reality with Christ's eyes, I just have to recognize that His eyes which are looking at reality are also looking at me. After that discover, I stepped onto the airplane to Paris like a princess. Thank you.

Banna. Thank you, Rose! You're right to applaud even when you're set straight, because each of you has a heart as great as Rose's. Even if it doesn't seem like it sometimes, or if it seems to hurt, it's possible for everyone to live like her, with a heart as great as Rose's. Carrón said it in his message: each of us has this *detector* inside, the heart. It's because of this heart that a person reads an article and runs to talk about it with a friend; he's angry and calls to ask for help; he discovers something and goes to ask about it; he discovers her nothingness and asks, "Is there someone who will come take my nothingness?"

Thanks to Rose, we understand what it means to use the heart without cheating it. If you're angry you say, "I'm angry," without being afraid to say so; if you saw an elephant and are sad, you're not afraid to say so. We can look to the eyes of Peter and John, too: they took off running to the tomb because a woman said, "Look, the tomb is empty," and they want to go and see.

Many of you have witnessed to us what it means to use your heart. Our friends from Le Marche, for example, prepared an evening in which each person presented a passion he or she had: a rap song, a painting, a poem. They were all in silence for the night, listening. There is a place, and this is it, where you can bring out your heart, that "almost nothing," that little red spot from Matisse's *Icarus*, which is what makes us great. And there aren't many places in the world where you can bring out your heart without cheating.

We all know our objections, "Ok, but it hurts, why do you say the heart is a resource?" or "But I'm alone, I've been abandoned, I'm [the cartoon character] Calimero, small and black." Fine, fine. Still, no matter what objections we might have, you can't turn it off! This is the most amazing part: It's always there! And no matter how much you try to turn it off, it's still there. There is also a place that makes you look as Peter and John did, for the rest of your life you can never forget it again; it's there! This faithfulness to your heart, to see and to discover, is the first great thing we hope for each other.

The second thing, the second great hope I have for you this Easter goes back to what Rose said about belonging. We said it in many ways the last few days: what's the risk? That the second you don't understand something, the second you're afraid of the heart, you run away. Let's watch the video of Rose's women.

[Viewing of the video on Rose's women]

Busingye: The woman was saying that, when her parents abandoned her, she thought that no one would ever embrace her again, and instead when she came, someone said to her, "Welcome. You are home. You have an infinite value;" but she didn't trust them and said, "All my relatives abandoned me, too. Who are these people who can embrace me?" Now, instead, she doesn't even seem sick; when she arrived she started over, like a plane that takes off. Now she's the one that welcomes others and gives witnesses of how she was before; she says about herself that she's greater than the sickness, greater than the virus; in fact, she says that her value chased out the virus, it defeated it.

Banna: Just think, you too, like this woman, could look at your math teacher and say to him, "I may have a bad grade, but I can say to you, based on what I've lived, that you, too have a value. Don't worry, you are not reduced to your being a poor math teacher, there's hope for you, too, that comes from what I have encountered." What can help us look at our classmates, our teachers, and our parents like this, the way that woman looked at the German teacher?

Busingye: These women want their children, in learning math or history, to discover their value, and they were saying, “Our children are going to other schools, but they aren’t discovering what we have discovered.” So, one day they told me, “We want a school for our children.” I answered, “Look, if I’m going to build something, I’m going to build a clinic or a hospital,” and they said, “No, you would educate a doctor, you would also educate a nurse; we want a school.” I said, “No, I don’t have any money.” They said, “Fine, don’t worry about it.” They started chipping stone for gravel and making necklaces; AVSI helped us, they sold 48,000 necklaces here in Italy and they built the first part of the school and said to me, “We want our children, in learning math, to discover their value.” I said, “Who’s going to do it?” But, little by little, we’re discovering that it’s working. Now we have 600 students at the high school, who are your age, and another 450 in the elementary school.

