

Message from Julián Carrón

Communion and Liberation Youth Pilgrimage to Rome in Preparation for the Synod

Why go to Rome in the middle of the summer? Because someone has called us together: the Pope; it's not something we pulled out of our hat. Someone we trust invited us.

What reasons do we have for trusting? To answer, we have to look at our experience. Pope Francis reminded us of this, using “the words that Jesus once said to the disciples who asked him: ‘Teacher [...] where are you staying?’ He replied, ‘Come and see’ (*Jn* 1:38). Jesus looks at you and invites you to go with him. Dear young people, have you noticed this look towards you?” (*Letter to Young People in Preparation for the Synod*, January 13, 2017).

For each of us, the encounter with the Movement meant running into a gaze full of promise, a proposal that we perceived as totally new because it didn't coincide with the way we had imagined our own journey. Just think of the disciples: the same thing happened to them after they encountered Jesus. What made them follow that man? They followed Him because He corresponded to their expectations. Once they had felt this correspondence, following it meant going to find Him the next day, and the day after that. And the more their certainty about Him grew, the more desire and the more reasons they had to trust Him, and so to follow Him. They woke up in the morning without knowing where He would decide to go that day, and any of them could have said, “Why don't we go to see that rabbi who is interpreting the Old Testament and get closer to the Mystery that way? Why should my relationship with the Mystery have to come through going fishing with this guy?” What would you have done in front of that invitation to get on the boat to go fishing?

Reality is the modality the Mystery uses to reach me and to call me to follow Him. In *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani describes this dynamic saying, “One's whole life [...] would be [...] waiting for the nod of this unknown ‘lord.’ [...] Man, the human being's rational life, would have to be suspended on the instant, suspended in every moment upon this sign, apparently so fickle, so haphazard, yet the circumstances through which the unknown ‘lord’ drags me, provokes me toward his design [...] simply adhering to the pressures of the occasions. It is a dizzying position,” (*The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queens, Montreal 1997, p. 135), that would be impossible to sustain on our own. This is why the *unknown lord* became flesh in a man who moved in unpredictable ways, ways that didn't coincide with what those who encountered him imagined, and they perhaps thought, “Today, I would've gone fishing and, instead, He's saying we have to go to Capernaum.” Just imagine how many times it must've happened to the Apostles! It's stupendous that we can read about it in the Gospels, so that we can grasp what Christianity is: a Fact that entered history and comes to life in concrete circumstances, both then and now.

Of course, every man or woman can imagine a way to enter a relationship with the Mystery, and this is part of the dynamic of the religious sense: the attempt to build a bridge to reach the *unknown lord*. But something happened and turned that method on its head: there's a new way—simpler, bolder, more beautiful and more reasonable—to enter a relationship with the Mystery, which is to run into a different humanity—at school, at your university, at work—that makes Him present in the present. This way is within reach for everyone, but only the simple recognize it. A simple person is one who, in encountering Him, immediately realizes that an entirely new category is opened, and that the Christ he or she ran into is not one of the many gods in the Pantheon which were thought up by man throughout the ages.

We need, then, to always go back to the episodes in the Gospels. Imagine being Marta or Mary: is it better to worry yourself with serving food or sit, listening to Jesus? And if it's ever your turn to

serve, would you complain about it? If you were at lunch with Jesus, would you be upset at serving that exceptional presence? You'd be honored to do it! We'll only be able to enjoy all we do if we understand the reasons. Otherwise, we'll always be fighting the images we have in our heads, having to try to erase all that we have lived from our memory. This is why it's stupendous that, after everything you have lived over the last few years, by calling us to come together in Rome with the Pope, the Lord places each of you in front of that big question he asks Peter on the lakeshore, that morning when He cooked fish for His friends: "Do you love Me?" How beautiful that He doesn't spare you from this question at precisely this time in your life.

This is what you are friends for: to help each other to respond to Jesus' question personally, with simplicity. And there could be no greater gesture of friendship among you than following Him who carries you to your destiny. If we aren't generating relationships at this level, with people with whom we would go to the ends of the earth—because the only reason we're here together is this: to go toward our destiny—I challenge you to test how long your friendships will last.

