



EXERCISES OF THE FRATERNITY OF COMMUNION AND LIBERATION

**OUR EYES ARE FIXED ON JESUS,  
WHO IS THE ORIGIN AND FULFILLMENT OF FAITH**



RIMINI, APRIL 14-16, 2023



# OUR EYES ARE FIXED ON JESUS, WHO IS THE ORIGIN AND FULFILLMENT OF FAITH

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RIMINI 2023

On the cover: Fra Angelico, *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, fresco, detail, 1442,  
Florence, Convent of San Marco. © Raffaello Bencini/Archivi Alinari, Firenze.

*“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme, ‘Our eyes are fixed on Jesus, who is the origin and fulfillment of faith,’ the Holy Father Francis sends his warm greeting, with the wish that these days of reflection will kindle the desire to look to the future with trust, in the awareness that the Risen Christ has changed the direction of history, opening a horizon of hope for ourselves, reality, and the mystery of life. With these wishes, His Holiness assures you of his prayers and gladly imparts his apostolic blessing, the pledge of every desired good.”*

***Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness,  
April 13, 2023***

# *Friday April 14, evening*

*Sergej Rachmaninov*

*Vespers, op. 37, Aleksandr V. Svešnikov–The USSR State Academy Choir*

*Spirto Gentil n. 17 (Ricordi-BMG), Universal*

## ■ INTRODUCTORY GREETINGS

### **Daide Prospero**

Let us call upon the Holy Spirit to grant us the simplicity of heart of children, full of curiosity and desire, who fear nothing and set no objections or perplexities in front of the newness they encounter. May He open us to welcome the fruits of His action, that we may be regenerated by it in the journey of these days.

*Come, Holy Spirit*

First of all, I'll read the Holy Father's telegram:

“On the occasion of the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation on the theme, ‘Our eyes are fixed on Jesus, who is the origin and fulfillment of faith,’ the Holy Father Francis sends his warm greeting, with the wish that these days of reflection will kindle the desire to look to the future with trust, in the awareness that the Risen Christ has changed the direction of history, opening a horizon of hope for ourselves, reality, and the mystery of life. With these wishes, His Holiness assures you of his prayers and gladly imparts his apostolic blessing, the pledge of every desired good. Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of His Holiness.”

In these days, our friends in Italy and in over thirty other nations will be following the Spiritual Exercises with us by video link, and in the coming weeks another sixty-nine nations will also participate.

A year has passed since the last Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity preached by Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori (abbot general of the Cistercian order), and I am truly happy that this year, once again, he will accompany us in the meditations of these days. On behalf of the entire Fraternity, I thank him from the heart for his precious willingness to be here. I think it went well last time [*applause*].

Why are we here again? Why have we returned?

It has been a decidedly intense year, full of events and provocations that have been important for our life. Last year's Exercises marked a fundamental step in our journey: we were still immersed in discussions and interpretations of the vicissitudes we were going through when Fr. Mauro forcefully set us in front of Jesus's words to Martha: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing."<sup>1</sup> These words rang for us like a question: where do we see in our daily experience this one thing that is needed?

The first thing to recognize is that along this road in these recent months we have been accompanied. Fr. Giussani himself, with his characteristic discretion, well remembered by those who knew him personally, accompanied us in the dramatic and painful challenges we have faced. I do not say this in blind faith, but with good reason, thinking how difficult it would have been to navigate the storm of these past eighteen months if, through a happy and perhaps not a chance coincidence, we had not been accompanied by the continuous memory of Fr. Giussani made so powerfully alive among us by the celebrations marking the one hundred years since his birth. As you well remember, these celebrations brought us to Saint Peter's Square on October 15, at the Holy Father's invitation. What a turning point this meeting with the pope was! For those who participated with simplicity, it truly marked a new beginning: we started afresh, abandoning doubts and uncertainties, with our hearts full of promise and intent on a fascinating task. We raised our eyes, which had been bent over our own internal issues, to fix them again on Him who through Fr. Giussani's charism chose us for great things. Peter, with the power God grants His ministers on Earth, raised us up and gave us certainty again, the certainty that we are wanted, loved, and esteemed. We remembered the word that God addressed to us, as He did to the prophet Jeremiah: "With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept My mercy toward you."<sup>2</sup>

So, we worked three months on the pope's words to us, finding some fundamental indications for the best way to live with maturity

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<sup>1</sup> Lk 10:41-42.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jer 31:3.

the great responsibilities entrusted to us; that is, to contribute through our lives and communion so that the charism God entrusted to the Church through Fr. Giussani bears fruit. We experienced personally the meaning of the co-essentiality of charism and institution, which we reflected on this summer at the International Assembly of Leaders and then in our communities prior to the audience with the pope. To use the Holy Father's words, "Charism and authority [...] are complementary, both necessary."<sup>3</sup>

As you will remember, this summer we spoke analogously about the figures of Peter and John, concluding the introduction of that assembly with two questions. First, we asked why the Lord wanted there to be this irreducible tension in the communion between charism and institution, a unity in tension such that there is no one point through which all prophecy, all grace, all the action of the Spirit passes. The answer to this question today appears clearer to us because of the experience we have had walking together, accompanied paternally by the authority of the Church. The second question, you will remember, was left somewhat unresolved: if it is true that John was the more charismatic of the two, why not choose him rather than Peter as the ultimate leader of the Church? Why not choose the disciple "whom Jesus loved"?<sup>4</sup> These are the words of the Gospel. Today, in the light of Pope Francis's words, I believe we can understand the meaning of Jesus's choice at least a little. I believe that we all have impressed in our memory Fr. Giussani's voice echoing in Saint Peter's Square and making our hearts vibrate with one of his powerful comments on the "yes of Peter,"<sup>5</sup> this yes, so poor and simple, and at the same time magnificent, above all because it was able to overcome the sense of unworthiness and littleness that filled Simon's heart. When the pope

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, "Let this Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness Burn in Your Hearts," Audience of Holy Father Francis on the Occasion of the Centenary of Luigi Giussani's birth, October 15, 2022, Saint Peter's Square, 17. Available at <https://it.clonline.org/cm-files/2022/11/07/inser-toudienza15ottobre-web-ing.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. "Life, the Response to Another Who is Calling Me," Notes from Davide Proserpi's summary at the International Assembly of Leaders of Communion and Liberation, La Thuile, August 30, 2022, at 4–5. Available at <https://english.clonline.org/cm-files/2022/11/18/dp-sintesi-air-2022-ing.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation*, 1989, Rimini, transcript of a video included in the virtual exhibit GIUSSANI100; now in Luigi Giussani, *La verità nasce dalla carne* [Truth is born of the flesh], ed. Julián Carrón (Milan: Bur, 2019), 135–36.



spoke of humility as the indispensable condition for responding adequately to the call of the present time, I could not help but hear Fr. Giussani's voice speaking about Peter, this gruff fisherman of whom the Lord, in entrusting him with the enormous responsibility of His Church, asked just one question: "Do you love Me?" "Do you love Me?"

In the past months I have visited many of our communities in all of the regions of Italy and also abroad. I have been able to verify that the Holy Father's concern suggests for us the road that will allow us to bring out the "potential" of the charism that, he told us, "is still largely to be discovered."<sup>6</sup> This point is very important, so allow me to dwell on it for a moment.

What is this humility of which the pope speaks? Humility is not saying, "I'm worthless; I am nothing." On the contrary, humility is saying, "I am nothing, but You are stronger than my nothingness and smallness, and if You call me to great things, fragile and limited as I am, I'm in, count me in. Yes Lord, You know that I love You. I am with You, aware that only with Your help, only if You are with me, can I do what You ask of me." So, humility is recognizing that I have nothing more than this yes, and that this yes is sufficient if, as I say it, I do not get the idea that I can do it all myself, if I am there entirely conscious that without Your constant help, I cannot even go a yard. For me, this is humility.

That first question Jesus asked Peter has helped me to reflect on this year. Actually, the first time Jesus did not ask Peter "Do you love Me?" but "Do you love Me more than these?"<sup>7</sup> Let's imagine the scene: John was certainly there nearby, and Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love Me more than the others? Do you love Me more than him? Him who was under the cross supporting my mother lacerated by pain as they crucified Me, after you had denied Me three times! Him who rested his head on My heart in the great hour of the Last Supper, to whom I confided the identity of the traitor, him who was with Me, always close by in the Sanhedrin at My trial when they spat on Me and slapped Me. Him who while you denied Me, had the courage to

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<sup>6</sup> Francis, "Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness," 15.

<sup>7</sup> Jn 21:15.

say that he was one of My people, that he belonged to Me. Do you love Me more than him? Can you say this?" Clearly, Peter could not answer this question with a yes, with that yes! In fact, he did not answer this part of the question. No comparison, no measurement of who is the best or the most loving or intelligent counted any longer. It was not important. Not only was it no longer important, but it was even more beautiful because the humiliation implied by the comparison turned into a positive value—it made Peter's yes even more humble, made Peter clearly conscious of the fact that he had been chosen not because he was the best but in spite of his unworthiness and smallness in front of a task that nobody (not even John!) was up to.

So, at this point you can begin to sense a possible answer to this question of why Peter and not John. In these months, the answer has become increasingly clear for me: because nobody understood better than Peter, the denier, that he needed Jesus's grace and the contribution of John, Andrew, Paul, and all the others to carry out his task well.

I think the same thing is true for us. I certainly need the Lord, and how! But I also need you. If I did not acknowledge that I need you in addition to the Lord, I would easily end up thinking I am the one mediator of Jesus's grace and would fall into the personalism and self-referentiality that the Church is warning us about. This is the reason for our insistence this year on centering our gaze again on our *communion*. Without this humility that makes us aware that we need each other, even within a clear following of the indicated authority, all of us would fall prisoner to our own partialities and particularisms.

Pope Francis continues: "I would summarize this attitude of humility with two verbs: *to remember*, that is, to restore to the heart, to recall the encounter with the Mystery that led us up to here; and *to generate*, looking ahead with confidence, listening to the cries that the Spirit expresses newly today. 'Humble men or women are those who are concerned not simply with the past, but also with the future, since they know how to look ahead, to spread their branches, remembering the past with gratitude. The humble give life, attract others and push onwards towards the unknown that lies ahead.'"<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Francis, "Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness,"<sup>14</sup>.

This is how the “miracle of change” happens in our life, made possible only by following Christ, as we have studied in the School of Community in these months. “Every day we are asked nothing more than to preserve faithfully and loyally our desire and will to be humble and obedient before the greatness of the Being who makes us.”<sup>9</sup>

The presence of Christ among us over time overcomes our fragility, smallness, and meanness of spirit, not because it magically eliminates them but because over time it renders them less than totally determinant; His presence makes them less and less important and causes our attachment to Him to dominate more and more. In fact, this attachment is the one true road to *unity*, to the victory of unity over division.

Right after the October 15 audience I wrote you these words: “Our task has become more precise: the educational proposal of the coming years will aim to focus on the steps of the path traced by the Holy Father. The more we are willing to follow them, the more our companionship, in fidelity to the charism we have received, will be a place alive with light, unity and hope for the Church and for all humanity, and will be able to correspond more—albeit with all the limitations of our poor selves—to the expectation that Pope Francis expressed to us with paternal vigor: from you ‘the Church, and I myself, I hope for more, much more.’”<sup>10</sup>

These Spiritual Exercises mark a fundamental step in that journey, also considering that in recent months Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life (whom I would like to thank very much for being here in these days to live these Spiritual Exercises together with us), has encouraged us to stress adequate formation on the theme of charisms. This is why, together with Fr. Lepori and the friends who guide our companionship, we thought it useful for the spiritual journey of the Fraternity to dedicate the gesture of the Spiritual Exercises and the follow-up work we will do in our

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<sup>9</sup> Luigi Giussani, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2022), 44.

<sup>10</sup> Davide Prospero, “Our Path,” letter to the entire movement after the audience with Pope Francis. October 21, 2022. Available at <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2022/10/21/davide-prosperi-letter-audience-october-15>.

Fraternity groups to reflecting more deeply on the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, including through the particular nature of our charism. These virtues fill women and men with the love of Christ, enabling us to live fully in relationship with God. They ground and determine the actions of the Christian. Giussani spoke and wrote a great deal on this theme: just think of the contents of texts like *Is it Possible to Live This Way?* and *Si può (veramente?!) vivere così?* [Is it (truly?) possible to live this way?].

This year we will focus on faith. What is faith? What experience of faith do we have, and what experience can we have of it in our companionship?

To begin this gesture, I would like to read you Fr. Giussani's words to a small group of friends gathered like us for the Spiritual Exercises of 1968, words that Julián had us listen to in Giussani's own voice at the 2018 Beginning Day. They seem to have been thought and said exactly for us! Giussani said:

“It is faith that we seek, faith that 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.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Luigi Giussani, “Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of the Charles Péguy Cultural Center,” Varigotti, November 1, 1968, quoted in “Alive Means Present!” Beginning Day for Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation, September 29, 2018. *Traces*, October 2018, “Page One,” 4. Available at <https://english.clonline.org/cm-files/2018/10/15/page-one-2018-ing.pdf>.

So, now, how can we answer the initial question of why we are here again? We are here again to beg for His presence.

Let us open ourselves to listening in the way the pope encouraged us to do: “The humble give life, attract others and push onwards towards the unknown that lies ahead.”

■ INTRODUCTION  
Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori

*“My eyes have seen your salvation”*

**Reviving the charism**

The *Life* of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux describes how, in order to rekindle his desire for conversion, Bernard often asked himself, “*Bernarde, ad quid venisti?*” (Bernard, what did you come for?)<sup>12</sup> He did not ask this so he could mourn the loss of his initial passion, or seek to revive it by his own effort, but to find again the awareness that the initial fire remains a hidden mystery in our lives and in the life of a community or a relationship like marriage.

Saint Paul wrote to Timothy: “I recall your sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and that I am confident lives also in you. For this reason, I remind you to stir into flame the gift of God that you have through the imposition of my hands.”<sup>13</sup>

Timothy was still young, and yet Paul invited him not to procrastinate in his commitment to stir into flames the fire of the gift of God (literally of the *charism* of God) that dwelt deeply in him. The “sincere faith” he received through tradition from his mother and grandmother, and the sacramental gift of his vocation received through Paul’s laying on of hands, were not a reality to fish up nostalgically from the past, like when you look at a photo album from memorable days, but burning embers one is responsible for stirring up, for stoking (literally the Greek term could be translated with “renew the life of the fire,” the fire of God).

The initial passion, the fervor, the ardor of the first encounter, the “first love,” as it says in the Book of Revelation,<sup>14</sup> the sincerity of sincere faith, not hypocritical, not covered by the dust of interpretations

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<sup>12</sup> William of St. Thierry, *Vita prima Bernardi* [First life of Bernard] (1147), I, 4; PL 185, 238. Our translation.

<sup>13</sup> 2 Tm 1:5–6.

