

TRACES

litterae communionis

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**Beginning Day for Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation
Mediolanum Forum, Assago (Milan), September 29, 2018**

Luigi Giussani's Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises for the C. Péguy Cultural Center
(Varigotti, November 1, 1968)

edited by Julián Carrón



**Alive Means
Present!**

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Julián Carrón

We cannot take beginning again for granted—it's a grace and an unequivocal sign of God's care for each of us. How moved and grateful we feel in recognizing that we have not been abandoned to our nothingness! But each of us has welcomed that grace by the very act of coming here today. So, let us ask the Holy Spirit—who is the wellspring from which that action flows—to break us wide open, opening our entire "I" to welcome that grace; and let us ask Him that this grace in us not be in vain.

Come Holy Spirit

I welcome all of you present here, and those of you connected by video.

This year, we mark 50 years since the upheavals of 1968, which, as we all know, was a real turning point (Benedict XVI called it a "caesura"—a major break in our recent history) which, despite having begun due to justifiable concerns—a need for greater authenticity and freedom—ended up pushing our entire society into crisis.

Today we are facing another major turning point, which Pope Francis has defined as an "epochal change," characterized by what we've called a "collapse of certainties" (we've repeated this many times over the last few years, with ever-increasing awareness): what seemed obvious and taken as a given just a decade or two ago, the very foundations of our personal and social lives, is now no longer evident to the majority of our contemporaries.

The most immediate consequence of this turning point is an overwhelming confusion we can all perceive. One of the most influential German sociologists, Ulrich Beck, attested to this in his last book (published posthumously). He stated that "the world is unhinged. As many people see it [...] we are wandering aimlessly and confused, arguing for this and against that. But a statement on which most people can agree, beyond all antagonisms and across all continents, is: 'I don't understand the world any more'" (*The Metamorphosis of the World*, Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2016, xi).

Many people are asking themselves, "How can we begin again? What is our starting point?"

Because of all this, I was very struck listening to a talk Fr. Giussani gave during a meeting with that core group of adults involved with the Péguy Cultural Center, who would later become Communion and Liberation. It's November 1, 1968, in Varigotti. We're at the height of the crisis that infiltrated GS that same year. Giussani is speaking right in the midst of widespread bewilderment, asking himself: From what starting point can we begin again? What is truly capable of sustaining our lives in a time of such great confusion? What can withstand the test of time? His response is contained in the words we're about to hear.

Because of the way it struck me when I listened to it, and how deeply pertinent I think it is to our situation today, I decided to ask all of you to listen to it as well.

In addition to the words, pay attention to the tone of voice and way in which Fr. Giussani addresses that small group connected to the Péguy Cultural Center.

It also seemed important to me that our friends outside of Italy—who will connect to this meeting by livestream or watch a recording—can hear Fr. Giussani's speech, and not just read the translation, to help them really enter into the content, which we will all be working on throughout the month of October. ■

Luigi Giussani's Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises for the C. Péguy Cultural Center (Varigotti, November 1, 1968)

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Luigi Giussani

Let's stay a moment in silence (thinking of what we came here to do, even if we haven't grasped the answer), silent before God.

Brief moment of silence

We hope, at least, that the Lord will give us, at the end of these days, a clear understanding of what we came here to do, to whatever extent this clarity was missing in the beginning.

I've never felt so self-conscious; I've never felt such fear and trembling about speaking here, in fifteen years, as I feel this time, because this time is like the ultimate fruit, the high point of a history. I am already hinting then, at what I think should be the content of these days; I am already saying, at the least, what importance the content of these days should have, in my mind. It's as if we were getting to the bottom of what we came here fifteen years ago to begin to seek in this same place. And the trembling or self-consciousness is due to the part my voice still needs to play.

We're all full of hope that these days might tell us something; not only that they not be wasted, but that they establish a stable foundation, that they help us to take an irreversible step. We all share this hope, but the profound dif-

ference compared to all the other times we have gathered together is this: that it is no longer a hope in what will be given to you, but in you. It is no longer a hope in what you might receive from a word or a circumstance here; instead it is a hope that each of you must place in yourself, not 'in yourself' in the sense of 'autonomously,' but in something that is inside of you. In the simplest of terms: this time, it's a hope in you; it's a hope in me and in you, in you and in me; it's a hope in our person, or something inside

of our person. It's not a hope in something outside us, in a word, a circumstance, a situation or opportunity: it's not a hope in those, but a hope in something that's inside us. I have hope, therefore, in you, rather than you hoping in what I might manage to be able to say to you. Deep down, is what distinguishes an audience of children or adolescents from an adult audience, a mature one; within for a mature person, within a grown man all the drama of life, of his worth, is unfolding within him.

