

“ALIVE MEANS PRESENT”

Meditation* - 2

After the Triduum and in light of the journey of the last weeks:

- What does it mean for me to brave the battle against nothingness during this time?
- What does it mean “to be free” in the reality of daily life? What does my experience tell me?
- Are there people and relationships in my life that generate me, places in which I see the victory of life over death?



Photo by Luigi Ghirri, Caserta, 1987. From the series *Un piede nell'Eden* [One Foot in Eden]. © Estate of Luigi Ghirri

*Al mattino [In the Morning]*¹

For those who had encountered the Lord, the morning was the beginning of the day, but not just in a chronological sense: it was the beginning of the search to be able to meet Him again, as the most precious friend in one's life. This is why we pray the Angelus, remembering the encounter we have had and asking to be able to meet Him again. We will now say Morning Prayer, that gesture of the Church's care for us when, at the beginning of the day, we otherwise would not know what to say, we would not have words to express our “beginning.” Just as a mother teaches her child each syllable, the very first syllables he says, so the Church at the beginning of our day teaches us the first syllables of our adventure: asking God to come and to save us.

“This is eternal life, that they should know you” (Jn 17:3) by Andrea Mencarelli

*Non son sincera [I Am Not Sincere]*²

1. “My soul is sorrowful” (Mk 14:34)

Good morning everyone! We prayed these words in Morning Prayer: “In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding you blood,”³ which is an ex- »

¹ A. Mascagni, “Al mattino [In the Morning],” in *Canti*, Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2014, p. 180.

² A. Mascagni, “Non son sincera [I Am Not Sincere],” in *Canti*, op. cit., p. 206.

³ Cf. Book of Hours, *Friday Morning Prayer*, Coop Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2009, p. 161.

* Meditation by Andrea Mencarelli at the Easter Triduum of Student Youth (Gioventù Studentesca) on Good Friday (April 2, 2021).

» pression of an incredible power, but also reminds us that life is alive and means a battle every morning, in every beginning, that life may win out over nothingness. The encounter we have had, with the positive intuition it carries, is not a vaccine that automatically protects us from everything and solves everything. In fact, reality continues to knock, and sometimes knocks with force, posing problems, challenges and questions to us every day.

There is a site called *WikiHow* that offers answers to any question. You, too, can go see (not now, obviously): just type any request and it answers, offering solutions. A bit like Siri, but more encyclopedic: you type and it suggests results. You can ask anything, even the most bizarre things: you can ask how to cut wood, how to build a bomb; you can ask how to convince people of their own immortality. For the more astute, you can ask directly for a method to solve any problem, which is how to learn a "grammar" for life. I went to search for just that, and the first response offered suggests four points: 1) define the problem, 2) establish your goals, 3) analyze the variables, and 4) act. Perhaps something similar has already been explained to us in some class on method at school, about how to solve a problem of mathematics or to translate Latin. This method can be effective if you start from the idea that problems are first and foremost something to resolve, and therefore are also an opportunity to prove our problem-solving skills to ourselves and to others. From that perspective, there is nothing wrong, if it is a particular, defined problem in life, such as hanging a picture, mounting a shelf or producing a vaccine in a laboratory. But if the problem is life itself, what can you do?

It is probably not the first time that we have heard repeated—perhaps in a GS meeting or by one of our older friends—that there is a very simple method to deal with the issue of life, the question that is life itself: starting from and looking at our experience.

The challenges that provoke us do not, in fact, primarily require us to show that we know how to do anything; they are not a test of our abilities.