<sup>14</sup> Rv 2:4.

and theorizations, can be rekindled, can be stoked. Why? Because it remains and does not die out. How is this so? Because I am not the one who lit all this, who gave myself all this! It is a charism of God, a gift of God's grace, a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. So when you realize that you have let the embers be covered in infinite layers of ash, that you have allowed them to be taken for granted, covered in layers of forgetfulness, distraction, and neglect, you can then realize how much ash covers your relationship with your wife, your husband, your community, your vocation, the company of people related to the charism whom you encountered, and the sacraments you received, from baptism onwards, and that you continue to receive. When you realize all this, what do you have to do?

You just have to regain awareness that the charism, the gift of God, is there, alive, burning under all this, not because we ourselves are a good but because God is merciful and faithful! The charism is a "gratuitous gift of God," and, as Saint Paul writes to the Romans about the election of Israel, "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable!"<sup>15</sup> By His nature, He cannot take back a gift, because everything is gratuitous for Him who is love. For God, taking back a gift would be a renunciation of Himself. In a certain sense, hell is the "eternal place of deposit" of the irrevocable gifts of God that have been refused.

A charism, a vocation, a grace, but also and above all the gift of life, the gift of existing, of being who we are, of having a soul, are never to be "re-given" or "re-created." They are to be revived, to be stoked into a flame.

Always and in every case, this is so even when you are almost a saint. Timothy was an excellent disciple and an excellent pastor, but Paul encouraged him to revive the charism, the sacramental one as well, that he received because it is never taken for granted and can never be so, because the charism is the gift of an Other. Paul probably wrote this letter to Timothy during his last period in prison, so between 58 and 62 AD. This means about thirty years after Pentecost. For us, it would be as if the death and resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost that happened fifty-four days later occurred around 1993. We think that at the beginning the Christian community lived

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<sup>15</sup> Rom 11:29.

the charism of Pentecost as a constant given. Actually, from the very beginning, the apostles had to continually renew the invitation to stir up the gift of the Spirit, not to grieve it,<sup>16</sup> not to quench it.<sup>17</sup> In this we see that Pentecost was not an initial discharge of energy that made the Church function mechanically until the Parousia, but that it too, like Christ, is an ever-present event that our freedom must constantly welcome and allow to work. This, then, is the stoking of the flame of the charism to which the Church always invites us.

### **“Stir into flame the gift of God that you have”**

But how does this happen? We have to admit that we all suffer from a structural incapacity to keep alive the flame of the charism in us. The more we think that it remains lit by itself, the more we see that it dampens, gets covered with ashes, and produces more smoke than flames. What a tender father Saint Paul was for his favorite disciple Timothy, and for many others! It is as if he wrote him, “Timothy, don’t be scandalized if you feel the fervor of the gift of God you have received lessen in the wear and tear of your days and your ministry, the passion that in the beginning seemed would never dampen. Don’t be shocked that you are this way. What you can do is to begin again every day to revive it in you first of all, and this will also revive it in the people entrusted to you, the communities you are responsible for, and the whole world!”

We often think of a charism as if it were a kind of cloak thrown over a given group of people and that to remain faithful to the charism, we just have to be careful not to leave the covering of the cloak, or if you prefer, the sheepfold. Instead, like on the day of Pentecost, the gift of God is an impetuous and powerful wind that blows on all present, but the fire that emerges from it settles on each of them, a flame for each of them, as if placed there by the Spirit with attention and motherly care. The Spirit chooses for each person the modality and form of the settling of the charism on that person. The gift of God is the one

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. Eph 4:30.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. 1 Thes 5:19.



Spirit, but it becomes perceptible and is lived when it is welcomed personally by each person. Each person recognizes in his or her own heart the specific charism granted to a companionship, a people of individuals. After all, even the communion that binds many in a particular charism is only recognized in the heart of each member, somewhat like the two disciples of Emmaus. “Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”<sup>18</sup> The heart of each of them bore witness to the charism that united them.

“Stir into flame the gift of God that *you* have.” The awareness that the gift of God, given even in common, is to be stirred up in each of us in order to stir it up among everyone, is fundamental for remaining united in a vocational journey, in a mission. How often, for example, in a marriage or in communities, do people complain about the dying out of the initial gift, and stop there to complain about the others who fail to collaborate in reviving the charism. Instead, if only we understood the power of individual freedom, humbly beginning from itself, beginning to stir up in itself the gift received! It is truly like stoking a fire, and when it burns, it communicates by its very nature. When the Holy Spirit seizes a person, even the most insignificant one, like a piece of straw, a blaze begins! But it is the Spirit, the fire, that spreads, not the straw or the wood that allows it to burn.

For this reason, the responsibility for a great charism in the Church and the glory of Christ in the world is totally each of ours, is played out entirely in each person.

I emphasize this because often we come across people who complain that the charism as a whole is disappearing, or the charism in the leaders, but then they do not ask themselves about the charism in their own relationship with their husband or wife, with their children, with their work, or in their choices of political engagement, in the use of their money, in the way they listen to news and react to it, in the way they manage their time, in their prayer, etc. A charism lives or does not live in the capillary details of a life, even if it is the most important charism in the history of the Church.

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<sup>18</sup> Lk 24:32.

As the pope told you in the October 15 audience: “Alongside the service of authority it is fundamental that, in all the members of the Fraternity, the charism remain alive, so that Christian life may always preserve the appeal of the first encounter.”<sup>19</sup>

So then, the charism is revived in our hearts! When there are big gestures like these Spiritual Exercises, the audience with the pope, the great meetings, everything is alive if the charism is stirred up in me, in you, in each of us.

### **An extraordinary human fullness**

The Gospel, the New Testament, is full of examples of people who experienced this in an extraordinary yet simple way, so this fascinating beauty of a new humanity, a new life, could be transmitted to us.

Let’s look at old Simeon, who appeared on the day of the presentation of the child Jesus in the temple in Jerusalem when He was forty days old.

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to Him, he took Him into his arms and blessed God, saying

‘Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,  
according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel.’

The child’s mother and father were amazed at what was said about Him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, ‘Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be

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<sup>19</sup> Francis, “Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness,” 18.

a sign that will be contradicted (and you yourself a sword will pierce) so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”<sup>20</sup>

Every evening at Compline Simeon’s canticle summarizes, gathers, and often puts together the meaning of our day, reminding us that a day has meaning if we live the meaning of our entire life in it, which consists in desiring and embracing Jesus Christ. All of our life is of worth, has meaning, is given to us, is asked of us only for this: to desire, to await Christ and to embrace Him in the simplicity of His coming in the flesh, a child of forty days who is entirely there, enveloped in our arms, who is entirely there, present against our chest, in the affection of our hearts, who is entirely there in our gaze. *He is there* not only in the sense of the dimensions of His little body. He is there as in *being there*, as God’s mysterious will, mysterious freedom, consenting to be with us, consenting to give Himself to fill our arms, our hearts, our lives, the human space of our lives.

Simeon left his whole life free and empty; he thirsted for this, for this embrace that filled and fulfilled him, for this embrace, beyond which there is nothing more than the eternity of the Father’s embrace.

### **A gift of the Spirit that makes us embrace Christ**

We will see how this is faith. It must be this in order not to be abstract, just an idea, a cerebral or sentimental persuasion.

But what I want us to focus on this evening, helped (I hope!) by the silence in which we will enter tonight and will live in these days, is how Simeon’s embrace and his confession of faith (“He is here! He is salvation! He is the light of the world!”) are the kindling of a charism by the Holy Spirit that fills his fragile person and has universal dimensions.

In this episode it is evident that *the charism is always a gift of the Spirit that makes us recognize and embrace Christ*.

Fully three times in three verses, Luke underlines the work of the Spirit in this elderly man. We do not know who he was or what he did in life. The tradition that he was a priest is not rooted in this Gospel.

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<sup>20</sup> Lk 2:25–35.

Simeon was simply a man, a man educated in the people of God, formed by the Law and the prophets, formed by the desire for salvation, light, and holiness, that is, for God, a desire that filled his heart, emptying him of everything else. A “righteous and devout,”<sup>21</sup> man, as the Gospel says, who was aware that notwithstanding our inborn tendency to sin, we are made for a true and good design, for justice, for being just, adjusted, the only place the heart can find peace, the only place the heart can find the truth of itself, not only known but experienced.

Simeon knew that women and men were created just (that the human creature was created just), adjusted perfectly to the Creator and to all of creation, within a love that harmonizes everything in the beauty of the light of God, because they are made in His image and likeness.<sup>22</sup>

But Simeon also knew and experienced in himself all of our limitations in reestablishing this justice, readjusting ourselves to God among ourselves, between man and woman, readjusting ourselves to all of creation. For this reason, he was “devout,” that is, he yearned with all his being for a salvation that he could not give himself. He yearned for a Savior, and until he met Him all his justice, the truth of the just position of his person, was concentrated in the desire, the entreaty, the expectant awaiting for Him who would incarnate the consolation of Israel.

“Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him.”<sup>23</sup> Can there be a more complete portrait of a true man than this? What fullness of humanity—one who desires justice, conscious of having to wait for it and receive it from an Other, and who desires it as a good for the whole people, a consolation for the whole people! For this reason, God corresponded to him and took pleasure in this humble and total truth of self, granting him the companionship of the Spirit, who is the Communion of God, in God. God was so pleased with the human truth of his sincere desire for salvation that He covered and protected it in the shadow of the

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<sup>21</sup> Lk 2:25.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gn 1:26–27.

<sup>23</sup> Lk 2:25.

Spirit, so that this little flame, which the whole world threatens, which everything tends to extinguish in the human heart, would not die out.

Simeon awaited expectantly, and the Spirit was with him. Simeon waited and the Spirit came right away to stoke this gift in him, the gift of a restless heart desiring God and the consolation of the people.

This reminds us that *the first charism of the human person, the first and fundamental gift of God in us, is the heart made for encountering Christ*, the heart restless for God. The first (and only) fundamental charism is this “being made for God,” an ontological charism that coincides with our being, concerning which restlessness is the awareness that “You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.”<sup>24</sup>

This ontological and structural, but also historical and existential, charism reverberates through everything that happens in our lives and in the world.

## **Familiarity with the Holy Spirit**

For Simeon, God’s taking pleasure in his desire was a familiarity, a friendship. In fact, the Spirit spoke to him, it does not matter how, and moved his steps, drove and accompanied him. “It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple.”<sup>25</sup> Simeon had a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit.

We are somewhat accustomed to treating the Holy Spirit like a stranger, or like a faceless blowing wind. We are not accustomed to familiarity with Him, having a relationship with Him, and thus conversing with Him and walking with Him. And yet the Holy Spirit does this with us; He treats us this way. It is evident that familiarity with the Holy Spirit led Simeon to an encounter and familiarity with Jesus, because the Holy Spirit is familiarity with God and in God. The Holy Spirit is the gift of God *par excellence*. He is the absolute gift of God. He is God who gives us His giving self in the Trinity. Those who wel-

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<sup>24</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions* I, 1,1.

<sup>25</sup> Lk 2:26–27.

come great charisms and want to welcome them in the depths of the gift they are for the Church, do not think so much about welcoming the specific charism as such, but about welcoming the Spirit whose gift contains and gives all of the charisms. These people have familiarity with the Spirit above all in the form of prayer, entreaty. How much Fr. Giussani insisted on the invocation “Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam”! It reveals and transmits a familiarity with the Paraclete that we will never learn sufficiently.

Those who want to welcome a particular charism from a founder distort the charism itself and reduce it to “something,” normally a packet of rules, ideas, attitudes, and words if they fail to welcome from the founder a familiarity with the Holy Spirit that animates every charism of divine life and grace that makes us familiar with Christ. Ever since Pentecost, the Church has always understood that the best and most intimate familiarity we can have with the Holy Spirit is that of the Virgin Mary, that familiarity that lived through Our Lady, that the apostles were the first to make their own. Yes. “Veni Sancte Spiritus, veni per Mariam”!

## **Moved by the Spirit toward Christ**

On that day, Simeon “came in the Spirit into the temple,” but he was not like a marionette maneuvered from above. Why was Simeon so docile to the Spirit? Perhaps because he was His slave? No, he was docile because he wanted to attain the fullness of his life that the Spirit had promised him. The Spirit moves us toward our fulfillment, toward Christ. He moves the restlessness of the heart toward His peace. As explained by Saint Paul, another great friend of the Holy Spirit, a man familiar with Him, “the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings. And the one who searches hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit, because it intercedes for the holy ones according to God’s will.”<sup>26</sup>

We are not able to desire purely and simply that which fulfills our heart, is worth more than life, is what we exist for. We pollute

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<sup>26</sup> Rom 8:26–27.

this desire with great presumption or ambition, desiring other things that are not truly our fulfillment. We do not need only fulfillment, but the decision to pursue it, the road to reach it, and the encounter so that we can embrace it. The Spirit, through the grace of God, through the mercy of the Father, gives us all this during our whole life through mysterious stages and itineraries. And when we reach Christ, we understand that all this takes on meaning, that there was a guide through this whole forest full of darkness and dangers, the guide of the Holy Spirit, who speaks to the heart, who shows the way and moves us to follow, and leads us to the goal. This was the guide that led us to Christ!

Have we ever thought to stop and look back, to think about our journey? Have we never realized that someone was guiding us mysteriously through a thousand instruments, a word, an encounter, a letter, an experience, a grief, a disappointment, a fall, an experience of wonder, an emotion in front of the beautiful, the good, and the true?

Maybe we have never thanked the Holy Spirit for all this. This is not grave for Him but it is for ourselves because we deprive ourselves of an awareness that makes us grateful for our life, whatever may have happened. If many things in life seem unworthy of gratitude and move us to complaint and rancor, maybe we should think them over in the light of the true purpose of life that the Spirit reveals to us, the purpose promised to Simeon: “It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Messiah of the Lord.”

To see Christ, to embrace Christ: this is the value and purpose of all of life, even if the encounter only happens at the end, as it did for Simeon, the prophetess Anna, and the good thief. The Spirit does not promise us success, wealth, health, or honors. The Spirit does not free us from having to die. *The Spirit promises us and makes us experience in our heart that our life is not defined by death, but by the encounter with Jesus.* “Define” comes from the Latin verb *finire* (to bound, limit), intensified by the prefix *de* (completely). It would be equivalent to *completely bound or limit*. So, what completely *bounds* or *limits* us more powerfully than death? In human experience, death seems to define and limit all of human life and history. Think of the spectacle of death in the war in Ukraine, the drowning deaths of thou-

sands of migrants in the Mediterranean, the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, the mass shootings in the United States, or the constant and hidden deaths of millions of aborted babies. And yet, the Spirit proclaimed to Simeon that this sentiment is not true, is not just: his long life is not determined first of all by death, but by his encounter with Christ. This is a definition that death cannot overcome or replace. Encountering Jesus, embracing Jesus, Simeon exulted in the certainty and peace that Jesus had always defined and would always define his life in everything, including his death.