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*It's not a hope in something
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Not that he has to draw all the factors or determining factors out of the autonomy of his individuality. Not at all! It's that everything that determines his worth is at play within him: God or Satan, if you will; the call of the mystery of Christ or the visceral call of the world. It is within you that they play out their drama, that they put their claim upon you to the test.

Think how many times we have been struck by that line in the Gospel: "Do you believe that, when the Son of Man returns, He will still find faith on earth?" (cf. Lk 18:8). I don't think, in all our history, that there has ever been a moment—a moment in the temporal sense—in which these words said by Christ with melancholy and sadness have seemed to be so, in which it has been possible perceive their relevance as much as right now: "Do you believe that, when the Son of Man returns, He will still find faith on earth?"

It is faith that we seek, faith we want to penetrate, faith we want to live. All round us, it seems that everything works in concert, everything conspires together with a tireless force that seeks to cast faith out, to pry it from its hinges, to empty it or reduce it to merely rational or naturalistic categories, both without and within the Christian world; nowadays within as well as without. It is authentic faith, or an authenticity of faith, that we seek. We seek no other. Precisely because of this, the

conversation and the work in the coming days mark something that requires a risk from each of us, risking ourselves. This is why we sought to be clear about our intentions before coming here. We're ready to speak to the whole world, to go anywhere in the world, but we need a home, we need a place where a word is a word, a true "expression" of something and relationships are of the "heart," [from the Latin] cordial, where the companionship is positive, where words have a meaning and our intentions have a meaning, where you call bread, bread; and water, water.

Consequently, before coming here we wanted to be clear and to draw from our history—especially from the last few years, and last year in particular—those dawning rays of a definitive vision of the world; those first hints and signs of a radical "turning" of the way we conceive of the world. Drawing out these hints, these dawning rays or first indications from our experience over the past year, the past few years, we said, "We'll bet ourselves, our persons, on these; we are willing to risk ourselves for these." It is these intuitions, then, that set the parameters for friendship, which is the most fundamental condition for a man to become himself, to be able to walk without insurmountable danger, without having to overcome an impossible danger.

"The deepest-rooted symptom of poverty of spirit is listening, a position of listening and listening again: of listening again to what we've already been given, and generously given."

So, despite our numbers, we need the tone of these days to be sustained by an air of profound, though perhaps extremely discrete, familiarity; a familiarity that is quiet and discrete, but profound; one that loves, desires and hopes for nothing else but that the familiarity become clear, that it become even clearer, or always clearer. In that sense, it's clear that we all must place our hope, once again, in each other: hope is placed again in you and in me, because it is in the sincerity you have, but let's use the true term: it's in a "poverty of spirit" you have. It's not intellectual curiosity, but a poverty of spirit that must accompany us in this companionship tomorrow, the next day and Monday. It's a poverty of spirit, an authentic poverty, not the poverty of misery and ugliness, though the Gospel has pointed to the poverty of misery and ugliness as an occasion God uses to force man to go to the bottom of things); but without poverty of spirit, clearly, even the darkest poverty will not become an opportunity to go deeper, because conversion alone helps you to understand and gives things their value, and conversion happens within poverty of spirit.

Poverty of spirit, then. The deepest-rooted symptom of poverty of spirit is listening, a position of lis-

tening and listening again: of listening again to what we've already been given, and generously given, because God, as Creator and builder, cannot prepare anything for us now if not in relation to what we've already been given. Of listening, because—again—since He is Creator, every moment carries newness, an impressive newness; that we feel pressing on our existence, pushing it to walk a path, or pushing it to discover or build something.

These days are an event that must take place inside of us. This time together is an event that must take place inside of us, because our aim is not to build an association. It would already be a start, one of you said tonight, if we could leave here having understood that an association is not at all what we want to build—except for that organism through which friendship seeks affirmation and a way forward. What we aim for is not an association, but, to use the same word as before, "faith," a given, definite clarity of faith. Because then your person, transformed from within, wherever you go and whatever you do, whatever relationships you establish, will create a part of that organism in which we are such tangible partners: the organism of Christ in the world.