Reality, instead, is more like an "assist:" those who play soccer or other sports know that the most beautiful kick there can be in a match is not a bicycle kick or a backheel, but rather an assist, the "killer pass." For those who remember the recent victory of Inter over Juve, Barella's goal came off of an assist: Bastoni (one of his teammates) made a 60-meter cut in the middle of the field (a gap like the one Moses opened in the Red Sea) crossing the whole thing, driving his teammate to score! Wonderful! But the assist is much more beautiful than the goal. You see: reality is like a continual assist, a permanent "opening" that is offered to us. It's not a blind forward pass, hoping that someone will be there to snag the ball; reality comes to meet you and brings the ball right to your foot in an absolutely personal way. What happens when we receive an assist (an encounter, a fact, an intuition, a trial)? We have a chance to become aware of ourselves, to recognize who we are, where we are—not who we "think we are," boasting who knows what kind of soccer talent—right in the moment we are living. At that moment, it is as if the usual separation is bridged; there is not a "private" self, left in some way reserved for yourself or a few close friends, and a "public" self, which is filtered and published on Instagram. In fact, when reality calls us, challenges us, poses us problems, asks us questions and forces us to change habits, for better or for worse, it brings our authentic self, our entire "I" to the surface. The brightest part of every challenge, of every game, then, is not outside of us but primarily within us.

Our great friend Fr. Giussani (the friend Carrón also quoted yesterday evening), once used an expression as beautiful as it is revolutionary, which I invite all you to seriously consider: "The solution to the problems life poses to us every day 'does not come from addressing the problems directly, but from exploring more deeply the nature of the individual who faces them.'"⁴ We should have a slide on that to help memorize it! Referring to that passage, »

⁴L. Giussani cited in A. Savorana, *Life of Luigi Giussani*, McGill-Queen's University Press (MQUP), Montreal 2017, p. 491.

» Carrón later commented: “[...] that is, by exploring more deeply the nature of the ‘I,’ the nature of one’s desire. He is not saying something commonplace, because only if the ‘I’ becomes aware of itself to this level will it be able to free itself from all the presumed solutions and the idiocies it has in its head, as happens with us as well.”⁵ We will look more carefully this morning at what those words from Fr. Giussani mean.

What is it that is at the depths of our “I?”

I was very impressed by some of the young people who spoke at a recent assembly we had, focusing on the questions and discoveries that have matured over this year. One told of his attempt to seek happiness in his studies: since relationships with friends are limited, since you can’t go out, then we are virtuous by necessity. Since we can study, let’s commit ourselves and fill the day with studying! Brave, huh?! But when evening came this boy thought, “After a day like that, I went to bed half empty. And that did not make me happy.” Another described sort of slipping into a strange indifference to things, an apathy that made him not feel anything anymore. He said, “I am sad that I am not sad.” That it is a paradox, an incredible paradox! So much so that all we need to do is to realize what we are saying, the syllables we pronounce, to take ourselves seriously, as we said last night, and we will see the reality of what a fire of life is stirring within us under the ashes; no matter how many ashes, there’s something going on underneath them.

A fact that emerges from our experience of these months is the presence of people who are, yes, fatigued, as we heard in last night’s witnesses, or even feeling arid or sad... but who are also alive! Their “I” is alive! Not dead, though they be in the midst of the storm, of agony (agony really means “combat”).

The witnesses and contributions we read show that life is a dramatic journey; it is a battle (as we said in Morning Prayer) in which we feel all the weight of contradiction, and often also the distance between our deep desire to be happy, our thirst, and the concrete reality of things, which is sometimes desert-like. It is not something we can only see in extraordinary conditions like a pandemic (because we complained and felt arid even before the pandemic!); rather, it concerns everyday life and its many facets. Let’s think, for example, of the love we may feel for a person (our girlfriend or a dear friend) and the distracted way we often take that person for granted; or let’s look at the things we are passionate about in life—our studies, sports, art and music—and the apathy and boredom we sometimes feel hovering over us like an impenetrable armor that we would like to break, but find ourselves incapable. Life really is a battle! But not against Covid or distance learning (which are symptomatic but fleeting circumstances); the battle is against nothingness, as Carrón reminded us yesterday; that is, against that “sense of emptiness [...] whose consequence is a weakening of our relationship with reality, with circumstances, which in the end seem senseless.”⁶ We end up feeling old, resigned and slaves to inertia as young as age 15.