### **The universal diffusion of every charism**

The encounter with Christ breaks down all the limits of life, not only death but also solitude and closure in on ourselves or on our coreligionists. In fact, Simeon immediately sang of the universality of the salvation brought by Christ:

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,  
according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen Your salvation,  
which you prepared in sight of all the peoples,  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and glory for your people Israel.”<sup>27</sup>

In the old age of his body, this man had the desire and passion of a young man in love, of a child wondering at imperceptible signs that no one else sees, like that young couple who in the immense temple and in the midst of the crowd brought a newborn and two doves for the Presentation rite. Who knows how many couples and how many babies came to the temple of Jerusalem every day! But this man was not “righteous and devout” only for himself; he was not waiting for the Messiah just for himself. He bore in his heart the expectant awaiting of the whole people of God, or rather, of “all the peoples.” In fact, no gift of God, no charism is only for yourself or only for a small group because it would mean that its flame would not be such, would not burn brightly, would not illuminate with true light. Light is the

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<sup>27</sup> Lk 2:29–32.



most explicit symbol of the charism, of God's gift and love, because if it is not blocked or if it does not find obstacles, it shines to infinity. And if it finds obstacles, it illuminates them too, transforming them into a reflection of His gift.

As we said before, God's gifts are irrevocable, but we can suffocate them or limit the light they shed. Every charism exists to shine to infinity, even the most insignificant and hidden one. I always think of a woman in Ethiopia who invited us for coffee. When you invite someone for a coffee there, it is not like here, where in thirty seconds you put the coffee pod in the machine, press the button, fill the cup, take it and drink it in ten seconds, continuing to chat and forgetting you have even had the coffee. For this woman, instead, it was a whole ceremony.

In listing the various gifts of the Spirit, Saint Paul also mentioned this woman's: "Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; if ministry, in ministering; if one is a teacher, in teaching; if one exhorts, in exhortation; if one contributes, in generosity; if one is over others, with diligence; if one does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."<sup>28</sup>

The beauty of her service and hospitality was that of a charism whose illumination was not suffocated, and that moment continues to edify me years later. That service, that coffee, edified my life and continue to do so. This is why the gifts of the Spirit, even the most insignificant ones, are flames whose light shines to infinity. But one could say the same of a true word from a priest, a mysterious but sincere correction from a friend, a gesture of generosity, a sick person's offering up of her suffering, the free smile that someone, maybe a stranger, gave you when you were too closed in on your own grey-ness. As Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta said: "A smile when we meet each other, it would help more than anything."<sup>29</sup>

We are often concerned, and rightly so, that our life be useful, that it bear fruit. However, we almost immediately suffocate this good desire for fullness of life in our demand that the fruit be ours and not of the Holy Spirit, not of the charism, of the gift of God that was

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<sup>28</sup> Rom 12:6–8.

<sup>29</sup> Mother Teresa, *The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living* (New York: Penguin Compass, 1996), 206.

entrusted to us. And so we begin to dream of illusory and glorious fruits, but of *our own* glory, and we waste the infinite range of fecundity that the Spirit of God wants to express in all we experience, do, say, think, and pray.

Returning to old Simeon, it is extraordinary to see how the desire of his heart, the passion of his desire for salvation, when they reach their goal, the purpose so long awaited and desired, do not for an instant close up into a suffocating possession of the gift of God. On the contrary, they immediately reverberate its splendor. Simeon hugs the Child to his chest but he does so to show everyone how much light shines from Him, how precious this treasure is for everyone. The gesture, words, and face of this old man reflect all the light of Christ. Fra Angelico expressed this admirably in the fresco that accompanies these Spiritual Exercises.<sup>30</sup> This reflection is the meaning of his entire life. Now he can even die, not only because he has been able to embrace Christ, but because he was able to announce Him with a testimony that was so powerful, so transparent, so humble and certain that it still reaches us today with the same intensity as on that day, and will continue to shine Christ until the end of the world.

I dwell on this to reawaken our awareness that none of us is called to less than this! Each of us has a gift of recognition of Christ that reverberates to the ends of the earth and to the ends of the world! Each of us is made and called to reach the point of being able to sing Simeon's *Nunc dimittis* personally as the exhaustive definition of our entire existence, not as a final point in our life, as a "swan song," but as an apex that acknowledges that death is also a gift given to shine the reflection of Christ's light eternally. In paradise we will reflect the light of the good face of God infinitely, and each of us will express this beauty, highly original in each person, and yet entirely the face of the Lord, a highly original reflection like God's gaze upon each human creature, upon each of us.

But we do not have to wait until the end, before our death, to have this consciousness. The Church and her liturgy educate us to exercise it every evening at the end of every day, which could be our last. Let

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<sup>30</sup> Fra Angelico, *Presentation of Jesus in the Temple*, fresco, detail, 1442, Florence, Convent of San Marco.

us think about it, *exercising it* (since we are living these Exercises) when, at Compline, we pray Simeon's *Nunc dimittis*.

This is how Fr. Giussani expressed it in his meditation on Simeon's Canticle:

“How beautiful it is to read Simeon's canticle every day. ‘My eyes have seen Your salvation.’ [...] Reciting the canticle of the *Nunc dimittis*, like the Virgin Mary's Magnificat, in the evening at Compline means reciting a prophecy of something that has already happened, the kingdom of God among us, the mystery communicated to the flesh, time, and space. [...] Being able to say to the Lord that He is savior, that He is, that He exists this way as He already exists, moves God to offer His grace notwithstanding our sinfulness, and He lets us go in peace, like old Simeon. [...] Everything is said in this word or in this looked-upon presence, imaginable and unimaginable: imaginable because it is the presence of a human being like you, and unimaginable because it is the presence of God, the mystery, within this human being. The mystery of my sinfulness sinks into this man, and thus is redeemed, resolved, and forgiven.”<sup>31</sup>

Tomorrow we will see how this shining human fullness, moved by the Spirit to an encounter with Christ, is faith.

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<sup>31</sup> Giussani, *La verità nasce dalla carne*, 214–16. Our translation.

## HOLY MASS

*Readings: Acts 4:1–12, Psalm 117; John 21:1–14*

**HOMILY BY HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP GIUSEPPE BATURI,  
ARCHBISHOP OF CAGLIARI AND SECRETARY GENERAL  
OF THE ITALIAN EPISCOPAL CONFERENCE**

“It is the Lord,” John says to his friend Peter of the presence of the Lord who was next to them. John, he who loved and was loved, can recognize the lover and the beloved because only love can recognize Him. Many times we have heard John’s exclamation of recognition, full of surprise but also of affection, in our teachers and parents, in particular in the words, gaze, and total striving of the person of Fr. Giussani. Giussani opened our gaze to recognize, “It’s the Lord!” It is the presence the heart desires and hopes for, the power that drives us to search for happiness and freedom, the ideal for building a new world, saying your own yes forever, and for educating children. The Lord present is the reason for all this.

Fr. Giussani named and opened our eyes to the great presence that is in the heart of the world, and in doing so kindled our hope because the Lord is here, here with us. Thus, we can feel that life is inhabited by God, seized within an infinite and eternal horizon, capable of giving meaning to everything and capable of gravitating to a center: it is He, the Lord. As these days begin, let us express our gratitude to God for our encounter with Fr. Giussani’s charism, and let us remember how many people have helped us and continue to open our eyes and our minds to a recognition of faith, which is always a recognition of a presence who attracts us and is the reason for everything.

As we heard, Peter threw himself into the sea and swam toward Jesus. He had been afraid, had seized the sword in order to wound, had denied Him and fled. But then he went to Jesus without hesitation because He was the beloved. And so, in this re-found friendship, in this familiarity that Jesus offered, even allowing Himself a meal, everything was reconciled in the expectation of the great question, “Do you love Me?” But everything had already been reconciled because there is no chance for peace and reconciliation with ourselves

and our history, with all of our past, without being in front of the Lord present, without being in the space of His gaze. Peter went to Jesus to be looked at.

What saves us is not a line of reasoning, not an interpretation or remembrance often marked by remorse, but a living encounter, now! It reopens life to a new beginning, to the possibility of a new start with Jesus, in front of Him. In a friendship with Him, everything can always begin again, everything can be made new. In our personal life, as in the fabric of our friendship, everything regains vigor and can hope in a new beginning. For Peter, being with Jesus by that fire was also the opportunity to be in a new way with the other disciples because Jesus was the one who had called them together.

In these days, may we, too, accept Jesus's invitation to be with Him in order to learn to be with each other, and to go out among other women and men, to read their desire and tell everyone that the Lord is the one they are looking for in joy or in restlessness, because saying to the world that the Lord is present is always also interpreting the desire of women and men.

However, the Lord was recognized while they were fishing, because of their fishing. Similarly, in our work, in building our families, in professional or political engagement, in carrying out our passion for life, we can recognize the sign of the Lord present, which is always marked by a superabundance. (So many fish! More than they could have caught with their own efforts.) There is always a disproportion between our strength and our capabilities and the fruitfulness we receive as a gift. The Lord makes Himself seen in the surplus between what we do and what we receive in a superabundance of life, joy, and truth, a surplus that can only be explained by grace and the gift of a presence, and so we give thanks because He fills life. We always invoke Him, beggars because now the Lord is here, among us, and we pray, "Come to us again, O Jesus, Lord and Teacher."

# *Saturday, April 15, morning*

*Johann Sebastian Bach*

*Cantata BWV 82, Ich habe genug, The Monteverdi Choir–The English Baroque Soloists–*

*John Eliot Gardiner–Edizioni Archiv*

*Motet BWV 229, Komm, Jesu, Komm, The Monteverdi Choir–John Eliot Gardiner–Edizioni Erato*

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayers*

■ FIRST MEDITATION

**Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori**

*The faith that informs life*

## **The cloud of witnesses**

The title of these Spiritual Exercises is inspired by a passage from the Letter to the Hebrews:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while *keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith.*”<sup>32</sup>

In the previous chapter, the author of the Letter to the Hebrews had just listed a long series of witnesses from the Old Testament who made choices and took actions that would not have made sense without faith in the promise of the Lord that was fulfilled in Christ after their death. All these witnesses, from Abel to Noah, from Abraham and Sarah to Jacob, from Moses to David to the mother of the Maccabees, are a multitude, literally a “cloud” that surrounds us. What does “a cloud of witnesses” mean? It is translated as a “multitude” because with the image of a cloud the author wanted to express a reality that surrounds us with a myriad of elements, like a sand cloud in the des-

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<sup>32</sup> Heb 12:1–2; my italics.

ert. But for the Hebrews, the cloud also refers to the mysterious and sacred presence of God accompanying the people of Israel in the desert, protecting them by day and illuminating them by night, the sacred cloud that Moses entered in order to encounter the Lord, to listen to Him and dialogue with Him. The witnesses to the faith form this mysterious cloud around us that makes the invisible presence of God visible. Also, on the Mount of the Transfiguration, all those present penetrated into the cloud—Jesus, Moses, Elijah, and the three apostles, all absorbed in the mystery of the Father who made His voice heard, as if God wanted to react to Peter’s instinctual words, “Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”<sup>33</sup> Humanly speaking, his words were sincere, but they banalized the sacredness of the event, reducing it to a nice camping trip in the mountains with friends!

The Gospel continues: “But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, ‘This is My chosen Son; listen to Him.’”<sup>34</sup>

In the shadow of this cloud, Peter, James, and John regained an awareness of the sacredness of the mystery they were witnessing, which is the mystery of Christ, “a light for revelation to the Gentiles,” as old Simeon said, the mystery revealed by the Father who presents Him with a love of predilection and asks us to listen to Him.

So then, for us, the “cloud of witnesses” of the Letter to the Hebrews is formed of the witnesses to the faith who illuminate us and speak to us from the Holy Scriptures and the history of holiness of the Church, and also by the true and authoritative people we know personally. All these witnesses constitute for us that cloud of the Holy Spirit in which the Father reveals the gift of the beloved Son, to whom we are called to listen, to obey, and to follow.

This is the mysterious, luminous, and authoritative splendor of the Church. Notwithstanding the shadow of our humanity, of the humanity of every saint, of every baptized person who bears witness to the faith, she reveals the mystery in a companionship of individuals.

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<sup>33</sup> Lk 9:33.

<sup>34</sup> Lk 9:33–35.

## **Surprised by the witness of faith**

How many times we feel like Peter and the others, humiliated and timid in front of a testimony of extraordinary faith that surprises us from people we maybe see every day without realizing the light they bear within! We saw everything superficially, with all the positive and negative aspects of a temperament, a way of being and doing or not being and not doing. We were with these people lightly, without truly looking at them, or only looking at what we liked; we were with them without listening to them, or listening to them only distractedly. And suddenly, for one reason or another, maybe in a circumstance in which we finally need them, or because these people are gone, the cloud covers us and in it, when all appearances disappear, we listen to their testimony of faith and confusedly have to acknowledge that it is a manifestation of God, of Christ, of the mystery that creates and saves us.

In the recently published autobiography of Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Ciò che non muore mai* [What never dies],<sup>35</sup> a text that I think is comparable to Saint Augustine's *Confessions*, he recounts his journey of faith, the journey that led him to the Christian faith and then to live that faith within an intense and dramatic life, to the point of finding himself physically and spiritually at the heart of the nuclear destruction of Nagasaki, with an awareness of faith that it was a sacrifice of the Lamb for the peace of the whole world. But only near the end of his life, when Nagai found the carbonized bones of his wife Midori under the ashes of their home destroyed by the bomb and next to her the chain of the rosary she had been praying with, did he realize the importance of his wife's faith in asking for and obtaining from God his own faith and the extraordinary fruitfulness of his life. In the end, the Marian presence of Midori was revealed to him as the most evident presence of the mystery in his life. He had not realized this! Thus, he understood that after the bomb, he too had to live by testifying to his faith in this way, from the depths of his powerlessness, ill with leukemia, always in bed, in a small shack, offering himself to Christ and experiencing an incredibly fruitful testimony.

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<sup>35</sup> Takashi Paolo Nagai, *Ciò che non muore mai: Il cammino di un uomo* [What never dies: the journey of a man] (Cinisello Balsamo [Milan]: San Paolo, 2023).



I felt the same confusion and deep emotion when a few months ago, I was visiting the room of my old friend Luciano, the carpenter who, with his wife Nella, introduced me to the movement in 1976. He had suffered a grave cerebral hemorrhage that took him to heaven a month ago. I saw on his bedroom wardrobe a note with the most important dates of my vocational journey, and in particular the date of our first encounter: “A friendship out of this world. February 25, 1976. 44 years... of grace” (he had written this in 2020). In that moment I saw my whole life contained in the memory and prayer of this simple man, contained in a faith that sees the endless event of grace in human encounters, something of the other world. I could say this of many other people, maybe people I do not know and will meet only in heaven; each of us could say this of many people. Yes, there really is a “cloud of witnesses,” a holy cloud, in which God is present and speaks to us, a cloud that guides and protects life, as it protected the people of God in the desert.