I don't know how to express all that's churning inside me right now, because I wish I could, with that premise, clear the field of any obstacle and I understand that I can't. But I do understand this: that the word "faith," as I've said it, the word "Christ," as I said just a moment ago, or the word "organism of Christ in the world," that I said just now; these words, like all those I've said, have such a different echo in me and in you; in all of us, what a different echo! For many of you, perhaps, these words still sound like something external to you. Still, no matter how external they may feel, or how deeply inscribed in your personality—as I feel them—a conversion in facing these words is the aim of these days together. It's an event, not coming to agree to do this or that, not a structure to devise or to preserve, but an event within ourselves, because an adult person, then, will create the structure as the work of his hands, if and to the degree to which he has within him the face that these words must determine, if he has the heart, the intelligence and the heart that ought to these words have as their primary content.

Pope John XXIII spoke of the signs of the times; he loved to talk about "signs of the times" (cf. the Encyc-

lical *Pacem in Terris*, 126ff.) We, too, can use this expression and look for a sign of the times with regards to the pedagogy for faith, our relationship to faith, our relationship with the faith.

I think you can define these signs of the times like this: fifteen years ago, when we started with GS—as each of you will remember—the inspiration, the motivation (I’m not saying it was fifteen years ago for each of you, no, but I’m saying it’s an attitude that has lasted up to the present), the inspiration for that call, the cause we sought as the firm ground, the reason—that’s it—the standard reason we sought as the firm ground moving us to adhere, the standard motivator we sought to found ourselves upon was the following: we were born into a tradition, so it would not be right for us to continue or dismiss that tradition without first engaging it. A history had shaped in us a responsibility to be faithful to that history. In my experience, this was the kind of appeal that catalyzed any good will, any minimum of simplicity of heart that was left. Anyway, in my experience this was the kind of appeal, the reason that motivated all the people who came with us: I mean the explicit, theoretical, defined motive or motivator.

Now, if there’s a most striking aspect as a sign of the times, or of

this sign of the times, it’s this: that a similar appeal today would no longer work, it no longer applies. For a young person, and for each of us, to the extent that we still have a little youth inside, tradition as motivation and appeal is no longer sufficient. It might be a word that, for a certain balanced, sensible temperament, might still elicit some emotion or feeling, but not the kind of impression that moves you. If I had to ask young people to join GS today, I don’t think I would still use that reasoning.

It’s true; we can also explain why: ours is a time in which—we’ve had many occasions to mention this—history is passing through an eminently critical phase, a phase, therefore, dedicated to revisions and revolutions. In this sense, history is in a phase in which some of its meaning is lost: busily consumed in the work of the present, man loses track of the meaning of history. From that perspective, a time like ours, though perhaps rich in a rare kind of energy or an operative force that was unimaginable just years before, is extremely poor in spirit, but not in the evangelical sense of the term; it’s an extremely poor age, because richness in spirit is the epitome of a phenomenon or an event of synthesis, and the meaning of history is the supreme measure of the richness of spirit.

But there’s a second aspect of this sign of the times, which confirms the question that the first point starts to raise. There’s another type of appeal you can no longer lead with in calling people back to faith; it’s an approach that can still awaken an intelligent person’s admiration, but not that movement of the person that makes them take a new step, that makes them commit to doing something, to something defined, defining, and definitive—yet how many times have we appealed to this!: the fact that the Chris-

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tian philosophy of life, the Christian view of the world, the Christian theory of existence is more complete than any other; that it is perfect, balanced, comprehensive and entirely human. Not even the marvel of a perfect theory can move today's young people, or any of us, to the extent that we have something youthful in us.

Tradition and theory, tradition and discourse cannot move today's men and women. I spoke of young people, but that minimum of youthfulness I mentioned earlier is what remains in a man his entire life, so it's true for us, as well, it's true for a mature, grown man; well, actually for a mature, grown man the problem doesn't even present itself, precisely because you have to have overcome it to become an adult in the faith, you have to have gone past the fascinating appeal of historical reasons and the admirable appeal of the aesthetic offered by theoretical perfection.