Even Christ was not spared this battle “on the night He was betrayed,” as we hear repeated at every Mass. That evening, when Jesus announced the total gift of himself to his friends (“I will give my life for you”) and invited them to remain with Him, the disciples did not understand what was really happening, the gravity of the situation. What did “remain here with me” mean? They were already with Him! They were His friends, they were always with Him, they listened to Him, they followed Him, they watched Him, they tried to learn from Him. For them, Jesus’s physical presence seemed sufficient. That evening Peter, an impetuous, energetic type, a leader (not surprisingly Jesus had chosen him as head of the »

⁵ J. Carrón, “In the Collapse of Evidences, the Generation of a Subject,” *Traces*, n. 12/2014.

⁶ J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes. What Saves Us From Nothingness?* Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, Milan 2020, p. 8-9.

» Apostles), renewed his promise of friendship to Jesus: "Though all may have their faith in you shaken, mine will never be,"⁷ which means, "I will never abandon you. The others, maybe, but not me; you can trust me 100%." Even in the face of that energetic affirmation of esteem, Jesus replies with a sorrowful tone, "Peter, my friend, this very night before the cock crows, you will deny me three times."⁸

But how—we should ask—could there be such a contradiction? Peter was sincere; everyone was sincerely on Jesus's side! Even Judas, at the beginning: he was called by Jesus, ate with Him, drank with Him, played cards with Him; he had seen the most amazing miracles; he had lived a thousand moments with Jesus physically present in his life. His eyes were full of a thousand exceptional facts. But with all these "graces of God" (it should be said!) how can you start to slip? How is it possible to slip? How can you be sad after having already encountered the happiness of life, the love of life?

One day, Judas asked himself, "When will Jesus finally change things for real, the way I have in mind, the way I expect they should change? When will He really demonstrate His divine power and take reality by force? When will He make it so all the contradictions in the world—my own contradictions and my fragility—will be erased, so that enemies will be punished and friendship will triumph?" It seemed, in fact, that the moment, in the way he imagined it, never came, and it was always "wait and see." Consequently, a worm began to dig its way into Judas's heart, little by little each day. You don't see the worm, it seems negligible, imperceptible, and yet it works in a devastating way. Over time, Judas convinced himself, "Maybe I was wrong, maybe it wasn't true; in fact, I *am* really wrong, because nothing is changing here."

Also on Jesus's side were James and John, nicknamed the "sons of thunder," impetuous and determined to follow Jesus to the end in building up His kingdom. Jesus also had a special regard for them: not only had He called them, but He had also shown them particular signs of His divinity; for example, He wanted them to be with Him on the Mount for the Transfiguration, when He revealed His radiant nature as the Son of God.⁹ They had seen Jesus in his deepest nature, together with Moses and Elijah. That evening, too, Jesus wanted them with Him when, agitated and troubled, He went into the garden called Gethsemane and asked them, together with Peter (the elite, the inner circle), to stay with Him and to pray. But while Jesus was sweating blood, James, John, and Peter fell asleep three times. Disarmed, Jesus said to them, "You could not keep watch with me for one hour?"¹⁰

That night, Jesus said something as human as it was terrible, for us as well: "My soul is sorrowful even to death." Just think what kind of torments Jesus must have felt to say something like that; what kind of solitude, though He was surrounded by the physical presence of his friends (the very friends He chose Himself!).

There are so many things that disappoint us in life, that cause pain, but perhaps the worst of all is being abandoned. It's not just about being "alone," in fact many times we really appreciate being alone (like when you, at a certain point of the day, go to your room and listen to music alone and think "how lovely," or if you share a room with a brother or sister, when they stay overnight somewhere else you think, "finally the room is all mine, I can have some alone time," I don't mean that!). It is, rather, to perceive a deep estrangement with the world around us, which should be familiar, but is not. It is to perceive things and people, especially those most "friendly" to you, as infinitely distant. Maybe they're there, beside you, or behind the screen you're looking at, but inside yourself you feel an icy solitude. St. Thomas »

⁷ Mt 26:33.