These witnesses reveal to us that there is a point of maturity of faith that for everyone consists of accepting to be a grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies in order to bear fruit that is no longer its own, even if all of the being of the grain of wheat was made to give this fruit.

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat, but if it dies, it produces much fruit.”<sup>36</sup> There are those who understand this right away and live it even in the midst of fruitful and effective activity, and thus live the fullness of this activity, the fullness of mission, with a soul committed to continual begging. I think of Fr. Giussani, of the popes of the recent decades whom the Spirit gave and gives to the Church, and of Mother Teresa. Instead, often we are asked to experience a collapse of our efficiency to discover with surprise that precisely there, and not at the top of our unfinished towers of Babel, our faith is alive and bears fruit.

## Witnesses of faith

What we want to understand is the fact that this “cloud” that manifests the mystery to us is composed of *witnesses to faith*. Each one of us

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<sup>36</sup> Jn 12:24.

is called to be part of it. These witnesses are the multitude described in Revelation, giving us an image of the elect in heaven. “After this I had a vision of a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation, race, people, and tongue. They stood before the throne and before the Lamb, wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice: ‘Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb.’”<sup>37</sup>

They are the martyrs, a term that literally means “witnesses,” who with their whole body, soul, and voice cry out their eternal testimony, sealed on earth in their blood, the testimony of the salvation wrought by God in the Son, the immolated and glorious Lamb. “Salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne, and from the Lamb!” Faith cries out that only God saves us!

Why does the cloud of witnesses before us on earth and before God in heaven bear witness to faith, and “only” to faith? Why not to charity, hope, truth, justice, or generosity? Certainly, the witnesses to faith are also witnesses to all this and still more. But why are they expressly witnesses to faith? Why do the New Testament, the apostles, Jesus Himself in the Gospel, insist principally on faith?

The passage from the Letter to the Hebrews suggests a possible answer, or rather, *the* answer that allows us to understand the nature of this faith that is given to us and asked of us with such insistence. It tells us that first of all we must walk, or rather, *run*, keeping our eyes fixed on Christ, who is the origin of faith and leads it to fulfillment.

This means that only by fixing our eyes on Christ do we understand something of faith. Actually, not something, but everything: we understand the origin and the fulfillment of faith, and we understand that the origin (the author) and the fulfillment (the end, the perfection) of faith are Christ Himself, as if faith were the same as Christ. In what sense?

## **Faith saves**

There is a judgment, or rather an announcement that Jesus made to a few people whose faith amazed Him; for example, the woman with

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<sup>37</sup> Rv 7:9–10.

the hemorrhage who believed that just touching the hem of the Lord's mantle would heal her<sup>38</sup> or the blind man Bartimeus,<sup>39</sup> or the sinful woman in the home of Simon the Pharisee who bathed His feet with her tears, kissed them and anointed them with perfume,<sup>40</sup> or Jairus before the resurrection of his daughter,<sup>41</sup> or the only one of the ten lepers who came back to thank Him.<sup>42</sup>

What did Jesus say to these people whose faith amazed Him? Fundamentally, He said the same thing to all of them: "Your faith has saved you!"

What does this mean? What saves us? Isn't it only Christ who saves us? Yes! Christ's words allow us to discover the meaning, the value, the sense of faith, what truly interests us in faith, and make us desire faith more than every other thing, more than every other virtue. *Faith is what opens us to Christ the Savior of life and of the world.*

These words enable us to understand the profundity of another answer Jesus gave those who asked Him for something in faith. He told the centurion, "You may go, as you have believed, let it be done for you,"<sup>43</sup> and the two blind men who begged Him to heal them, "Let it be done for you according to your faith."<sup>44</sup>

*Faith is the space in us that corresponds to the event of Christ, to Christ who has come and who is present to save us. Faith is an openness in us to the event of Christ, our Savior.*

There is nothing more important to understand about faith, about what faith is, about what it must mean for us. Faith does not save us: faith permits the Savior to save us, to save the world.

Without Christ, without the event of Christ, faith has no content and no meaning. Fr. Giussani wrote that "faith, as a real attitude that man lives before God, is not something generic: it is *faith in Christ*, the Sign of all signs, the Man through whom the Mystery has revealed itself."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. Mt 9:20–22.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Mk 10:46–52.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Lk 7:36–50.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Lk 8:49–56.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Lk 17:12–19.

<sup>43</sup> Mt 8:13.

<sup>44</sup> Mt 9:29.

<sup>45</sup> Giussani, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, 59.

And, in *Generating Traces in the History of the World*: “Faith is part of the Christian event because it is part of the grace that the event represents, part of what it is. Faith belongs to the event because, as *loving recognition* of the presence of something exceptional, it is a gift, it is a grace. Just as Christ gives Himself to me in a present event, He brings to life within me the capacity for grasping it and recognizing it in its exceptionality. Thus my freedom accepts that event, and acknowledges it. So in us, faith is both the recognition of the exceptional that is present and the simple and sincere adherence that says ‘Yes’ and does not object. Recognition and adherence are part of the moment in which the Lord reveals Himself to us through the power of His Spirit [we talked about this last night]. They are part of the moment when the event of Christ enters our life.”<sup>46</sup>

The faith of Abraham, the patriarchs, Moses, and the prophets also had Christ as its horizon and content. This faith was great, it was enormous, because it was already full of the event of Christ. As Jesus said to the Jews: “‘Abraham your father rejoiced to see My day; he saw it and was glad.’ So the Jews said to Him, ‘You are not yet fifty years old and you have seen Abraham?’ Jesus said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I AM.”<sup>47</sup> He did not say He had seen Abraham, but that Abraham had seen Him in faith: Abraham was full of the event of Christ and of the joy it brings.

But these words of Jesus make us understand that “the event” that faith believes in is not just something that will happen in the future. Abraham “saw it and was glad” because his faith saw Christ. The event, the salvation to which faith adheres is the person of Christ. Abraham saw that Jesus is the “I AM,” the God present who saves. For this reason, Jesus always asked His disciples for faith in His person more than in the works He did. The works He did were a reason or a help for believing, not the content of faith. “Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.”<sup>48</sup> It is not a matter of believing in the works, but of believing in Christ because of the works He does.

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<sup>46</sup> Luigi Giussani, Stefano Alberto, and Javier Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, trans. Patrick Stevenson (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 22-23.

<sup>47</sup> Jn 8:56-58.

<sup>48</sup> Jn 14:11.

There is a beautiful text of Fr. Giussani's that I can't resist reading to you. It is from 1968, the introduction to the spiritual exercises of the Charles Péguy Cultural Center in Varigotti. "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."<sup>49</sup>

If the works and miracles do not lead me to believe that the presence of the person of Jesus saves me, and not what He does, even raising people from the dead and multiplying loaves and fishes, my faith is in vain, my faith is not faith. If I do not believe that Christ is risen and that *this* is what saves my life, whether I live or die,<sup>50</sup> I do not have faith, or I have a faith made of lovely memories of a great prophet but not a faith that makes me touch the salvation of all of life. If Christ is not risen, could we continue to believe in His miracles, as we believe that Elijah or Elisha or the saints performed many miracles? What use is it to my life to remember this now? Nothing. Maybe it will make me hope that some miracle will happen still, will happen

<sup>49</sup> Giussani, "Introduction to the Spiritual Exercises of the Charles Péguy Cultural Center," *Traces*, October 2018, "Page One," 8.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Phil 1:20.

to me, but my life remains abandoned to what it is or is not. Nothing saves it *now*, nothing fills it with sense now.

## **Taking the form of the event of Christ**

But if faith is the recognition and opening up to this event, what change of humanity, what change in us should it provoke? Or looked at negatively, what do we lose of Christ and ourselves when we lack faith, when we do not believe, when we do not permit faith to save us, when we fail to open ourselves to the event of Christ?

Think of the many times Jesus had to reprove His disciples, His apostles for not having faith or having faith that was small and meager. They must have felt naked, ashamed, unable to respond, like Adam when God asked where he was after the sin. If he had not sinned, he would have remained in God's presence, his heart would have remained in God's presence. Adam and Eve hid in their hiding, not in the bushes. They hid behind their freedom to refuse the gift of the friendship of a present and familiar God, a God of whom they were the immediate image, the immediate reflection. Our freedom hides us behind its withdrawal from the loving presence of the Lord. So too the disciples when they lacked faith found themselves uncovered, like children hiding because they had misbehaved, like small children when their mother looks at them with pretend severity, who put their hands in front of their faces and believe they are hidden. In fact, the Gospel reports hardly any of the disciples' reactions to Jesus's reproof for lack of faith, or having a meager faith, or not yet having faith. They stood there, frozen, confused, as if they did not even understand what Jesus was talking about! And Jesus loaded it on, making them even more uncomfortable. "The pagans and publicans and prostitutes have more faith than you who always live with Me, who listen to Me speak all day, who have seen hundreds of miracles! And yet if you had faith the size of a mustard seed you could move mountains!"<sup>51</sup>

Jesus did this out of His immense love for them. How could He not be exasperated when He saw that they refused to accept from Him, even

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Mt 17:20; Mt 21:31; Mk 11:23; Lk 17:6.

as they were living with Him, the most precious gift that opened them to the gift of everything, to the experience of everything, to communion with His deepest mystery that transformed everything into good? It is like a mother seeing her child refuse to eat, refuse the milk she offers, and thus refuse life. What suffering for Christ to see us refuse faith in Him, to see us closed or negligent or, worse, indifferent to the gift of opening ourselves to His presence that saves our life, that saves the world, not just with a last-minute salvation *in extremis*, but with salvation that saves life as we live it, that saves all of life, that saves it not only from death, but from non-life, from living badly; from living pettily, thoughtlessly, superficially; from living without living, just to survive, without asking for more from life in life; from living without desiring the infinite. What pain for Christ and for God the Father, what groaning of the Holy Spirit, to see us refuse the fullness of life for which we were created! And this to grasp a piece of fruit eaten in a few minutes, for satisfaction that ends after thirty seconds, to accumulate victories that disappoint us when we are still lifting up the trophy to the acclamation of the crowd, of the world.

With what pain must Jesus have said to the Pharisees, “The Father who sent Me has testified on My behalf. But you have never heard His voice nor seen His form, and you do not have His word remaining in you, because you do not believe in the one whom He has sent. You search the scriptures because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on my behalf. But you do not want to come to me to have life.”<sup>52</sup>

### **“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”**

Christ’s pain was such that He wept over Jerusalem because she did not believe, because she did not accept the gift of His salvation.

“As He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying ‘If this day you only know what makes for peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. For the days are coming upon you when your enemies will raise a palisade against you; they will encircle you and hem you

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<sup>52</sup> Jn 5:37–40.

in on all sides They will dash you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave one stone upon another within you because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”<sup>53</sup>

Jesus did not weep because Jerusalem would be destroyed, because she would die. He wept because she refused life, the life that visited her in Him, the Son of God come into the world so that it could have life in Him. Jesus wept because Jerusalem did not welcome the gift of faith, the gift of recognizing the visitation of God, the presence of God who comes for us. Jerusalem did not embrace Jesus as Simeon did, did not exult at having been visited by the Lord. “The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us,”<sup>54</sup> wrote Saint John at the beginning of his Gospel, but he also wrote, “He came to what was His own, but His own people did not accept Him.”<sup>55</sup> What a loss, what ruin in not accepting Christ, not having faith in Christ! Why? Because “to those who did accept Him He gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.”<sup>56</sup>

The importance of faith lies entirely in the importance of the event of Christ for us. Those who believe in the name of Christ, that is, in His presence, become by grace children of God. They are given the total fulfillment of their humanity, the fulfillment that Adam and Eve wanted to take away from God by hiding, instead of welcoming it from His love and His presence.

For this reason, because He yearns to give us this, which is everything for us, which would be everything, because He is dying to give us this, Jesus at a certain point stopped, as if seized by a sudden worry, an unexpected anxiety, and asked, “But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”<sup>57</sup>

Jesus’s question always leaves us uneasy. We ask what it can mean, what judgment on history it represents. It makes us understand that the problem of the end of the world will not be a galactic catastrophe or great pestilence, wars or earthquakes: the problem of the end of the world will be something much more human, more inherent in us—our

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<sup>53</sup> Lk 19:41–44.

<sup>54</sup> Jn 1:14.

<sup>55</sup> Jn 1:11.

<sup>56</sup> Jn 1:12.

<sup>57</sup> Lk 18:8.



heart, our freedom. It is as if Jesus predicted that at His final coming, the Parousia, the risk is that there will be nobody waiting for Him saying, “Come, Lord Jesus!”<sup>58</sup>

This seems like reading the bitter line in Primo Levi’s autobiographical *The Truce*, in which he recounted his complicated return to Italy after being freed from Auschwitz: “The house was standing, all the family alive, no one expected me.”<sup>59</sup>

But if Jesus’s question only concerned the end of the world, I could shrug and say it does not concern me. “The older I get, the smaller the chances the world will end during my life. Others will answer Jesus’s question, and who knows when!?” Instead, the unease that the question provokes in us, perhaps more than the question in and of itself, results from the fact that Jesus asks the question and cannot answer it, cannot foresee what will happen at the end of the world, He who knows everything, He who foresees everything. This fact proves to us that this question concerns us and that each of us is called to respond. This question wounds my freedom and I must answer it. When the world ends for me, will Christ find faith? But also, when the whole world ends, will Christ find faith in me?

The fact that Jesus said elsewhere that the Son does not know when the end will happen<sup>60</sup> and that He asked this question about our faith without giving Himself an answer, makes us understand that the end of the world, in addition to the glorious coming of Christ, also depends on our faith, because the end of the world more than a final point of the cosmos and history, will be the fulfillment, the goal of the cosmos and history. This fulfillment will not be “only” Christ, but Christ acknowledged and desired as the fulfillment of everything. Only faith can enable this. Think of the intensity with which the saints awaited this fulfillment and desired this end of the world, this fulfillment of the world. Thanks be to God, their faith prayed for and desired it for all of humanity as well. Faith is the cry, “Come, Lord Jesus!,” expressed in every moment and circumstance, which opens to the fulfillment that the presence of Christ gives to life, time, things, everything.

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<sup>58</sup> Rv 22:20.

<sup>59</sup> Primo Levi, *The Truce*, in *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, vol. 1 (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 397.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Mt. 24:36.

## **To die with total faith**

If this is true, then faith, my faith, our faith, concerns the whole world, even all of humanity that is unconscious of or indifferent to Christ. For this reason, we need this cloud of witnesses who lives this faith for and with us in order for us to grow in it.

I always think of an expression that Bishop Eugenio Corecco, my father in the life of faith, used in a letter to me seven months before he died: “Let us continue in any case [he had just spoken of prayer for his healing] to pray first of all to die with total faith, because this is and remains the greatest grace.”<sup>61</sup>

He wrote to a nun in the same terms: “The enemy’s temptation is reemerging and once again I feel how difficult it is without total faith to go to the Lord not only with resignation, which is truly little, but with joy. If He loves me, I pray He will give me this last grace because it is immensely more valuable than life. It is all here. (Psalm 62:4).”<sup>62</sup>

To die, to go to the Lord with total faith as the greatest grace that is worth more than life—this “total faith” is what Christ will come to seek at the end of our lives and of that of the world.