It is no longer history, or doctrine, or tradition, or a discourse that will move men and women today. Christian tradition and philosophy, Christian tradition and discourse have created and continue to create "Christianness," but not Christianity. By "Christianness" we mean that flux, that current, that identifiable river running

through history and characterized, accordingly, by determined formulations of thought, determined ways of conceiving, determined moral laws, determined values that are underlined, determined attitudes in practice, by determined "forms." Tradition and discourse, tradition and Christian culture, tradition and theology, if you will, tradition and Christian doctrine, create certain "forms" and customs.

Christianity is quite another thing, even though, clearly, Christianity includes all those things we've said. It not only restores, but enhances the value of history, it makes tradition into a living reality, it restores philosophy in the deepest sense of the word, it not only restores its intelligent ordering, but enhances

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it to the point that it becomes a living reality within us. There, Christianity is that "what" which makes tradition into a living reality, which turns the articulation of thought into a living reality, which brings to life what is past. It's what makes thought, idea and value come alive.

But alive means present! We can employ no other means—if we do not want to flounder in confusion—than to return to our origins: how did Christianity arise, how did it begin? It was an event. Christianity is an event. "Christianness" is a social and historical furrow, but Christianity is an event. Christianness is the articulation of norms and customs, but Christianity is an event. Let's discuss, then: how did they begin to believe? What made up the event that awakened such an

interest, that created such an impression that people risked themselves for the first time in what was in front of them, that people had faith burning inside for the first time, that there began to be Christians in the world? What kind of event was it; what was the nature of that event?

They didn't believe because of the way Christ spoke, saying certain things; they didn't believe because Christ worked miracles; they didn't believe because Christ quoted the prophets; they didn't believe because Christ raised the dead. Think how many people, the vast majority, heard Him speak that way, heard Him say those words, saw Him do those miracles, and the event didn't happen for them. The event was something of which the miracles or sermons were components, segments, they were factors, but it was something else, something much, much more, something so beyond that it gave the words and the miracles their meaning. They believed because of what Christ showed Himself to be. They believed because of that presence, not for one thing or another that He said or did. They believed because of a presence. A presence neither transparent nor opaque, not a faceless presence: a presence with a very specific face, a presence charged with words, charged with a proposal. They believed because of a presence charged with a proposal. A presence charged with a proposal is, then, a presence charged with meaning.

What is the term you can use to perfectly define the event of a presence charged with a proposal, charged with a meaning for life (because the proposal is a meaning for all existence)?

There's one detail, an implication, that we still need to underline, one that we can't let escape our notice: not every presence, not just any presence is charged with meaning, pardon, not just any presence with a proposal is charged with meaning in a way that makes it fit under the word that we're about to use; rather, a presence with a proposal is charged with meaning, in the way described by the word we're about to use, only when it has an unforeseeable quality, unforeseen and unforeseeable; when, in other words, it carries within it a radical newness. A radical newness that I'll say again, describe again with the terms "unforeseen" and "unforeseeable:" it's something that wasn't and then is; it was something that could not be, and is there. Something that could not be and is here. A thing that could not be, that didn't theoretically follow, that wasn't coherent with all the wisdom, all the experience, all the previous arguments or all the tradition. It's the expression of an "extra" power, the expression of a greater power, the presence of a greater power, however you come to define it, despite the fact that our critical

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awareness more or less hurriedly seeks to reduce this undeniable impression, which is irresistible at first. Despite the fact that our critical awareness seeks more or less hurriedly to reduce it to pre-existing categories taken from the tradition or arguments it had before, from its previous philosophizing, its previous wisdom, or experience.

It's a presence, then—summarizing—that's full of a proposal, and therefore brimming with meaning. Though that “therefore” exaggerates a bit. A proposal is full of meaning, a presence is full of meaning only to the extent to which it contains something that can't be reduced to the past, that is, to our present which is born from the past. The radical newness lies in this.