⁸ Mt 26:34.

⁹ Cf. Mt 17.

¹⁰ Mt 26:40.

» Aquinas defines sadness as: "The desire for an absent good."¹¹

Jesus did not hide anything of His own humanity, but told His friends, "I'm sad." There are, in fact, moments in which everything feels like a desert and the things we fill our lives with seem false. "In my hands, everything turned to dust, / only names with no reason [...]: What remains is the regret of wasted time / and maybe, the expectation of You." The distant desire of an absent good. We will sing those words together in "La Guerra [The Battle]."¹²

La guerra [The Battle]

2. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me" (Lk 22:42)

All of Jesus's life had been an unceasing sign of good, a bright spot in the history of humanity. Jesus never did anything wrong, unlike us. But that does not mean that everyone automatically accepted the brightness in Jesus. Because "eternal life," as He had defined it—that is, true life, a happy life, the life that our heart desires—is not an iOS update we download into our body and then just restart and everything is resolved. Imagine if the Mystery acted that way: a download of a few minutes, a restart and then our whole lives go on smoothly, with all the meaning and happiness already inside, downloaded, without viruses, without problems, without loading delays, nothing! But not even Jesus was spared the journey, and not even Jesus tried to get out of the journey.

What does man do in the face of contradictions? What do we do when we are faced with contradictions? When we experience the aridity of a day floating from one video connection to another, turning our camera on and off again? We wish we could change reality. That idea is not wrong, and it is not even a sin of presumption to want to change something that we perceive as trying. It's human! But when we cannot do so (in the midst of inevitable circumstances, like the many sacrifices asked of us during period), we may ask ourselves the question that so many of you sent in your contributions: "How can I find enjoyment in this situation?"

I would ask a question in return: who said you should find enjoyment in this situation? Where is it written? Who's that "terrorist" who told you you *should* like it? This point is crucial, and needs to be clarified so as not to condemn ourselves into a swamp to rot in, without anyone having asked us to. Not everything in life is equal! We are made for life; we do not have to think too much about it. We do not have to ask someone, because we already realize it by ourselves: we are made to be happy.

And so what? So, the first thing we can do is compare what we have before our eyes with our heart's profound need for happiness—this is called "judgment"—and say "this is *for* me," or "this is not for me." When we use our heart in this way, with this seriousness, as Carrón told us last night, what Giussani calls "elementary experience" happens. Then you understand that the point is not to make yourselves like the things the heart recognizes as foreign, but rather to make a judgment. Otherwise, it would be like trying to fit into a shoe five sizes too small. How could you? You can't! We do not have to try to please the salesman even if the shoes don't fit us. We say, "these are no good!"

The night He was betrayed, experiencing how His friends abandoned Him and foreseeing that in a short time, everyone would get rid of him (the Romans, His friends and His enemies), Jesus makes a judgment. "I am sad. Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me," which is to say, "if possible, take this struggle away, erase my sorrow, because I am »

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 20, art. 1

¹² C. Chieffo, "La guerra [The Battle], in *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 234-235.

» not made for sorrow." What could be more human?

The words of a Russian author, Vasily Grossman, may also resonate in us. They seem almost like a prayer we can relate to, "That everything return to the way it was before that unbearable change, that everything return to being habit, something well known, and that there remain no trace of the newness that breaks your bones and enters into your blood..."¹³

3. "...Still, not my will but yours be done" (Lk 22:42)

"What fills my heart?" our friend in Bologna's classmate asked yesterday in response to the witness from Zatto, the young man who is seriously ill that we were talking about. Digging into the deep sadness that Jesus felt, what was inside His heart? What was at there at the depths of his "I"? A presence. The bond with an Other. All the sentiment that exploded in Jesus's heart on that night, which would have extended up to today [Good Friday], up to the wood of the cross, carried within it a cry, an appeal to an Other: "Father."