But what does “total faith” mean? In what sense can faith be total? Was this how old Simeon died after having recognized and embraced Jesus? Is this how Paul died, if we think of what he wrote Timothy? “For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the last judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for His appearance.”<sup>63</sup>

We see that in Saint Paul and in Bishop Corecco the sense of death has the dimensions of Parousia: it is going to the Lord who is coming,

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<sup>61</sup> Eugenio Corecco, “Lettera del 23 giugno 1994 [Letter of June 23, 1994],” in Antonietta Moretti, *Eugenio Corecco: la grazia di una vita* [Eugenio Corecco: The grace of a life] (Siena: Cantagalli, 2020), 371.

<sup>62</sup> Eugenio Corecco, “Lettera del 5 giugno 1994 [Letter of June 5, 1994],” in Associazione Internazionale Amici di Eugenio Corecco, Vescovo di Lugano [International Association of the Friends of Eugenio Corecco, bishop of Lugano], in “L’Epistolario: ‘Farsi ricostituire dallo Spirito Santo,’ Lettere di Eugenio Corecco ai contemplativi,” [Allowing yourself to be restored by the Holy Spirit, letters of Eugenio Corecco to contemplatives] ed. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, *Bollettino* no. 2 (1997), 102.

<sup>63</sup> 2 Tm 4:6–8.

going to Him “with joy” as Corecco wrote, or “with love,” as Saint Paul wrote. Everything is summarized in faith, as it was with old Simeon.

However, we understand that there will not be total faith at the end of our life and at the end of the world if faith does not begin to be here and now the thing in us that goes toward the Lord who comes—our openness to His presence and our desire to encounter Him, love Him, and embrace Him now. How can we not think of Saint Paul’s extraordinarily succinct line to the Galatians? “For through the law I died to the law, that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me insofar as I now live in the flesh; I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given Himself up for me.”<sup>64</sup>

As I began preparing these lessons, I was constantly besieged by various questions and problems concerning my order or other people or realities (this is always the case, but that was a quite dramatic moment for me). Often, these are problems I feel helpless to deal with because of the more or less sincere freedom of the people involved. This often makes me feel sad, irritated, and troubled. But meditating on faith while I was struggling unsuccessfully to find a solution to a situation that had deteriorated, which saddened me, suddenly I understood that Jesus’s question about the end of the world was one I had to ask myself immediately, right there in the midst of that complicated and intricate question I had to face. And I asked myself: “Do I have faith? Am I in front of this circumstance first of all with faith, before looking for other positions, decisions, and solutions?” In this way, I began to feel Jesus’s final question posed to me by everything, in everything, by everyone, always. What becomes of my faith when I am calmly spending time with someone, or dealing with daily tasks, or am tired from a day’s work, or when I read an email, when I answer it, when I prepare a talk, when I go to church to pray, when I talk at the table, when I watch the news of the world, of the war in Ukraine, etc.? In all this, when Jesus comes, does He find faith in me?

Life continually poses us questions from everyone and about everything. Even those who ask nothing of us actually question us.

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<sup>64</sup> Gal 2:19–20.

Everything questions our “I,” everything asks, “What are you like in front of me? Who are you? What defines you in front of me?”

Jesus tells us that the only adequate answer, the only one that truly responds, the only one that is responsible, the only one that corresponds to all of reality, to the reality that from the moment that I am experiencing goes all the way to Him who makes it and will come to judge it, the only face that adequately defines us in front of all of life and all of reality, is faith, only faith.

You understand that it is something very important, vital, without which, when the moment of truth comes; that is, when all of our reality will be face to face with the glorious Lord, and His eyes will reflect all the reality we will have encountered and experienced, if we do not have faith we will be stupefied, wordless, without anything in our hands, without the ability to say “I” because we are incapable of saying “You.” Without faith we will not be able to mumble even a word of repentance, a prayer for forgiveness! Our sin is not what makes us ask the Father for mercy: it is faith, the recognition that may occur only *in extremis*, that God is the one love that can fulfill my life.

## **Faith is prayer to Christ**

This exam, this final judgment may cause us to experience terror. Actually, the question is whether there will be faith on earth. In the Gospel of Luke this is not a jump: it is the conclusion of a parable on prayer, on insistent and trusting entreaty. “Then He told them a parable about the necessity to pray always without becoming weary. He said, ‘There was a judge in a certain town who neither feared God nor respected any human being. And a widow in that town used to come to him and say, “Render a just decision for me against my adversary.”’ For a long time the judge was unwilling, but eventually he thought, “while it is true that I neither fear God nor respect any human being, because this widow keeps bothering me I shall deliver a just decision for her lest she finally come and strike me.”’ The Lord said, ‘Pay attention to what the dishonest judge says. Will not God then secure the rights of His chosen ones who call out to him day and night? Will He be slow to answer them? I tell you, He will see to it that justice is

done for them speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on earth?”<sup>65</sup>

Christ asks and demands faith of us, and even wants it to be great, because fundamentally faith is entreaty, begging, insistence in asking. In asking for faith from us, Christ is asking us for prayer. In waiting for our faith, Christ waits for our expectancy.

So, when the Son of Man comes, will He find entreaty on earth, will He find prayer, will He find those who ask for His coming? Will He find those who have not stopped echoing the cry of the Spirit and the Bride, the Church, that is practically the last word in the Apocalypse, and thus of the whole Bible: “Come, Lord Jesus”?<sup>66</sup>

So, you understand that having faith, being people of faith who are solid in faith in front of life, even when it is stormy and threatening, is not a question of strength and power, or of valorous virtue. It is a question of poverty, of poverty of spirit, because the poor person asks and begs.

Without faith we are inadequate in front of life, because without faith we ask for adequacy from ourselves or others as a demand, that is, we ask for it where it does not exist.

With faith, adequacy is asked of God; it is grace asked for and welcomed, and so it can also be a miraculous adequacy, an adequacy that is otherwise impossible because it comes from God.

Without faith, we ask for nothing and so we live everything as if it were ours and our work. Without faith, nothing is gift, nothing is grace, and so nothing amazes us, everything is taken for granted, everything becomes tedious, tires us, even the greatest and most beautiful things of human experience like your beloved, your children and family, your fellow religious, work, celebrations.

This identification of believing as praying (this reminds me of the theological principle *Lex orandi, lex credendi* [The law of prayer is the law of faith])<sup>67</sup> does not empty faith of all its theological and moral principles, but it does empty it of all our claims that we produce these principles, that only we understand them, that only we know them. Everything in faith is a prayer of entreaty, everything is asked, and so

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<sup>65</sup> Lk 18:1–8.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Rv 22:17, 20.

<sup>67</sup> “The law of prayer is the law of faith: the Church believes as she prays.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 1124. Available at [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P32.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P32.HTM)

everything in faith is given, is grace. For this reason, fundamentally, the content of faith is the love of God: it is faith in the love of God.

Thus, it becomes easier to ask whether we have faith or not, easier to verify whether we are in front of life with faith or not. Let's ask ourselves whether we ask, whether we pray, whether we live asking for everything from the Lord who makes us, begging for everything. There is no confession of faith more righteous and orthodox than to acknowledge, asking for everything, that God is love and the total substance of our beings, as He is for everyone and everything. Everything comes from Him; everything is an overflowing of His Father's love for the Son in the Holy Spirit, so there is no confession of faith more pleasing to God than to pray to Him as our Father, acknowledging Him as our good Father. There is no confession of faith that is more right and true than the Our Father prayed with Christ, because He gives it to us.

### **What does Jesus change in life?**

If faith is essentially faith in Jesus Christ, what essential, vital thing does faith ask for, if not Jesus Christ Himself, His presence that fulfills the heart and life of women and men?

A friend who is a mother, grandmother, and catechist wrote me about a powerful provocation she received from a fifth-grade girl who asked her, "What if Jesus wasn't born? What if He isn't present? What would change in our life?"

This is truly a challenge to faith. In fact, my catechist friend wrote me, "What an incredible provocation! This girl forced me to ask myself the question that surprisingly we are also studying in School of Community: faith as adherence to that acknowledged presence whose concrete impact on all aspects of life we recognize. The power of children is that they're not expecting a theological answer: they want facts in hand! This forced me to dig down inside myself to find the answer, not digging in the sense that I didn't know what to say, but in the sense that I had to begin to exclude all the superfluous answers that came to me instinctively to get to the core of the question: Jesus, are you truly indispensable to my living?"

My friend continued, "Looking for an answer led me to an intense personal conversation with Him because I rediscovered that the only

answer is a presence present in this moment that embraces me now, entirely, just as I am. 'Now I need You!' And I end up crying to Him: 'Jesus, don't abandon me!'"

So then, faith is not testified to without Christ, not only without Christ as the content of faith, but without Christ present, recognized here and now by faith, by the eyes of faith that fix upon Him. The question that this little fifth grader formulated so well, with such truth, is the burning question, often tacit or badly formulated, that the whole world asks and that Christ Himself asks us.

What does the event of Christ, His presence, change in my life? I've asked myself this again in these weeks of celebration of the passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord. What does Easter change in my life? What sign, what conclusion, does it leave? There is a mistaken and sterile way to ask this question, which is to examine yourself moralistically, sentimentally, or intellectually. It is like a mother who during pregnancy only thinks of how she is changing, how her form is changing, her weight, how her strength is changing, and does not think about the child, the presence of the child growing in her. My catechist friend grasped the heart of the question, the true issue at stake. The impact of the presence of Christ in our life is first of all, essentially, the presence of Christ. If I have to change something in myself, it is that I feel, experience, and suffer how much He is necessary to me, how much I miss Christ if He is not there or if I do not pay attention to Him, and how His presence fills my life, gives it meaning and beauty.

Yes, what changes life is that the presence of the Lord is there. What changes life radically is the fact that He is present, so that in a personal relationship with Him you understand what changes or does not change in your life from the fact that Christ is there or not. This personal relationship is that recognition, saying "You" to Christ, which enables me to realize that He is already saying "you" to me even before I know it, as happened to the disciples of Emmaus who, even without recognizing Him, during the entire journey looking at and listening to this pilgrim in the evening twilight, later realized that they had already perceived Him, that their life had already changed, had taken new form, that it burned in them like a fire that allowed their heart to cry "YOU!" even before their consciousness could call Him by name.

This makes me think of the comment Saint Gregory the Great made on Jesus's encounter with Mary Magdalene, in his twenty-fifth homily on the Gospels. He has Jesus tell Mary Magdalene, "Recognize therefore the one who recognizes you."<sup>68</sup> It is as if He said to her: "Say 'You' to Him who says 'you' to you!"

A couple of weeks ago I had dinner with my dear friend Carras in Madrid, and I met his wife Jone, who told me how she experienced the grave illness that left her paralyzed for months. In just a few hours she found herself immobilized and intubated, only capable of seeing and listening. She said "You" to Christ: she began saying "You" to Christ and this immediately gave her a sense of her substance, the dignity of her being created and loved by God. This sense has never left her, and has defined her more than anything else. She told us that though her doctors could not speak with her, simply by looking at how she was, they recognized that in the midst of everything she had a strength and peace that the other patients did not have: it was faith.

## **Faith that informs life**

This is the heart of the question of faith. Only if faith is the acknowledgment of a "presence present in this moment," as our catechist friend wrote, a presence to whom you say "You" like Jone, anchored to this "You" as the substance of all of life, who saves you even when everything is lost, only if faith is this does it become a wellspring, the shining fulcrum of a life truly transformed by Christ and that transforms all of reality from within. Faith is given to us and asked of us in order to restore to all of reality the substance that is lost when we are far from Him who makes it.

Ever since my teen years, when I read for the first time *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos, I have been accompanied by a thought that the priest who is the protagonist wrote in the midst of the trial he was going through in his sick body, in his complicated

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<sup>68</sup> Pope Saint Gregory the Great, "Homily 25 on the Gospels," 25:5. In *Patristic Bible Commentary* (website). Available at <https://sites.google.com/site/aquinasstudybible/home/gospel-of-john-commentary/gregory-the-great-homily-25-on-the-gospels>



relationships with his flock, and in his spirit that was doing battle with a hidden God who kept him in the agony of Gethsemane.

He wrote in his *Diary*, “No, I have not lost my faith! This expression ‘to lose one’s faith,’ as one might a purse or a ring of keys, has always seemed to me rather foolish. It must be one of those sayings of bourgeois piety, a legacy of those wretched priests of the eighteenth century who talked so much. Faith is not a thing which one ‘loses,’ we merely cease to shape our lives by it. [...] An educated man may come by degrees to tuck away his faith in some back corner of his brain, where he can find it again on reflection, by an effort of memory: yet even if he feels a tender regret for what no longer exists and might have been, the term ‘faith’ would nevertheless be inapplicable to such an abstraction, no more like real faith, to use a very well-worn simile, than the constellation of Cygnus is like a swan.”<sup>69</sup>

“Faith is not a thing which one ‘loses,’ we merely cease to shape [inform] our lives by it.” That is, it ceases to form life from within. To inform, etymologically, before the banal meaning of “give news,” means “give form to” or to “form from within.”

This helps us to understand the true problem of today’s crisis of faith in the Christian people and in contemporary women and men, the children of centuries of abstract or moralistic faith detached from reality and reason. This also helps us to become conscious of how our faith is to be found again and revived in us in the nooks and crannies of our life and consciousness, where we have relegated it. As Bernanos said, we have not lost it but we have set it aside in the storage area for useless things whose contents we do not throw away but have no idea what use they may have or what to do with them.

The fact is that faith serves to inform life and give it form; you understand what faith serves for only when it informs life, only when it gives life a form that only faith can give it. Setting aside faith makes it useless. It does not become useless because it is no longer useful in and of itself but because we set it aside. A faith set aside no longer has a place from which it can inform life, give form to life and thus transform the world.

### *Regina Coeli*

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<sup>69</sup> Georges Bernanos, *The Diary of a Country Priest*, trans. Pamela Morris (1936), 89.

## HOLY MASS

*Readings: Saturday of the Octave of Easter, Year A: Acts 4:13–21; Psalm 117; Mark 16:9–15*

**HOMILY OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL KEVIN JOSEPH FARRELL  
PREFECT OF THE DICASTERY FOR THE LAITY, FAMILY AND LIFE**

Dear brothers and sisters, in this octave of Easter we still experience the fullness of light, peace and joy that emanates from Jesus Christ's victory over death. The Gospel we have just heard is taken from the so-called "canonical ending of Mark," missing in the oldest manuscripts of the second gospel, but rich in content for our faith. The theme of the Apostles' unbelief recurs several times: they do not believe the testimony of Mary Magdalene who tells them that she saw Jesus alive; they also do not believe the testimony of two other disciples who met Jesus "as they were on their way into the country." Finally, Jesus himself, appearing to them "while they were at table," rebukes them "for their incredulity and obstinacy."