Good. So the word that indicates this phenomenon is the word “announcement.” Christianity was born as an announcement: it was that person speaking a certain way, acting a certain way, but it was him or her, the person who was speaking and acting; it was that person as a whole, everything about them, it was that presence full of a proposal, brimming with meaning, with an irreducible newness. It was the experience of an irreducible newness. Try to imagine, with a spirit of delicacy,

discretely, not in the sense of timidity, but of respectful awe, that profound gentleness that preserves a keen poverty of spirit, try to imagine that girl who was at home and received the announcement: Our Lady. The ultimate example of something that couldn't be reduced to the prior events which made up her present reality. Why did those hundreds of people begin to believe the moment the Holy Spirit descended on the Apostles? Why did they believe when Peter planted himself, crying out in the square? Why? It could have just been a curious spectacle, that a person spoke and people of many languages understood; it could have just been an interesting intellectual detail, that he set out in his speeches, as he did, to reinterpret all of Hebrew history in the light of that Man whom they had killed a few days before. The announcement was that thing, it was what was happening, it was that event, it was the totality of that event that weighed on people, in the sense of making an impression, that something, something that they could not clearly decipher or define, but was different, something new, a proposal—and what a proposal!—a proposal that brought change. They couldn't decipher the value or the terms of that

change in the least. This is why there is only one other word the word “announcement” immediately brings to mind, which is the word “conversion.”

Now, so as not to try highlight every components, or, better, every implications, let's go back to that effort to imagine, to place ourselves directly in that moment: it was an event in its entirety that struck those people; and the thing that continued to strike them and change them was the fact that the event was full of meaning, it was new, unforeseen and unforeseeable. And why did the people of Smyrna, or of Athens, of Miletus and Philippi—the people who followed St. Paul—adhere? Because of the words he said? Because of gestures he performed? In part. It was the combination of everything, which can be defined in all its parameters by the word “announcement.” It was an announcement: the presence of something that proposed a change, something new.

There is a term from our history, from the history of our efforts, that is closely related to what we're trying to encapsulate this evening, and it's the word “encounter.” The word encounter, in fact, has an existentially incisive, existentially valid meaning only

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and exclusively if the encounter coincides with an announcement: a presence charged with meaning. There’s a particular characteristic I want to point out to you, so that it’s even clearer. A presence with a proposal is an announcement, it becomes truly full of meaning, it’s truly an announcement only to the extent that the presence involves in its meaning the person who carries that meaning. The announcement is the presence of a person fully engaged in a meaning of the world, in a meaning of life. Because what changes life, what changes us; an impression becomes existential, meaning it changes our existence, when it carries within it a conception of the world, a way of seeing the world. An announcement, then, is a presence, a presence charged with meaning, but also a presence that involves in that meaning the person who carries it.

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A person fully engaged in a meaning of the world and of life: this is what Christ was for those who listened to Him; this is what Peter was for those who listened to him; this is what Paul was for those who listened to him with a poverty of spirit. Because precisely when poverty of spirit is missing, in exact proportion to the lack of poverty of spirit, what happens? A person “already knows” everything, thinks he already knows and reduces everything to what he already knows; he tends to trace everything back to what he already knows. Only the poor in spirit can become rich, true wealth is for him alone: for everyone else there’s nothing but wasting away, just trying to get by, which is wasting away.

For all of us, if we are here, it’s because in some way this announcement has touched us; it’s because in some way that presence that involved a person in a meaning of the world and of life was given to us. It happened in various ways, but, for the very fact that we are here, there is no way this announcement has

not touched us, that it has not touched us as well. It’s an event

I said before: we’ve always used the word “encounter,” but the word encounter doesn’t express the entire depth of the question, the word “announcement,” yes, because the word announcement opens up—beyond the boundary of all that can be said—the mysterious sense of that power, or of that powerful will, or that powerful intelligence and will that made it all happen, that makes this presence. And how is this presence here? The word “announcement” clearly opens up (beyond the boundary of all that can be said) the sense of the mystery of the Father, the sense of the mystery of God, the sense of the Father’s will, the sense of God’s design, the sense of God, the lord of mankind and of history, who makes the announcement happen to me and not another, to another, yes, and me, no; who chooses to announce Himself to Mary, a girl who was absolutely ignored, without value at a worldly level; who chooses to announce Himself to her, who chooses to announce Himself to poor fisherman; to one, two (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea...) of the wise men of the time, and not to the 300 others in the Sanhedrin. This breathtaking and absolute freedom has touched me and each of you, by the very fact that we are here.