Banna: There’s hope for everyone! If a person takes his heart seriously, you notice people with whom you can build something new, it’s not because you get more talented. A person is still sick, poor, but if he applies that little he has, he can discover that the little or nothing he possesses has an infinite value. If think about it, all of us who are here can experience a true “new school,” the true hope for our life and that of our classmates, because, as Rose was saying before, when a person finds a place to belong, then he is free. For Peter and John, too, life was transformed by this belonging. I was struck, on a related note, rereading an episode in the Acts of the Apostles⁷⁰ in which Peter and John, after Jesus’ resurrection, walk in front of a poor, crippled man laid at the gate and look at him. He expects to get money, because they look at him like they want to do something for him but, instead, as Rose described to us today, they say to him, “Look, we’re poor like you, we can’t give you anything.” In the same way, we can go back to our classmates and our parents saying, “After the three days of the Triduum, it’s not like I’m better than you, I’m as poor as you are, but I have something to tell you (the same thing Peter said to that poor man): ‘Come with us, in the name of Jesus Christ, rise and walk, walk and come with me.’”⁷¹ This is what you can say to everyone, just as Rose’s women said it to the teacher from Germany, you can say to your teachers and your friends, “Look, I’m worse off than you, but I found a place that’s what I was looking for. Get up and walk.” Using our heart, we can come to recognize a place that makes us free, free to go out to meet everyone and everything, and where we can invite everyone, because there’s a richness that throws open the doors, throws open the tombs. It’s the power of the risen Christ.

Listening to Rose talk about this belonging that frees us made me think about the fact that each of us has to respond to the question, “Who do I belong to?” When you find out who you belong to, you won’t be more talented, but in answering the question, “Who do I belong to?” you can conquer the world. In Sicily (where my family is from) there’s a common way of saying, in the midst of a heated argument where you have to assert yourself, “Don’t you know who I am?” as if to say, “You don’t know to whom you are speaking. You better show some respect.” This is, to some extent, the attitude we often have with each other: “You don’t know who I am!” Remember your place, you’re 19, you can’t enter *Memores Domini*—they told Rose; remember your place: you’re full of psychological issues—adults say to you; remember your place: you’re not doing well in school; remember your place: you’re as ugly as death; remember your place, don’t you know who I am?

I’d say this way of acting is fairly common. The resurrection offers a response to that mentality: even the noth-

⁷⁰ Cf. *Acts* 3:3-8,12,15-16: “When [a man crippled from birth] saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, ‘Look at us.’ He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, ‘I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, [rise and] walk.’ Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God. When Peter saw this, he addressed the people, ‘You Israelites, why are you amazed at this, and why do you look so intently at us as if we had made him walk by our own power or piety? The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, this man, whom you see and know, his name has made strong, and the faith that comes through it has given him this perfect health, in the presence of all of you.’” Cf. *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 89-90.

⁷¹ Cf. *Triduum Booklet*, pp. 89-90.

ing that you are, full of problems, even though you're doing poorly in school, despite all that, you can lift your head and answer, "But, instead, you don't know to Whom I belong." This is the real newness. You think you already know who I am, but you don't know to Whom I belong. It's this belonging that brings a richness, a hope, brings life into my life. Because of this, I won't let you push me around, even if you can blackmail me for a grade, for a kiss, for a friendship. I'll even challenge you, "You don't know to Whom I belong, so come with me, because maybe you, too, could need a little of this freedom."

Our life goes on and do you know what the "misfortune" for all you out there is? That it goes on. You think that it ends here on earth, but we have been here for 2,000 years, not cutting your heart any slack. We're still here to tell you, "Do you want to be one of us? Come and see. Use your heart and see if this makes you freer."⁷² This challenge goes on, and we continue not cutting you any slack. Christ has continued to do so since the day He rose from the dead. So let's say goodbye singing, *Cristo Risusciti [Christ Be Resurrected]*.⁷³ This is the life that has manifested itself, this freedom to invite the whole world to experience.

Cristo Risusciti

Now, we have to go home. The choir prepared a gift for us. This morning, they practiced the *Regina Caeli*,⁷⁴ which the Church sings throughout the Easter season. The power it expresses is the one that comes to tear down the walls we use to isolate ourselves and stretches its hand out to us, as Rose was saying.

Regina Caeli

Happy Easter to you and to your families, and safe travels!

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⁷² Cf. *Jn* 1:39.

⁷³ G. Stefani–Anonymous, "Cristo risusciti [Christ Be Resurrected]," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 91.

⁷⁴ "Regina Caeli," in *Triduum Booklet*, p. 95.