The Apostles' persistent and almost stubborn unbelief is an important aspect that the New Testament revelation has transmitted to us, without eliminating or "softening" it. So many times in history attempts have been made to attack the Christian belief by saying that the resurrection of Jesus is a myth constructed by the community of his first disciples, the result of collective exaltation or posthumous glorification of the master, as happened in many other religious beliefs of the past.

In fact, the very striking testimony of the Gospel accounts contradicts all these assumptions. Jesus' group of disciples was not in a state of "collective exaltation" at all. On the contrary, the Gospels tell us that they were fearful, distressed and dejected. Nor do we find an attitude of easy belief in them, or an inclination toward religious mysticism. Indeed, it is clear, as we have heard from today's Gospel, that the very idea that Jesus was still alive seemed incredible to the Apostles. It was extremely difficult for them to convince themselves that Jesus had conquered death!

Thus, the Apostles' very unbelief is a strong sign of the credibility of the Gospel. At the heart of our faith is not a myth, not a collective

illusion, not a legend created by the community for the purpose of consolation. No! The foundation of our faith is a fact: Christ is risen! Christ has truly conquered death! Christ, by rising again, entered with his holy humanity into the very dimension of God and eternity! This unexpected and astonishing event has been encountered by many eye-witnesses, as we are hearing these days in the accounts of the apparitions of the Risen One that the liturgy offers us.

I am sure that you too have experienced the risen Christ in your lives, and that is why you are here, that is why you are in the Church, that is why you are trying to live as Christians in today's world. You have encountered the risen Christ in the Christian community that has authoritatively transmitted His word to you: in the word of the Church, in fact, we recognize the very voice of the living Christ speaking to the depths of our hearts. In the Christian community you have recognized the risen Christ "in the breaking of the bread," as was the case with the disciples at Emmaus. In the Christian community you have encountered the merciful face of the risen Jesus who responded with forgiveness to our sin, our indifference, our pride, as happened to St. Paul on the road to Damascus. In the Christian community you have encountered the risen Christ who has given us his Spirit, who has become in us a source of renewal, rebirth, enlightenment and infinite creative energies to be put at the service of our brothers and sisters, as happened for the disciples at Pentecost.

Dearest, for you, the Christian community in which you encountered the risen Christ has taken on the concrete face of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. Here you may have come across a "Mary Magdalene" who spoke to you about Jesus with gratitude and zeal. Here you came across the two disciples "returning from the country" who enthusiastically told you that they had had a shattering encounter.

Perhaps you too reacted at first with "incredulity" and "obstinacy," but gradually the serenity, the reasonableness of faith, and the joy of those who brought you the announcement won you over. Those Christians showed that they were certain of a good destiny that lies at the origin and culmination of our existence, a destiny that came to us and made itself known. This fascinated you. The way of living and being together of those who said they had encountered Christ, their

passionate involvement with life, which excluded nothing from their interests, all of this surprised you and aroused in you a desire to live in that way as well. You thought that if Christ is the one who helps people live so fully and happily, and so authentically human, then he is worth accepting and following.

And indeed, as you began to follow Jesus and live in the companionship of His disciples, you began to experience a great peace, you began to discover with surprise that the answers to your deepest questions and desires were in Christ, and that your outlook on life, your humanity, your work, your friendships, your ability to love, all acquired a new depth and greater “truth.” This, in effect, means encountering the risen Christ. It is an event of rebirth, of transformation, of inner and outer reconciliation.

Always remain grateful to the Lord for this immense grace and also for those concrete “instruments” that the Lord has used: people, charism, community. Safeguard also the lucidity and freedom to consider them instruments for the real encounter, that is, the encounter with the risen Christ.

In Mark’s account we heard that to the very disciples who were “incredulous” and “obstinate”, Jesus entrusts the mission of “proclaiming the Gospel to all creation.” To all of us, though weak and with an often faltering faith, Jesus entrusts great tasks. I was struck by a passage from a letter, which I happened to read recently, written by Fr. Giussani in 1960, when he dreamed of leaving as a missionary to Brazil together with a group of young people, in which he writes, “only the whole world is the horizon of the Christian, whoever works without this ideal may be doggedly honest, richly ascetic, perhaps even heroic, but cannot be a true Christian.”<sup>70</sup> These words of Fr. Giussani are true! And so are so many of his other words, yet to be fully valued and assimilated. I therefore invite you to return to the integrity of Fr. Giussani’s teaching, which constitutes a great wealth for the Church today.

The encounter with the Risen Christ truly broadens our horizons and opens us to the “whole world,” puts in our hearts the desire to reach out to every person and to bring the joy of the Good News to

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<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Osservatore Romano*, Wednesday, March 8, 2023, insert “Religio,” 1.

all. May you, too, never lose this universal outlook, this missionary impulse and this great love for all people that Jesus points out to his disciples and that Fr. Giussani always felt burning within him.

This universal mission of the Church, even if carried out with momentum and enthusiasm, will never be easy; indeed, it will encounter opposition, as we heard in the first reading. The account of the Acts, however, testifies that in the face of prohibitions of proclaiming Christ and of healing “in His name,” Peter and John maintain great frankness and freedom of spirit, and affirm, “we cannot promise to stop proclaiming what we have seen and heard.”

This apostolic testimony is of great help to us. It appears here that the “charism” of Peter and the Apostles is precisely to keep the proclamation of the Gospel alive, even when it is met with indifference or even rejection by the world. Therefore, only if we maintain firm communion with Peter and the Church will we also have the strength to say, “we must obey God rather than men.” Our bond with the successors of the Apostles gives a guarantee of ecclesiality and authority to our proclamation, and will help us not to be “proclaimers of ourselves,” but people seized by the mystery, also risen with Christ and heralding His victory over death. This is the precious service we Christians are called to perform out of love for the men and women of our time: to keep the world open to the mystery of God, to proclaim the undoubtable “fact” of Christ’s resurrection with our lives, with all the light and hope that emanates from it.

May the Virgin Mary sustain you in your Christian journey and in the mission that the Lord entrusts to your Fraternity and to each of you individually. Amen.

#### BEFORE THE FINAL BLESSING

***Davide Proserpi.*** Your Eminence, allow me to express on behalf of the entire Fraternity of CL our heartfelt threefold thanks.

Thank you for accepting our invitation to share with us this journey of reflection on the content of faith. Thank you for the precious words of your homily, which invites us to recover the fullness of Fr. Giussani’s teaching and missionary passion: this is also our great desire! Thank you for the paternal attention with which you are

accompanying us closely, together with the Holy Father, in this phase of our history. This is a powerful sign and continual confirmation of the action of the Holy Spirit in our life and communion.

We want nothing more than to live for Christ's glory on earth and therefore to serve the Church with our life and our poor but certain testimony that only Christ can respond to the questions and turmoil agitating people's hearts today.

Eminence, let us continue to journey together on this road.

We are at your disposal. Thank you!

**Cardinal Farrell.** Before the final blessing I would like to thank all of you.

You have received the vocation to be members of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, which, I have learned in my life, is one of the most important ecclesial movements in the Church today.

I consider Fr. Giussani to be one of the greatest prophets of the Church, of the modern Church, and your vocation is a vocation made and inspired for the culture of our days. It is for this moment, one of the most difficult moments in the life of the Church. But with you, us, I believe that the Church always goes forward because what Fr. Giussani said many times is true.

We are the apostles of the future; you are the apostles of the future.

So, I thank you for the testimony of Christian life that you give all of us every day. May God, our Lord, bless all of you. Thank you.

# *Saturday, April 15, afternoon*

*Arvo Pärt*

*Which was the son of... and Nunc Dimittis, Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir–Paul Hillier–  
Edizioni Harmonia Mundi*

*Fratres, Hungarian State Opera Orchestra–Tamas Benedek–Edizioni Naxos  
The Deer's Cry, The Sixteen–Harry Christophers–Edizioni Coro*

## **Daive Prosperi**

We have a welcome surprise: we have a visit from the new bishop of Rimini, His Excellency Bishop Nicolò Anselmi, who succeeded His Excellency Bishop Francesco Lambiasi just three months ago, and so he is freshly appointed. He comes from Genova.

## **Bishop Nicolò Anselmi**

Thank you for this welcome. I am truly honored to be here. I'll tell you the truth, I can still see last week's assembly when there were 3,500 young people here. You are much more numerous, more beautiful, more everything, obviously; we won't make any mistakes right off the bat!

I wanted to thank you for being here, also in the name of the Diocese of Rimini, which the Lord through the pope has called me to serve for almost three months now. We are happy to greet you and assure you of our prayer for this very important moment, thanking you for all the good you do in your and our dioceses. I also greet the many people following us by video link.

## **Prosperi**

There are over 25,000.

## **Bishop Anselmi**

Now I am going to celebrate Mass in the cathedral and I will pray for you, for Fr. Mauro, and for the entire Fraternity, that the Holy Spirit may truly touch your hearts. Thank you.

## **Prosperi**

Thank you.

■ SECOND MEDITATION  
Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori

*That the world may believe*

**“That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:17)**

“Faith is not a thing which one ‘loses,’ we merely cease to shape our lives by it,”<sup>71</sup> wrote the curate of the Bernanos countryside. What is the form that faith wants to give to life?

Saint Paul explains it to us stupendously in the Letter to the Ephesians, one of the most beautiful and sublime Pauline texts, which he wrote from prison, an imprisonment that worried the Ephesians, as if it could diminish Paul’s apostolate to their detriment and that of the Church and the pagan world that awaited the Gospel, just as we, too, often think that our illness or infirmity or that of our friends can demean a vocation or mission or the fruitfulness of a charism. Instead, Paul reassured the Ephesians in no uncertain terms, “I ask you not to lose heart over my afflictions for you; this is your glory.”<sup>72</sup>

And he explained why, revealing his position in front of God, that is, his faith, and how faith must inform their life as it informs his: “For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that He may grant you in accord with the riches of His glory to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner self, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”<sup>73</sup>

Faith is that full consent and adherence of heart, that conformity in feeling, thoughts, and will to the given presence of Christ who comes to dwell in our hearts, enabling us to be rooted and grounded in chari-

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<sup>71</sup> See here, p. 47.

<sup>72</sup> Eph 3:13.

<sup>73</sup> Eph 3:14–19.



ty, in the love of God, so that with and like all the saints, the “cloud of witnesses” in the Letter to the Hebrews, our heart and life, informed by faith, becomes through grace capable of understanding and making their own the dimensions of Christ’s love, “the breadth and length and height and depth” of this immense, infinite love. This is a form of ourselves, of our life that Paul says “surpasses knowledge,” that totally surpasses us as mystery because it is mystery, the absolute mystery. In this way we are “filled with all the fullness of God”!

### **Otherwise everything wilts**

Do you understand what we give up when we put faith in the attic, tuck it away in some back corner of the brain, as Bernanos wrote, or in a sentimental corner? Do you understand what the Western world has given up? Once it was Christian, but it has since excluded faith from reason, thought, culture, political and social life, even from religiosity. *Almost without realizing it, the West has given up, gives up “all the fullness of God”!* It has given up the infinite dimensions of the mystery of Christ, the love of Christ! For this reason, everything has *wilted*, everything! We live in a wilted culture, a wilted society. Our family life, education, work, love, entertainment, prayer, and belief are wilted, deflated like an enormous balloon or many balloons that have lost the air that gave them their form and fullness, through a miniscule pinhole that nobody noticed. But also so much consecrated life, monastic life, community life, mission, action for peace and development, and art, like so much pastoral activity and engagement in the media, in politics, have wilted, deflated, lost their fullness, the fullness that faith wants to “shape” for us, that Christ came to “inform,” such that a mustard seed of faith would suffice for this to happen,<sup>74</sup> so that it would penetrate in us, so that Christ would enter into us, into our lives, making us explode with all of the fullness of God, all the breadth, length, height, and depth of His infinite and eternal love.

But this crisis is not exclusive to our own society and time, to the Church today. Otherwise, Saint Paul would not have spoken of it two

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. Mt 17:20.

thousand years ago, and above all, Christ would not have become flesh to live among us as a man, to proclaim the mystery that freedom is called to consent to with the yes of faith. This has been the crisis of humanity, the crisis of women and men, ever since the original sin when they yielded to the temptation that life could have an alternative form to all the fullness of love that God offered them.

What did the serpent insinuate to Eve, if not the illusion of possessing divine fullness without receiving it from God? “God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know good and evil.”<sup>75</sup>

The man and the woman immediately found themselves empty, because this knowledge of good and evil is the knowledge of reality not as it is in reality, not as God makes it, because God makes everything good, beautiful, positive, given, and free. Full of this false fullness, of this doubt about the action of God and His giving us everything, about His causing us to receive life and everything from Him, Adam and Eve found themselves empty and naked, as if discovering a shameful form of themselves, one to be hidden.

It is precisely to the human person wilted in its “I,” emptied of itself because emptied of the loving and trusting relationship with the Creator, that Christ comes to bring in Himself the fullness of real knowledge of the whole of reality, so that, as Saint Paul wrote, “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to *comprehend* with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to *know* the love of Christ that *surpasses knowledge*, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”<sup>76</sup>

If we want to allow our life to be informed by faith, we must learn these words by heart and repeat them to ourselves as we live our daily lives. It is like living by *seeing* the destiny of life and the world, living and having in front of us in everything and with everyone, always, the Risen One who appears in the Upper Room on the evening of Easter and who, with all the splendor of His beauty and goodness, blows the Holy Spirit upon us to make our life a mission of His peace and forgive-

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<sup>75</sup> Gn 3:5.

<sup>76</sup> Eph 3:7–19; my italics.

ness: “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.’ And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them.’”<sup>77</sup>

Only in this way do people who are wilted and without faith find the true, original form of their substance, original in the heart and thought of God, the Father.

### **Christ is all and in all**

“Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me.” / Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, / Christ on my right, Christ on my left, / Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, / Christ in me, Christ when I arise, / Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, / Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, / Christ in every eye that sees me, / Christ in every ear that hears me, / Christ with me.”<sup>78</sup>

Saint Patrick’s prayer, set to music in 2007 by the Estonian Orthodox composer Arvo Pärt, expresses the awareness of a man whose “I” is completely informed and shaped by faith in Christ. In the music that accompanies these words, Pärt expresses well the sense of Christ’s growing in us toward an ever greater and more radiant fullness.

This humanity in which Christ is all and in all, everything in ourselves, everything in everyone and everything in everything, in all of reality, is the new humanity, the new creation that faith makes possible, welcomes, forms, and shapes, opening itself to the Easter event of Christ that the Spirit of Pentecost makes contemporaneously intimate in the heart and shining outward to the ends of the earth and of time.

From the musical point of view, too, the composer makes the music grow to give the sense of the fullness that fills your heart and life the more you become aware that Christ is in you, that Christ is before you, at your right, at your left, that Christ is all and in all. Everything, always, in everything and in everyone.