This, however, is the problem, which I’ll leave unresolved; as we leave here, we’ll have to look it in the eye: it’s becoming aware of this event that happened to us; becoming aware of what Christianity means; Christianity means this announcement. Christianity doesn’t mean giving money to the poor; Christianity doesn’t mean taking in thirty-four children who aren’t your own; Christianity doesn’t mean wearing the papal tiara, Christianity doesn’t mean praying to God; Christianity doesn’t mean performing religious gestures, because all these things, in the type

of things they are, are possible in all kinds of human experiences. Christianity is something that is given to us, and that appears to us as given, as an announcement, an unforeseen and unforeseeable reality, that didn't exist and is here, that could not be and is here, is present, that couldn't be and is present: an absolute newness. Just think of what the shepherds must have felt at the Angel's announcement, or the wise men at the announcement of which the star was a sign. A radical newness; new at an absolutely new level: it could not be and is here; it could not be because we never would've thought of it, we couldn't imagine it and it's here. Christianity is this event, it's the event of this announcement. Announcement not, first and foremost, in that I hear it, but inasmuch as it presents itself to me: it is a proposal, a sort of proposal; it's a kind of proposal; it's a sort of meaning, a kind of meaning that is passed on to me, is proposed to me, that comes before me in the form of people who are involved in it, who are in some way involved in that meaning. God chose an adulterer for one announcement; God chose greedy men, the apostles, for this announcement; God chose sinners for this announcement, because this all lies within the power that brings it all to light.

Everything hangs on the event, not on what we are, or what we could be, I mean, in terms of our moral standing. It is in something that's outside of us and that proposes itself deep within us, but is outside of us: it's an event outside of us, just like the stormy sea. An event outside of us, an event that is an announcement; an event that, from outside of us, unexpectedly, you could not have foreseen it—comes to the forefront and overtakes us, piercing us to the depths with its proposal; and this proposal that pierces to the depths of us also involves that poor person who carries it, despite him or herself. Remember that chapter in Jeremiah when, at a certain point, fed up, he tried to rebel against God, we've all thought about it more than once. "I said to myself, 'I will speak in His name no more; enough, I will flee from His face, I will speak no more in His name.' But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it. I must go and cry out again, 'Cursed and ruined is he who listens not to the Lord'" (cf. Jer 20:9; 22:5).

We have to erase what has passed to understand what Christianity is, we have to erase all the undertones from the past to understand what it is now, now, now!

Of course, not the past of yesterday or of the day before, because Christianity is a presence within your daily life, a presence that involves the lives of other people. Other people engaged their lives in a proposal so that they could carry it to you; and it is a proposal that demands that you engage your own life. But it's a proposal that, in demanding you engage your life, is full of meaning, is full of an unimagined newness, guarantees an unimaginable change, unimaginable.

The main thing to begin to sketch out inside of us, to begin to "unwrap" from all the paper around it to see the gift inside, to discover the clear features of its face, the thing to begin to look at face to face is this absolutely living and present reality that is Christianity.

Christianity is an announcement, a phenomenon in which a group of people, one person—think of Christ—through their way of being, the engagement of his or her life, carries a proposal bound to change your life: this is a claim that cannot exist without a meaning that's absolutely new. What an immense amount of debris we have to clear from the surface—and much deeper than the surface of our awareness—of our soul, of our intelli-

“You cannot, as grown men, remain Christians of a certain authenticity if not through an awareness of the announcement.”

gence, of our sensibilities to begin to walk toward the thing of which this word, the existential reality of this word “announcement” begins to be an echo. So much debris! Such a thick crust to break through! Because of this, any attitude of curiosity, to the extent one’s position is mere intellectual curiosity, because of that, he won’t be able to understand. Only poverty of spirit can help you understand, that poverty of spirit that makes us cry out, “Father, show me Your face!” (cf. Ps 27:8-9), that poverty of spirit that makes us cry out, “My soul is thirsting for the living God” (cf. Ps 42:3). What’s needed is the rawness of these words, the sincerity of these words, the perfect purity of these words that can remain standing, under any kind of evil or sin, any disrepute. Yet these may not be present, may not exist in the perfect soul of a pharisee, in the morally irreproachable soul of a pharisee.