One of you explains it well, describing feeling stuck like a "couch potato," her annoyance seeing classmates who seem to be "taking it well," and the emptiness she experiences repeating ritual words. To the point of asking herself: "Why am I here?" She comments, saying this: "There was no need to mince words to understand: I felt empty, I was crying because my heart was shouting to me that no, I was not happy like this, the questions were, and are still there. It's not true that all things are equal, that I am incapable of judging reality, that I am superficial. I have a heart that has felt correspondence with another [...], I want my heart to be inflamed like it was on that day [...]. I want to feel anxious, awake, alive."

Now, we will listen to a really beautiful song by Adriana Mascagni, "Amica del mistero [Friend of the Mystery]."

Amica del Mistero [Friend of the Mystery]

"I was born a friend of the Mystery / so I do not know how to speak / unless it is with You / so I do not know how to think / unless it is of You."¹⁴ This is not poetic suggestion, it is the awareness one cannot live, cannot truly live without a great and real relationship, without one that is alive, present and that embraces our entire life.

What Jesus witnessed to us was "not an effort, but being daughters and sons. [...] The life of fullness that He shows is not that of being capable, but of being a son,"¹⁵ as Carrón wrote in his famous book, *The Radiance in Your Eyes*. This being daughters and sons is made visible within reality. There are not shortcuts, you don't see it outside of reality or in our thoughts. We often imagine Jesus is like one of the Marvel superheroes, one who commandeers reality, flying over it, destroying or building it up, doing whatever He pleases. That's what Peter, a friend, the leader and the rock, thought that night in Gethsemane, when they have all gathered around them and he pulls out his sword and strikes a soldier. But Jesus stops him. Why does He stop him?! Wasn't he trying to help? He stops him and orders him to lay down his arms, "Put your sword back into its sheath [...]. Do you think that I cannot call upon my Father and he will not provide me at this moment with more than twelve legions of angels?"¹⁶

Still, Jesus was not passively resigned to the circumstances, he did not simply endure them. He does not hide His own sadness—which is the first symptom of our call to happiness, to »

¹³ V. Grossman, *Il bene sia con voi! [Blessing To You!]*, Adelphi, Milan 2011, p. 212. Our Translation.

¹⁴ A. Mascagni, "Amica del Mistero [Friend of the Mystery]," in "Who are you that you fill my heart with your absence?" booklet for the 2018 GS Triduum, pp. 44-46, clonline.org

¹⁵ J. Carrón, *The Radiance In Your Eyes*, op. cit., p. 113.

¹⁶ Mt 26:52-53.

» life—and He responds when He is questioned. For example, before Pilate, He said, “My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. [...]”—but He was the one who had just told Peter not to fight!!—“For this I was born and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth.”¹⁷ “You (Pilate) would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above.”¹⁸

What sustained Jesus when He was put to the test was not a naïve optimism—like many people were saying during the first *lockdown*, “Everything will be fine!” but who said everything would be fine? Where is it written?—it was not optimism, but rather a solid hope, which is entirely different than optimism. A famous theologian, Jean Daniélou, explains it well: “Hope is not optimism. Optimism is the easy attitude by which we think that things will always work out by themselves. In a more reflective form, it considers evil as a simple disorder that will be eliminated by itself, or like growing pains. By voiding the tragic nature of evil, optimism is the worst enemy of hope.”¹⁹

Those who live in hope, in contrast, grasp the full depth of the drama of life, of sacrifice, and pass through it not by their own efforts, but rather strengthened by something else that is alive, that is present from outside oneself. “Because of this, we need to live suffering within the presence of God. Then, the suffering is not eliminated, but it loses its poison. It no longer poisons the soul, but rather purifies it. It is no longer a messenger of anguish, but of peace.”²⁰