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<sup>77</sup> Jn 20:21–23.

<sup>78</sup> William Byrd and Arvo Pärt, *The Deer’s Cry* (2007), from the *Lorica of St. Patrick* (ca. 377), The Sixteen choir, directed by Harry Christophers, 2016, © Coro).

## From Galilee to the end of the age

“The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw Him, they worshiped, but they doubted. Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’”<sup>79</sup>

This last scene of Matthew’s Gospel reminds me of the pope’s closing words to the Fraternity last October 15. “Never forget that first Galilee of the call, that first Galilee of the encounter. Always return there, to that first Galilee that each one of us has lived.”<sup>80</sup>

Returning there, to the first Galilee, means returning to the moment of encounter when Christ gave us a faith that filled our heart with Him, when Christ made Himself the everything of life, the life of our life. After the Resurrection, Jesus wanted to meet His disciples again in Galilee, rather than there in Jerusalem, in Judea, so they would understand that the great mission to which they were called always had to spring from their encounter with Him, from that first and eternal encounter with Him that each of us had and always has anew when you discover that the wellspring of your living is Christ Himself, who dwells in our hearts through faith, making us experience ever anew and ever more deeply “the breadth and length and height and depth” and enabling us “to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” so that we may be “filled with all the fullness of God.”

But we do not truly go to Galilee and return to the first encounter with Jesus, to the wellspring of the charism that bowled us over, and thus we do not rekindle it, if the return to that wellspring encounter, if the first companionship and friendship that must remind us of it, *does not immediately send us on mission* to all peoples, to all of humanity not yet baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the

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<sup>79</sup> Mt 28:16–20.

<sup>80</sup> Francis, “Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness,” 18.

Holy Spirit, not yet bowled over by the great presence of God who is love, who is open communion with the human person, who wants to embrace every person, all people.

Returning to Galilee means returning to the first encounter that lit in us *the Christian charism that is the divine gift of being able to embrace God who gives Himself*, to live a belonging to the gift of God's presence with us in the incarnate Son, lit in the world by the Spirit of the Father.

But we do not return without hearing the Risen One there, telling us, telling us again, "Go! Go to all nations!," promising us that those who depart will bring Galilee with them because they bear within the presence of Christ, the daily, familiar, constant presence of Christ: "And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age!"<sup>81</sup>

Could Christ make a more beautiful, gladdening, encouraging promise than this?

Yes, truly, "Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me." / Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, / Christ on my right, Christ on my left...."

Faith is that gaze, that listening, that attention of the heart that sees, hears, remembers, and makes memory that is no longer possible to leave behind, to find yourself outside that breadth, length, height, and depth of the love of Christ experienced personally and together.

## **Christ is the one who resolves the doubts of faith**

This position of awareness, certainty, and unshakable sureness is precisely a question of faith: it *is* faith. We see it in the last scene of Matthew's Gospel that I just referred to: "The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had ordered them. When they saw him, they worshiped, but they doubted."<sup>82</sup>

We naturally think, "That's impossible! What a disaster! The eleven? The apostles? After forty days of seeing Him risen, hearing

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<sup>81</sup> Mt 28:20.

<sup>82</sup> Mt 28:16-17.

Him speak, even seeing Him eat fish and bread, when they saw and touched the wounds on this living and glorious body! After bursting into exclamations of joy each time they saw Him! *They doubted?! They still did not have faith. They were not truly convinced about Him, that He was here, that He was living and present.*

How can we not recognize this absurd attitude in ourselves? How can we not recognize that we, too, are always this way?

What does Jesus do? Does He perhaps reprove them again? No. *Jesus comes closer.* “They doubted. Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go [...]. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.’”

We need to understand that we do not resolve the problems or crises of faith: Christ does. He resolves them by making His presence closer, more visible, more hearable, more palpable, and more experienceable.

Isn't this perhaps the experience we all have? So many times we doubt, above all if we find ourselves like Peter in the midst of a stormy sea and it seems to us that God no longer cares about us or the world, not even the Church, and then suddenly something happens or someone appears that makes us rediscover the Lord's presence, just like in the risen Lord's appearances. We have spent the night fishing and not even a crab shows up in our nets. We are demoralized and grouchy. Then someone appears on the shore, and we recognize Him as the Lord who is with us always, until the end of the age.<sup>83</sup> And so we realize that moment of doubt—of little faith, of feeling abandoned that made us feel bad and have a surly attitude toward reality, people, and things, depressed and violent, capricious with everything and everyone—was not a parenthesis in the presence of Christ, but in our faith.

But thanks be to God, faith is not produced by itself. Rather, it is born and rises again from an encounter with Him, and He is always present, always knocking on the door, always drawing close again, closer, to meet us.

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Jn 21:1–7.

## Raise your eyes with Jesus

But let's be careful, here, because Christ does not come closer just to rekindle our faith, or, better, our faith as *we* mean it, in an intimistic sense, as just an instrument to serve my purposes, to make me feel better. When Jesus reproved His disciples and Peter for their "little faith," literally their "small faith," perhaps He was thinking of this: a faith we miss only when something goes wrong in our life, and so a faith we only need to turn on intermittently when we feel the need, when we lack more powerful lights, or in any case, when it suffices to take the three steps necessary to walk around ourselves. How often Pope Francis has denounced such a reduced faith!

No, the faith that Christ's presence wants to rekindle is the light old Simeon saw, causing him to immediately proclaim: "My eyes have seen Your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel."<sup>84</sup> It was not enough for him to have a faith that would console him in his old age. In fact, his faith embraced the world.

Faith is paltry and thus sterile even for illuminating daily life if its horizon is not the whole world, a yearning for the whole world's salvation.

In fact, Pope Francis, meditating on Fr. Giussani's charism, concluded by saying, "There are many men and many women who have not yet had that encounter with the Lord that has changed your life and made it beautiful!"<sup>85</sup>

Is it possible to sleep well after hearing such a thing?

I always think of when Jesus withdrew with His disciples to a mountain to rest a bit because a huge crowd was always following Him. He was there talking with His disciples sitting in front of Him and all of a sudden, they saw Him raise His eyes and look far off (as if now I looked past you to the back wall of this big hall). Instinctively everyone turned around and saw what Jesus had seen, "the great crowd" coming from afar, from behind them, still and always. This scene is recounted at the beginning of chapter 6 of Saint John's Gospel: "Jesus

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<sup>84</sup> Lk 2:30–32.

<sup>85</sup> Francis, "Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness," 15.

went up on the mountain, and there He sat down with His disciples. The Jewish feast of Passover was near. When Jesus raised His eyes and saw that a large crowd was coming to Him, He said to Phillip, ‘Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?’ He said this to test him, because He Himself knew what He was going to do.”<sup>86</sup>

This is what must happen for those who truly keep their “eyes fixed on Jesus,” their eyes fixed on Jesus’s eyes. Normally, when you look at a face you look at the eyes. Now, those who keep their eyes fixed on Jesus see that His gaze embraces a limitless horizon, full of compassion, full of awareness of what humanity is missing, full of awareness of what the human heart hungers for. Jesus provoked Philip about bread to nourish the body, but already knew that after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes He would offer them the proclamation of the Bread of Life that is His eucharistic body. “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is My flesh for the life of the world.”<sup>87</sup>

“My flesh for the life of the world.” How did the disciples, the few who from that moment remained with Him, hear these words? And how do we hear the pope’s challenge? “There are many men and many women who have not yet had that encounter with the Lord that has changed your life and made it beautiful!”

## **United in faith to shine faith to the entire world**

Saint Patrick’s prayer set to music by Arvo Pärt reminded me of the great musician’s visit years ago to my abbey in Switzerland, where I lived before being called to Rome. He lived with us for twenty-four hours because the organizers of the Festival of Sacred Music in Freiburg had proposed to him a stay in a monastery to see if it might inspire a composition. His presence impressed many of us monks because of the simplicity of heart with which he lived every moment of our day with us. This man with a child’s heart and gaze saw a rea-

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<sup>86</sup> Jn 6:3–6.

<sup>87</sup> Jn 6:51.



son for wonder in everything, and this attitude spread to us. He made me think a lot of Fr. Giussani and his personality.

Well, Arvo Pärt was very struck by the wood carvings on the stalls of the fifteenth-century choir of my abbey, which represent the figures of the twelve apostles matched with twelve prophets. Each apostle says an article of the creed and each prophet a line from his book relevant to that article of the creed. Henri de Lubac wrote in his *Medieval Exegesis* that the choir of the Abbey of Hauterive is the last development of the legend-based tradition that holds that before separating to go evangelize the world, the apostles proclaimed each article of the creed.<sup>88</sup>

Unfortunately, Arvo Pärt has not yet composed a work inspired by this choir (he's eighty-seven years old), but he made us more aware of the inspiration that these figures should transmit to us monks who pray there seven times a day, seven days a week, the inspiration that these figures should give to our faith and to our community life, our communion.

This legend may not be historically true, but it is correct theologically. It is correct in the way we are called to live the Church, faith and mission. Above all, it is correct in reminding us that the Christian faith is inseparable from communion. Ecclesial communion formulated the faith, and is the fulcrum of its constant and universal spread.

### **So that they may all be one, that the world may believe**

What is the work, the vocation, the mission that the event of Christ realizes in us and among us if we have faith, the faith of the Virgin Mary, the apostles, the martyrs, the “cloud of witnesses” that has guided and illuminated the Church for two thousand years?

Jesus spoke about it in the most solemn moment of the Last Supper, and spoke of it praying to the Father, revealing to us the content of His prayer, of His profound trust in the Father. There is no more real and substantial relationship than that of the Son of God with the Father in the love of the Holy Spirit. All of reality is creat-

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<sup>88</sup> Henri de Lubac, *Esegesi medievale: I quattro sensi della scrittura* [Medieval exegesis: The four meanings of the scriptures], vol. 4 (Milan: Jaca Book, 2006), 455–56.

ed and receives being and substance from this relationship. Being is this eternal and endless communion, and everything that exists, in particular we and our relationships, everything has its origin and destiny in the trinitarian communion. The words Jesus expresses in praying to the Father are the apex and synthesis of all of revelation. What can Christ reveal to us that is greater, more precious, truer, better, more beautiful than His dialogue with the Father? For thirty years, Mary had seen Him absorbed in prayer to the Father, and certainly He did it by withdrawing often at night, in deserted and hidden places. Similarly, for three years the disciples saw Him withdraw into the mystery of His prayer. When they asked Him to teach them to pray, Jesus gave them the Our Father, the echo of His prayer, but translated into words and requests adapted to us sinners and debtors. So, it must have been a great surprise for the apostles when, at the end of the sublime discourses of the Last Supper, Jesus suddenly went silent, raised His eyes to heaven, and began to pray to the Father out loud, as if He had forgotten they were there, as if He believed He had withdrawn to the desert while they slept. In this prayer, Jesus prayed for them, as He must have always done when He prayed in secret. He prayed for them, for their mission, for their relationship with the world. And He also prayed for us, for all the disciples who for two thousand years have believed in Christ through the proclamation of the apostles and their successors, and for all the disciples who will follow to the end of the world. For everyone, He prayed for the one thing in particular, an essential thing, “the one thing needed” of which He spoke to Martha,<sup>89</sup> precious not only for the disciples, not only for us, but for the whole world, the most important thing for everyone:

“As you sent Me into the world, so I sent them into the world. And I consecrate Myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth. I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And I have given them the glory You gave Me, so that they may be one, as We are one. I in them and You in Me, that they may

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<sup>89</sup> Cf. Lk 10:41.

be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent Me, and that You loved them even as You loved Me.”<sup>90</sup>

Our faith, transmitted to us by the apostles, transmitted to us by the Church, and the faith of the world; that is, the faith of humanity that does not yet believe, that does not yet know the Son sent by the Father to save the world, this faith does not live in us and is not born into the world if the unity of the disciples is lacking, *if communion does not happen*, the communion among us. *Communion is the fruit of the faith of the Church, of the disciples, but for the world, in the world, faith is the fruit of communion.*

### **The sense of belonging**

But we could ask why Jesus insists on unity so that the world may believe. Why insist practically only on unity to enable the world to embrace faith? Why did Jesus only pray for this? Why did He not ask for His disciples, for example, the grace of holiness, or the ability to do miracles, or to be good, honest, coherent, impeccable people, able to persuade with their words and works? What is so special about unity? What is so unique about it?

It seems to me that Jesus asked that the disciples be united, not so the world would say, “Look how good they are!,” but so it would say, “Look how they belong to Christ! How precious Christ is for them, notwithstanding the way they are!”

Christ asks for the grace of unity because in it one recognizes or at least senses that this unity is not the work of the disciples, not even of those foremost among them, but is the work of Christ; rather, it is Christ, the body of Christ! Communion is the body of Christ.

Saint Paul was consumed by this awareness and the urgency of calling people to it, as he did in the First Letter to the Corinthians: “God is faithful, and by Him you were called to fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. I urge you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind

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<sup>90</sup> Jn 17:18–22.

and in the same purpose [a very deep unity]. For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers, by Chloe's people, that there are rivalries among you. I mean that each of you is saying, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Cephas,' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?"<sup>91</sup>

What pain for an apostle, for a father who lives and spends himself to generate Christ, to generate Christ in everyone, to see himself instrumentalized to create divisions in the very body of Christ! What horror for Paul to hear of people who say they belong to him more than to the Lord!

Where do these distortions come from? They come from the distorted faith of those who claim to possess Christ instead of allowing themselves to be possessed by Him, instead of being His, instead of belonging to Him. This lack of faith wounds the heart of the mystery that communicates itself to us in the communion of the Church through baptism. We were baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," and thus were inserted into that unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that Christ asked for us from the Father before dying on the cross and rising from the dead. "I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."<sup>92</sup>

Every human belonging, even to disciples of great value and full of charisma like Peter, Paul, or Apollos, that does not serve to make us grow in our belonging to Christ, which in turn makes us part of His communion with the Father in the Holy Spirit, not only destroys the unity of the Church but also an ecclesial community, a fraternity, and renders vain the mission of testimony to the world so that it may believe, but it also *destroys us*, destroys the person, alienates us from our ultimate truth and destiny, as Jesus said of Judas: "Is not one of you a devil?"<sup>93</sup>

Judas was no longer himself. He was possessed by an alienation, by an other who did not constitute him the way Christ constitutes

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<sup>91</sup> 1 Cor 1:9-13.

<sup>92</sup> Jn 17:20-21.

<sup>93</sup> Jn 6:70.

us, the way the Father constitutes us. The unity of our person, the unity of our heart happens in the unity of the Church, is built and consolidated in the unity of the Church, in the fraternity the Lord gives us to belong to in order to be His, to belong to Him. My carpenter friend Luciano always wrote me, “The Lord had us meet so that we would belong to Him; He made us friends so that we would belong to Him.”