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When, before coming here this evening, I said to myself: “Now I have to go there to say all these things...,” what comforted me in my decision to accept the thankless task was exclusively this thought, at a human level: that these words, this word, or words like these have to be thrown out there, even if it seems as though they bounce back as they would off a stone, or slip away as they would over marble; they have to be thrown out there, because it’s only the tenacity of a path that can open them, break them wide open, that allows us to be invaded by their force, by their weight; that allows them to completely overtake us. This tenacity, however, cannot take shape in us, cannot exist in us without one vital condition: a shared life: it’s a shared life that generates this, only a shared life.

Because it’s very important that we close one phase and begin another: a definitive, mature one. This word is at the origin of our mature Christianity, or

“of” Christianity itself; it is the thing that can stand the test of time, or better, the test of all of history: because that announcement that started to make an impression on two people (the first chapter of John’s Gospel), two: John and Andrew, two thousand years ago; that announcement, that person, is exactly the same phenomenon that attracted us to come here, and is the phenomenon that can make us remain in God’s Church. Now, however, it can no longer be passively accepted, the times will not permit it; the times in two senses: this time in history (the “sign of the times”) and this time in our lives, because you cannot, as grown men, remain Christians of a certain authenticity if not through experience of this event, if not through an awareness of the announcement. Above all, clearly, you could not be an announcement for others; in other words, you could not support the Mystery of Christ in the world, collaborate with this, or spread—as they say—Christianity in the world. To be faithful to the Church, to belong to God in the battle of the world: it’s impossible, you can’t be missionaries, in short, without continually living, and therefore continually participating in, an announcement. To many, this might not seem the case. Instead, I’m telling you it is, which is a radical shift; I don’t mean, deep down, ultimately, it’s necessarily of our attitude, but of our consciousness, of our awareness, of our way of defining things, yes; and therefore the development of our attitude. Because the development of our attitude toward things, constructing something new in our present life cannot happen except through a consciousness that’s made explicit, except through a definite awareness. I’m telling you that what needs to happen is a radical shift in our awareness, in our way of thinking, in the way we organize things; a radical shift that must take place, which is brought about through the word “announcement.” ■

Julián Carrón

What jolting words, enough to render us silent, asking that the words we just heard—which so often remain external to us because of the difference in the echo they have in him and in us, as he said—may become truly ours! We'll take some time to leave room for this silence and work on what we just heard.

Fifty years later, it's even more striking that, at a time when everything was so discombobulated, Giussani had such clarity in his judgment of the situation of the Church and the world, and about what the answer had to be.

What can hold up under the pressure of a situation like our current one? The only thing that can hold up is the announcement—as we just heard—that began to reverberate when Jesus spoke to those two men, John and Andrew, initiating the phenomenon that attracted them. Only if that same phenomenon happens again will we be able to remain in God's Church for the long haul. It's impossible to withstand the challenges without renewing that same attraction. Therefore, Fr. Giussani has reminded us of the method that's always been there, from the first moment up to the present, posing these questions once again: What was it like in the beginning? How

did people begin to believe? “They believed because of that presence [...], a presence with a very specific face, [...] charged with words, charged with a proposal.” Jesus's presence was one that carried an announcement. And “a presence with a proposal is an announcement [...], full of meaning [...], only to the extent that the presence involves in its meaning the person who carries that meaning.” In other words, it is an announcement, it is a presence, a witness, when the word has taken flesh, has become part of them.

Accordingly, Fr. Giussani concludes, “It's very important that we close one phase and begin another: a definitive, mature one. [...] Now, however,” Christianity “can no longer be passively accepted, [...] because you cannot, as grown men, remain Christians of a certain authenticity if not through experience of this event, if not through an awareness of the announcement.”

Now, how does this event become experience for each of us? How can it enter into the marrow of our “I”? He himself reminded us: only by walking patiently, which will allow what seized us at the beginning to reach the point of totally defining and determining us. This is what Fr. Giussani invites us to: “The tenacity of a path,” without which we are fooling ourselves if we think the event will become our own experience. We ask the Lord that we may be able to experience that event, that newness that seized us, once again in our very bones, that we never reduce its origin to a fact from the past. We ask Him the grace to be able to recognize the responsibility we bear in this time of confusion, including within the Church, certain not because of our merits, but because of what we have received: a method through which the Christian announcement, in its bare essentials, may enter the life of any person to the point of involving his entire person. In other words, an event happening now, a witness, similar to those we see in Fr. Giussani and Pope Francis. ■