What face does this destiny wear today? We're back to our starting point: what face does Christ wear for us today, according to an image that's not determined by what we "think" about Him? His face reaches us today through the gesture of this pilgrimage to Rome, to which we've been called by Christ Himself, present in history through His vicar, the bishop of Rome.

The modality the Mystery uses to call you are historical facts, concrete circumstances: right now, the leader established by Christ as the ultimate point of authority for our life of faith—the Pope—is calling us to Rome. This summer, the Mystery is calling you in this way, and He will know how to help you to answer the questions you have about your future—I'm thinking especially of those of you who have just finished high school or college.

I can only prepare myself to face the future by following this method, because the Mystery will be offering signs to help me find my path. But I will only find it by staying immersed in this place that is the Movement, within the Church, because only then can Christ so determine the way I look at things that I begin to truly see. "He was seen and therefore saw," as St. Augustine said of Zacchaeus. Only if we are literally "soaking" in a place where Christ constantly happens again can we have the experience of knowing reality, which will allow us to recognize the hints the Mystery uses to clarify which road to take; otherwise it will be impossible to see things that are right under our nose.

The disciples were only able to understand more about what life is, what vocation is and what they needed to do by following the lead of the relationship with Jesus, which increasingly brought to light who they were and who could respond to their hearts. This is what allowed them to develop a gaze broad enough to recognize the signs of their vocation. Do we realize what newness Christ introduced into our lives?

When we don't understand that everything becomes clear by following His presence, we start to complicate our lives. What does the problem of our affectivity consist of? The question of the future? And of vocation? It's all played out in a relationship with a place where He makes Himself present. Consequently, I can only have a true, new, original kind of knowledge open to everything if I live contemporaneous to Christ. Going to Rome is a modality Christ is using to make Himself contemporaneous to each of you.

Our one certainty is that if we do not follow after Him whom we have encountered, all our certainties will collapse one after another. Certainty is not first and foremost about what you will study, what job you will find or who you will marry; and if you have already designed the invitations for your wedding, picked the caterer and the menu for the reception, what will you do with all of that if you are missing Him?

A pilgrimage is always a gesture of begging. We go to Rome as beggars, that Christ might keep His hand upon us. What we need is to learn the sense of the Mystery, who communicates Himself in

time through a concrete historical place and calls us to follow Him, to follow His lead. You do well to follow, rather than subjecting Christ's historical presence to the test of your own measure, deciding for yourselves "how" He should make Himself present in your lives; do not be like Peter who, in the face of Jesus' invitation, "We are going to Jerusalem, because the Son of Man must suffer," impulsively replies, "No! Not Jerusalem, for goodness' sake!" (cf. *Mt* 16:21-23), putting Jesus on trial.

As you go to see the Pope, then, ask and beg for this new way of knowing that Christ promised to those who follow Him with the simplicity of a child. As St. Paul says, we do not even know what to ask for. Full of the desire to have an attitude of begging, ask Christ, "Give me even this attitude, because by myself I don't know how to have it." This is why we begin every gesture in the Movement praying to the Holy Spirit, because it's the Holy Spirit that comes to help us—as St. Paul says—to give us what we cannot even imagine, to place us in that attitude of asking that allows us to recognize the answer when it comes. As you can see, we cannot take anything for granted, not even having this attitude. Because even our ultimate attitude of asking is the fruit of an encounter, as witnessed by Manzoni's Unnamed; when Cardinal Federigo asks him, "You will return, won't you?" he answers, "Will I return? [...] Will I return? Should you refuse me, I would obstinately remain outside the door, like a beggar" (*The Betrothed*, Cosimo Books, New York 2009, p. 387). The more our familiarity with Him grows, the more clearly we see our poverty and the One who can respond to it.

The pilgrimage to Rome will help you to understand what you have lived over the last few years even more deeply. A gesture like this is more educational than a hundred explanations we could give, so happy "verification," and I wish you all the experience of the hundredfold.

Milan, July 2018