In order to understand better, we’ll read the contribution one of you sent. “Over the last three years, I had distanced myself, I thought definitively, from the Church and from CL, in part influenced by new classmates I spent time with. My house, in those years, had become a bar where I spent every day, talking on and on about nothing. Despite that, I was very care-free and felt happy. When the pandemic began, distancing me from distractions, I felt really bad. [...] I am sad. That discomfort allowed me to ask myself what else I wanted out of life and out of myself (to more deeply explore the nature of the person, that’s what it means). It was like regaining the deepest part of myself, which had been unknown to me for a while. From that moment on, a series of events became like a call to me. First of all was a time of quarantine spent at the beach with some friends from the movement whom I hadn’t seen in a while. I could not help but compare what I was living there, that kind of friendship and way of spending time together, with the way I had lived the last few years. For the first time with my own eyes, I saw the beautiful face of the Church and of the movement incarnate in the people close to me. All my convictions and everything that had made me happy in previous years became meaningless. Something so great had happened that I still can’t explain it myself, and so it must not totally depend on me. What happened gave meaning to the pain, and consequently to the questions I had asked myself in the previous months. This discovery of depending on someone did not make me feel less accomplished, less complete. On the contrary, it made me perceive a unity, a completeness in my life for the first time.”

It is incredible and revolutionary to be able to live our lives with the lack of prejudice described by this friend: she tries all kinds of things, feels a discomfort, lets herself recover, makes another mistake, and starts to see her desire for happiness again. She follows the clues she sees of an answer to the point of recognizing a living reality, which she does not build or produce, but if she welcomes it, chooses to be in relationship, chooses to remain »

¹⁷ Jn 18:36-37.

¹⁸ Jn 19:11.

¹⁹ J. Daniélou, *Saggio sul mistero della storia [Essay on the Mystery of History]*, Morcelliana, Brescia 2012, p. 370. Our translation.

²⁰ H. de Lubac, *Paradossi e nuovi paradossi [Paradoxes and Further Paradoxes]*, Jaca Book, Milan 1989, p. 94. Our translation.

» (as Jesus said to the disciples), it makes her feel more complete, more herself. This witness also helps us to understand what a "charism" is: "The mode of time, of space, of character, of temperament, and the psychological, affective, intellectual way with which the Lord becomes event for me, and for others in this same way,"²¹ as the School of Community we worked on says. The same way that our friend saw in "what was happening at the beach, in that kind of friendship and in those faces, that way of spending time together," that difference in potential compared to the way she had been living the last few years.

4. "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit" (Lk 23:46)

One of you wrote, "I was rereading the invitation letter for the Triduum and I paused at the question, 'Why do I exist?' I thought, 'How would I know why I exist? If it had been up to me, maybe I wouldn't have made myself, at least not like this!' Still, I could not help but observe that I do exist all the same. I exist all the same! So, then, I thought that if I live my life that is so tiny all for myself, of course it will remain small, but if I live it for the one who gave me life, maybe it can become something more. So, the question is no longer, 'Why do I exist? What is the reason for my existence?'" but rather, "Why do I exist, for what purpose? For *whom* do I exist?"

Jesus also gave an answer to that question, "I have life because of the Father."²²

Because when you are reached by a hope that, from the outside, enters deep into your bones, into your heart, your gaze is lifted from your own navel and the question that stirs within changes: For whom do I exist? Today, this morning, throughout the day, for whom do I live? I do not live for myself. My center of gravity is not in me; rather everything in me hinges on what I have encountered, on the hope that has come to meet me. Think about starting every morning like this, with this waiting (although we don't always have the luck of a friend who sings *Al Mattino* so for us). "My heart / today / is nothing but / a beat of longing,"²³ Ungaretti wrote.