*“Now, how does this event
become experience
for each of us?”*

Holy Mass

Homily by Fr. Julián Carrón

Readings for the Mass:

Nm 11:25-29; Ps 18 (19); Jas 5:1-6; Mk 9:38-43,45,47-48

God is always the one to take the initiative, as we said in the Fraternity Exercises. Today's liturgy demonstrates this once again: in order to save His people, God takes the initiative with one man, Moses. However, He pulls in others right away. The spirit Moses received passes on to 70 others so that they can communicate what had been given to Moses. And this first initiative was just the announcement of the much greater initiative God was about to take—sending His son to bring Moses's work to its fulfillment. In the same way, the gift brought into history by Jesus was communicated to the first people He encountered: the disciples.

We are quite familiar with this method God uses. That movement of the Holy Spirit is, in fact, the same thing that led us all here. Continuing with the same method, the Mystery took the initiative with one man, Fr. Giussani, bestowing on Him the grace of the Spirit so that it could reach us with that specific tone, that force—which we just heard as we listened together to his words—and that intensity that brought all of us to take an interest in Christianity, so that we could participate in his Spirit, his gift, his grace. It's moving to see how that method is not just the beginning of a story from the past, but rather continues in the present, fulfilling that consideration and care God has for us.

But if we do not grow in our awareness of how gratuitous this gift is, we risk immediately trying to possess it. This is what we heard in today's first reading. Because Moses's spirit also entered two people outside of the group to whom it was given, Joshua, after seeing them prophesy, goes to tell Moses, "Moses, my lord, stop them!" Moses, however, responds, "Are you jealous for my sake?" The same thing happened to Jesus's disciples, as we hear in the Gospel. "Teacher, we saw someone driving out demons in your name, and we tried to prevent him because he does not follow us"—in other words, he wasn't part of their inner circle. First Moses, then Jesus, refused to be hemmed in by that closed attitude. Moses says, "Would that all the people of the Lord were prophets! Would that the Lord might bestow His Spirit on them all!" as if to say, "Don't you realize that God gave me His Spirit so that it could reach everyone?" Jesus does the same with His disciples, saying, "Do not prevent him. There is no one who performs a mighty deed in my name who can at the same time speak ill of me. For whoever is not against us is for us."

Jesus exposes the temptation to turn the gift we receive into something we possess, and so use it in a domineering way, forgetting that it was given to us gratuitously, and, further, forgetting that the very nature of a charism, of a grace from the Holy Spirit, dictates that it is for everyone. It is given to one person so that it may reach everyone according to a design that is not ours. This is why Jesus, like Moses and like all those who have truly received the Spirit, correct any attempts to use the grace received in a domineering way, just as Fr. Giussani corrected us.

In listening to these readings, then, we hear the echo of that quote from Fr. Giussani, “You highlight what’s positive [which we can find in anyone we meet out in the streets], even in its limitations, and abandon the rest to the mercy of the Father” (Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generare tracce nella storia del mondo* [*Generating Traces in the History of the World*], Milan: Rizzoli, 1998, 159) because we are not the ones who determine how the Spirit moves and works. The Spirit blows where it will, even outside the Church—as the Church as always affirmed—and therefore outside our inner circle! What great attention and

striving it takes for us to follow every movement of the Spirit, in every person in whom it is manifested, that they become our companions on the road, because “whoever is not against us is for us [and with us]. Anyone who gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ [...] will surely not lose his reward.”

So instead of concerning ourselves with trying to manage the movement of the Holy Spirit, let us be concerned with our own conversion, that none of us become a source of scandal. “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were put around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.” We are called to live this gift

“That the grace which we have received may shine ever more brightly upon all people, and that we not scandalize anyone with a ‘distorted,’ possessive or improper use of the grace we received.”

we have received, stripping away anything that gets in its way—even a hand or a foot or an ear, if it causes us to sin, Jesus said—in order to allow that gift to shine. How disproportionate we feel compared to this gift! But if we truly begin to grow in awareness of that disproportion, we cannot help but ask that the grace we have received (and which we received for everyone, as the first hint of a design unfolding in us for those around us) may shine ever more brightly upon all people, and that we not scandalize anyone with a distorted, possessive, or improper use of the grace received. ■

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