

WORKSHEET 2 - SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

2. “Simon, do you love Me?” An overwhelming sympathy

A point of certainty for Anduela*

Anduela had enjoyed a special year of high school with very good GS friends. Then, tragedy struck. But she discovered that she faced it “with a gladness that was contagious,” even for her Muslim relatives.

When eighteen-year-old Anduela Keqi saw the tables with the final scores of her high school class, she jumped for joy, because she had passed every subject. This was the crowning achievement of a truly special year, not only from the scholastic point of view. Her friendship with the members of GS, whom she had met in her freshman year when he had been in Genova, Italy for only two years, having come from Albania, had become even closer. Life with them was an adventure she could not do without. Certainly, her parents often complained that she was always out, but it was worth it. Now all her plans for the summer could go ahead: the GS mini vacation, the Meeting, which she had never been able to attend, and the Equipe in September.

But a few days later, she received a call on her cell phone. “Hurry to the Emergency Room. Your father is in grave condition.” She rushed to the hospital, and was told that notwithstanding the rough sea, her father had brought his nephew, who had arrived for vacation, to go for a swim. A wave had thrown the boy to the beach and the man far offshore. By the time the rescuers got to him, he was almost dead. Now he was in intensive care, struggling between life and death. Anduela could not believe it. Her father was afraid of deep water.

In the waiting room, full of distressed relatives, Anduela felt disoriented. The only thing she could do was send text messages to her closest friends. “Pray for my father.” She recalls, “My family is Muslim by tradition, though we are not practicing. I began to pray when I got involved in GS. That day in the emergency room, I thought it was the only thing I could do. I prayed for him and also for us, that the Lord would help us.” A short time later, she saw at the end of the hallway her dearest friend accompanied by Marina, the teacher responsible for GS, and her husband. They told her, “We’re here with you!” Then, as time passed, the waiting room, the landing and the stairwell became crowded with friends: university students, adults, GS teenagers. “From that moment on, I was no longer alone.” The doctors and nurses became curious and asked about this “strange” Albanian family. This continued for two days, until her father died of a heart attack.

Her pain was terrible, but with those friends at her side it was clear to her that there was something greater that was victorious and enabled her to live. That afternoon she called Marina, and said, “I want to say a Rosary with everyone for him. You are my point of certainty.” The next day, the square in front of the church of the Emilian priests was full to overflowing. Anduela arrived with three cousins. Her mother and little brother had to remain home. Everyone was there, Marina and Fr. Beppe with some GS friends who had left the vacation »

* Paola Bergamini, *Tracce*, October 2016, p. 27.

» specifically to be there with Anduela, young people from the CLU group, and families. "I felt loved and cared for." Among the relatives was the cousin of the day of the tragedy. He approached Marina and said, "I've never seen people who love each other so much. I've never entered a church before today. I've never seen anything so beautiful. I filmed everything. I want to show this beauty back in Albania."

A few days later, Anduela, her mother and little brother arrived in Lezha, an hour from Tirana, for the funeral. A difficult period began for her. She saw only pain and crying in the people who crowded the house. She recalls, "There was so much sadness and I thought, 'But my father was never this way. He can't have left just this despondency. This is not enough for me'." She never tired of praying and asking. Her friends in Italy did not let her feel alone; they called and sent text messages. "They weren't empty words, but something that filled my life, giving it certainty. I reflected on the last four years, on the beautiful things that had happened to me. If that good had a meaning, also what happened had a meaning of good for me. The pain remained, but not the desperation."

She spent a large part of her day cooking for her friends and relatives who, as is traditional, came to visit them. One day a family friend told her, "We didn't think that you could face the situation in this way. You are glad." It was a gladness that even she found difficult to understand, but it was contagious. Thus one evening, her mother was out on the balcony and called Anduela and her little brother. "Come see!" On the horizon a beautiful sunset colored the sky. In Genova, her family used to make fun of her a bit, because she would say, "Look at the beautiful sky! What a beautiful starry sky." Instead, now her mother was doing this. "That evening, my mother was happy. She had become aware of that beauty." Afterwards, when Anduela read her the messages from her Italian friends, the woman commented, "How many people love you!" The girl thought, "They love you this way, too."

Slowly, as the days passed, a word began to surface timidly in their conversations with relatives and friends: God. "Now my father is His. If God wanted him, all this has a meaning." Something had happened. One evening Anduela called Marina. "Our family is not religious. Nobody goes to the mosque. But at a certain point I saw the need to affirm something that went beyond death."

Six weeks later the family returned to Italy and life began again. Her friends, with sensitivity and discretion, did not leave them alone. For Anduela, nothing is the same. "It is more."