Many things about me may still be imperfect or off-balance, I may fall short even a hundred times a day, which may even be the case for us today, because we will not be spared the battle against boredom and distraction, but do not worry if you are distracted, rather ask that you may be able to have a moment of silence, even a brief moment of silence during the day in which you can look and be moved by your own experience. Even if I often fall short, there is a rock I can cling to and stand up again, upon which I can build my umpteenth attempt, to which I can return each time after I walk away, like our friend who went to the beach. Jesus lived this solid certainty in his relationship with the Father, from whom He came, for whom He lived and to whom He gave His whole life, up to the last breath. What an adventure to live like this! Not like dogs or machines, but full of this awareness of being continually wanted and taken hold of by one who loves us. No reality, my friends, is hostile to us; everything can be lived to the full. Every joy can overflow a hundred times more; every sacrifice can be faced (even if we do not like it, and let's be honest we do not like it) and every pain can be offered, just like when we were children and we threw ourselves into the arms of our mother, totally defenseless, saying, "I have this question, I don't understand this thing, or I have this precious treasure in my life (my girlfriend, my friends who are the most precious thing I have), I have this pain, I am called to this sacrifice that I don't want, but I offer it to You, because I can offer everything to You because I know that You love me and embrace all of me, so help me to carry it. »

²¹ L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, MQUP, Montreal 2010, p. 79.

²² Jn 6:57.

²³ G. Ungaretti, "Oggi [Today]" in Id., *Poesie e prose liriche [Poems and Lyrical Prose]. 1915-1920*, Mondadori, Milan 1989, p. 40. Our translation.

» Guys, this is something entirely within our reach!

Listen to what another girl recounted. "Recently, I joined GS, a group where I was given the opportunity to reflect on the small things of every day, which we often make the mistake of ignoring. Over time, I recognized the superficiality that made my life monotonous and—in part thanks to the unity that I found in my friends in School of Community, who make me more and more aware at every meeting that I am not alone in my 'torments' through their stories and their experiences—I realize that I'm starting to appreciate the people around me more. Also,"—pay attention to what she adds—"I would dare to say, to appreciate myself too. So in a certain sense I am 'grateful' to the pandemic for opening this new world to me (it takes the poison out of the circumstance); in any case I hope it will end so I can participate in person and have the opportunity to get to know all the people of this group better." This is what it means to be human, guys! Of course it would be much nicer to see each other every day in person, but even now we can live the present as protagonists, using this our desire and our expectation to "see" where something happens.

A person—we are coming to the end—could still say, "It's all nice: Jesus, those friends certain of their lives, the guileless simplicity of that girl ('she's new,' you could cynically comment), but I am not like them, but then life changes, you experience aridity like a fistful of sand in your mouth." That thought could stew in our heads, especially if we are going through a difficult moment, making us almost want to take an immediate step backwards in the face of this possible journey. But let us not forget, my friends, that our hope, our strength, is not in knowing how to "act like" Jesus, it *is* Jesus! The disciples, Our Lady, the centurion who saw Jesus dying on the cross: they did not worry about emulating Jesus, of acting like Him. That would never have crossed their mind, because it was impossible, and because they were not interested in emulating Jesus; they wanted to be with Him! They could easily recognize the power, the fullness, the vivacity and the profoundly human gaze that emanated from Him. They had only to welcome Him, without measuring themselves, without filters, just letting Him reach them. As another friend helps us to understand, "The friends who are decisive are the ones who always put me in a truer position in front of things, in front of what happens. So I, including when it comes to the days of distance learning ahead of us, cannot be afraid, not because there is no struggle or sadness, but because I recognize that in recent months I have never been left alone, neither by my friends, nor by my teachers, nor by my older friends." And she concludes, listen carefully, saying, "My hope is based on the certainty of these faces that have clear names and surnames, and who I have well in mind, from whom I receive a free and, ultimately, inexplicable love for me. It is only the certainty of these relationships that enables me to face everything about myself and everything that happens around me."

This certainty, which for us is a slow journey, like that of a seed that longs to blossom, was in Jesus a dominant and daily refrain, so clear and so full of tenderness for our uncertainty that it did not allow him to retreat even in the face of extreme fear, the fear of the cross, that He might bear witness to the Truth of life and to place it back before our eyes. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do. [...] Into your hands I commend my Spirit."²⁴

Please stand and we will listen to the music in silence.

*Dulcis Christe*²⁵

²⁴ Cf. Lk 23:34.46.

²⁵ M. Grancini, XVII century, "Dulcis Christe," in *Canti*, op. cit., p. 20.