Is it not perhaps evident and palpable in our communities that those who most consecrate and sacrifice themselves in the fraternal communion have more substance as people? Maybe they are those most lacking in gifts and charisms, the least capable of acting and speaking, the least intelligent, but it is evident that the community holds together because there is that person, that humility, that presence, that gaze, that attention, that charity, that faith!

It seems that at the death of Saint Teresa of Lisieux the nuns did not know what to write in her necrology, because she had “only” loved and built communion in the community. She had done nothing else that was special.

I have met many people like this in monasteries, and in many other communities, in our communities. People loved by everyone, without anyone knowing why. In fact, they have not lived for something, but for Someone. Communion among us is not “something”—it is God present, God who is love, the Holy Spirit, the Trinity, one of the three persons that coincides with their entire being. Only an attitude of faith sees this, and educating ourselves to faith leads us to see this better and better, to see the mystery among us, which fills us with silence, wonder, and confusion at our sin but a confusion that is glad, grateful, and certain of the mercy of the Father, and fills us with a desire not to suffocate this beauty, this splendor of friendship that burns among us, notwithstanding ourselves, because it burns, shines without limits, and causes the world to believe.

## **The grace of unity**

Unity is a grace, first of all because Jesus asks it of the Father. Everything Jesus asks of the Father is certain grace, charism, gift of God. The true scandal of the divisions in the Church and among

Christians is that if they arise, they must necessarily come from the refusal of a certain grace, of a charism certainly given, because it is impossible that the Father would refuse such an insistent prayer of the Son on the eve of His passion and death. It is impossible. It is as if Jesus had said to the Father, "Take My life, let Me die on the cross, but give me communion for them, have Me die so our unity may be in them, so our being, our charity may be in them!"

It is impossible that the Father would not grant His Son's extreme prayer. Extreme but not last. Jesus prayed this way at the end of His life in order to reveal to us His eternal prayer, which He asks eternally for us, which He is asking now.

I am always struck by a line from the Letter to the Hebrews: "For Christ did not enter into a sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself, that He might now appear before God on our behalf."<sup>94</sup>

Jesus is appearing *now* before God on our behalf; He is speaking well of us, interceding for us. He is there with the Father talking about us like a friend full of concern for a friend, like a mother for her son, like a wife for her husband. I am struck by that *now* inserted into eternity, a *now* that is eternal in heaven, but that touches every moment of my life and our lives. The moment I am living through now, the difficulty I am going through now, the fall I am experiencing now, my sin now, the gladness I feel now, Christ speaks of it to His Father, entrusts it to the mercy of the Father. This is what we pray in every Hail Mary: "Pray for us sinners, *now* [now!] and at the hour of our death." Our Lady is before God as well, entrusting to Him the moment I am living through, the circumstances I am in, everything, moment by moment, hour after hour, until my last moment, until the hour of my death; that is, the moment when I enter into the eternity in which Christ is my advocate before the Father, my defense lawyer.

If we were conscious of this, how intensely we would live our every moment! If we were aware that in this moment Jesus is asking the Father for our communion, communion with the brother or sister whose neck we'd like to wring, what a jolt we would feel at the way we treat our relationship with others, our being together in community, our way of thinking of others! We would at least feel some con-

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<sup>94</sup> Heb 9:24.

trition for the carelessness with which we treat, in thoughts, words, deeds, and above all omissions, the people Christ asks us to be united with, or rather, gives us to be united with, as He is with the Father in the Most Holy Trinity. Unity is not just a need of Christian life: it is a gift of Christian life because Christ asks for it as a grace.

We must always be comforted by the thought, the certainty, of faith, that what the Son asks of the Father is always granted in the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So then, the worst thing that can happen is for us to get used to division, to get comfortable with division, taking it for granted, living it with superficiality, and for example, nourishing it with gossip. We treat with superficiality a gift that God asks of God, that God begs of God, that God certainly grants God. We act as if the unity Christ begs of the Father were a quirk and not something essential for His mission, something He died for, sweated and shed His blood for. Forgetting Christ's ardent, yearning desire for our unity and communion is the most ignominious distraction we can have in front of the mystery.

Is this perhaps the sin against the Holy Spirit that will never be forgiven?<sup>95</sup>

### **“Master, to whom shall we go?” (Jn. 6:68)**

So, it is urgent to ask ourselves how we can take seriously the unity that Christ asks for and the Father gives. What is asked of us so that we can welcome this charism, which makes the Church the reflection of the Trinity in the world and makes the Christian communion the proof that everything consists in an eternal love, that everything has its origin and end, and thus its meaning, in an infinite love? What is our error when we refuse this gift?

Perhaps the error lies in thinking that we must build unity, rather than yield to the grace, to the ontology of the Being that makes each thing and gives us an awareness of it. To be united, we are not asked to have something extra, but to give something up. What? Pope Francis

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<sup>95</sup> Cf. Mt 12:31–32.

loves calling it “self-referentiality,”<sup>96</sup> and Saint Benedict called it “self-will” or “presumption.” Jesus summarizes all this as a demand that we be able to save ourselves, our life and that of others, or, if we prefer, in not having faith in Him, not entrusting ourselves to Him.

Here we understand that a fundamental point of faith is the affirmation that *only Christ saves us*. Faith does not nourish communion because it makes us better or “saints” or because it eliminates contention, conflicts, and different ideas. The greater faith is, the more it embraces everything in confiding in Christ, in trusting the Father, and only this enables us to remain united above all with those who are different, those who are our enemies, who think differently, who act badly, and also to remain united in spite of everything in us that is incapable of building unity. The unity of the Church and in the Church, the unity of the disciples that Christ asks of the Father so that the world may believe, is entirely founded in Peter’s act of faith that, notwithstanding everything and everyone, and above all notwithstanding himself, he cries from the depths of his heart: “Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that You are the Holy One of God.”<sup>97</sup>

“We have come to believe.” What Peter expresses is truly an act of faith in the plural, which unites him with his brothers. He makes an act of faith in communion with his brothers. Remaining attached to Jesus enables all of the disciples to remain attached to each other. The faith that unites us is this awareness of Peter’s that he cannot abandon Christ without finding himself in the void, in a solitude where we would no longer know where to go, completely lost: “Master, to whom shall we go?”

## **The claim for oneself that fails**

Jesus responded to Peter with a very bitter line that must fill us not so much with fear as with humility in living our faith and living in the Church, in

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<sup>96</sup> Cf., for example, Pope Francis, “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Communion and Liberation Movement,” Saint Peter’s Square, March 7, 2015. Available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150307\\_comuni-one-liberazione.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/march/documents/papa-francesco_20150307_comuni-one-liberazione.html).

<sup>97</sup> Jn 6:68–69.



our community. “Jesus answered them, ‘Did I not choose you twelve? Yet is not one of you a devil?’ He was referring to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot; it was he who would betray Him, one of the Twelve.”<sup>98</sup>

“Is not one of you a devil?” A devil, someone who divides, who detaches his heart so much from Christ that he becomes for everyone a temptation to detach from Him, and thus a temptation to lose the linchpin of our unity, which is only Christ. The unity is Christ at the center and an attachment of faith to Him as the only salvation of our lives, as the only source of a full and eternal life.

Those who, even if they fall, renew their awareness and the cry that without Christ we are lost, confirm the faith of the others. “Simon, Simon, behold Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith may not fail; and once you have turned back, you must strengthen your brothers.”<sup>99</sup>

Peter’s faith was not founded on himself, on his qualities or strength or courage. Peter’s faith was the faith of a convert from betrayal, like the faith of each of us. Peter’s faith was entirely founded on Jesus’s prayer for him, the prayer that founds our unity: “I have prayed for you.” Peter’s faith was his attachment to Jesus, not being separated from Him, even when he cried that he did not know Him. How Peter must have felt that he was lying to himself, how he must have felt that he was denying himself when he denied the Lord!

Peter’s denial culminated in a cry expressed with fierce violence. “At that he began to curse and to swear, ‘I do not know the man!’”<sup>100</sup> A violence generated by fear. Fear of what? Fear of losing his life, being arrested, suffering the hostility and abuse of the Jews, fear of dying, fear above all of an undefined, unknown danger. And yet he had said to Him, “I will lay down my life for you!”<sup>101</sup> Who among us has not experienced becoming aggressive and violent out of the fear of a dark, unknown danger? In fact, aggressivity is a defense mechanism. Faced with a danger we cannot define, we lose control of our possibility to defend ourselves. Since we cannot measure the danger, since it is unknown, our defense also loses its measure, does not know

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<sup>98</sup> Jn 6:70–71.

<sup>99</sup> Lk 22:31–32.

<sup>100</sup> Mt 26:74.

<sup>101</sup> Jn 13:37.

what level of intensity to take. Peter's error was in being prepared to defend Jesus, imagining the danger that would have threatened Him. He was prepared to give his life *against* those who threatened Jesus more than *for* Jesus himself. In fact, he had brought a sword, thinking he would have to fight armed guards. He was not prepared to fight against a gossipy doorkeeper! In other words, he was prepared to lay down his life only while trusting more in himself than in Jesus, measuring himself more than having Jesus take his measure. He was prepared to give his life instead of allowing it to be taken. In sum, he was prepared to give his life, trusting more in himself than in the Lord, having more faith in himself than in Christ. If he had trusted in Jesus, he would have waited for the "later" that Jesus had asked him to wait for in following Him: "Where I am going, you cannot follow Me now, though you will follow later."<sup>102</sup>

Peter tried to give his life for Christ without faith, without entrusting himself to Him. This is the fundamental point to understand for living life—without faith you do not give your life, you do not love, you do not have charity.

## **A great faith**

So then, let us ask what a great faith consists of, the one Jesus praised in the pagans and desired from His disciples. If Jesus reproved His disciples for having a meager, paltry faith, what does great faith consist of, one that has the dimensions that correspond to the immensity of the mission Christ entrusts to the Church, the dimensions of His compassion for all of humanity? How great Simeon's faith was. He saw that the presence of Christ illuminated the world just by the fact that He is here,<sup>103</sup> even though as a child He did not speak or walk and could do nothing! How great was Mary's faith. When Jesus had been in her womb only a couple of days, she sang in the *Magnificat* about His immense impact on the salvation of the world and history!

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<sup>102</sup> Jn 13:36.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Lk 2:34.

To understand this, I propose a scene from the Gospel. Let's be led by Jesus's own wonder at the great faith of a few people who were often totally outside the usual conception of a person from whom one should normally expect faith. The episode that has provoked me the most for many months is that of the pious centurion who begged Jesus to heal his paralyzed servant, who was suffering terribly.<sup>104</sup> Luke said that "he was valuable" to the centurion.<sup>105</sup>

Matthew reported that Jesus was willing to go to his home immediately, but the centurion said the words whose sense we repeat at every Mass before receiving the Eucharist: "Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed. For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."<sup>106</sup>

Jesus reacted with wonder at the faith of this pagan. "When Jesus heard this, He was amazed and said to those following Him, 'Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.'"<sup>107</sup> And He told the centurion: "You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you."<sup>108</sup>

In Luke's gospel, this episode immediately follows the chapter that corresponds to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, which begins with the Beatitudes. Luke introduced the episode of the centurion with these words: "When He had finished all His words to the people, He entered Capernaum."<sup>109</sup> There the centurion approached him. Luke has us understand that the centurion's faith is the most adequate response to Christ's words, to the Word of God who had just expressed the culmination of His teaching, the pith of all of the Gospel.

So then, this faith that enables Christ to complete His mission in us perfectly, what does it consist of? It consists of accepting Jesus's word with a humble openness that allows Christ Himself to fulfill His word, His mission in us. The centurion gave the example of military

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Mt 8:5-13.

<sup>105</sup> Lk 7:2.

<sup>106</sup> Mt 8:8-9.

<sup>107</sup> Mt 8:10.

<sup>108</sup> Mt 8:13.

<sup>109</sup> Lk 7:1.

authority: “For I too am a person subject to authority, with soldiers subject to me. And I say to one, ‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another, ‘Come here,’ and he comes; and to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he does it.” Put succinctly, the centurion *believed with trust that Christ’s word would become event*. He believed that Jesus’s word is fulfilled if we ask for it and allow it to act. He was certain that the one who fulfilled the word, the order, was Christ Himself. He understood that we should not conceive of obedience simply as something we do with our own strength, but that Christ Himself knows and can accomplish for us and in us what He says. Obedience is allowing Christ to do what He commands of us, what He orders us to do.

The centurion’s words do not simply describe the miracle of the healing of his servant; they describe the life that Christ came to live in us, that Christ wants to live in us. When Jesus tells us to “Come!,” all of our *vocation* is summarized in this word. When Jesus says “Go!,” all of our *mission* is summarized in this word. When He says “Do this!,” this order summarizes the entire *work* of God that Jesus wants to fulfill in us and through us.

Faith not only allows God to do some miracle for us, *faith allows Christ to become the true subject of our lives*, allows His word to live in us, allows the Word that He is to live in us as Word of God. *Faith allows Christ to be incarnate in our life, as in the Virgin Mary, and to become in us His vocation, mission, and work, that is, His coming into the world to do the work of the Father*.

Jesus summarized all this at the end of the episode when He told the centurion, “You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you! *Vade, et sicut credidisti, fiat tibi!*”

How can we not hear in these words the echo of Mary’s answer to the angel? “Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me [*fiat mihi*] according to your word.’”<sup>110</sup> In a certain sense, Jesus pronounces over us, over our faith, Mary’s “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord” so that our lives, too, will become an incarnation of His presence and mission.

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<sup>110</sup> Lk 1:38.

## **The right position between reality and Christ**

When Jesus, in response to the centurion's words, said "Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith!"<sup>111</sup> it is as if He were saying that there was a crisis of faith in Israel, and that the faith of the centurion was a prophetic judgment that should reveal to Israel its true problem, the true nature of its crisis.

Also in Jesus's time, like today, the people felt that it was in a crisis. Everyone perceived that things were not going well, that a change was needed. However, almost everyone said it was the Romans' fault, or the opposition party's. The Pharisees said it was the fault of the Sadducees, and the Sadducees said it was the fault of the Pharisees. This is often the case in the Church today: if the enemies of the Church are not blamed, then the tendency in the Church opposite one's own gets the blame.

Let's imagine that Jesus came into the middle of all this. What would He tell us? He would look for a Roman centurion, or a Canaanite woman,<sup>112</sup> or a repentant prostitute,<sup>113</sup> He would look with amazement at their faith and then He would tell us: "Look, the true problem is that you do not have this faith. Your crisis is a crisis of faith, not of a theoretical, dogmatic faith, because you are all fairly well catechized, but a crisis of faith as a position in front of Me and all of reality, all of life."

Having faith does not mean doing nothing and letting God do everything; it does not mean living entirely on miracles and prodigious works, but in taking the right position between reality and God, between the situation of the world and God who saves us. It is a matter of being the intermediary between God the Savior and the reality to be saved, to be those who allow God to act in the world. For this reason, faith is essential to mission.

The centurion's faith is the right position between his sick servant and Christ. This man acted in truth in front of his servant and in front of Christ. On the one hand, he looked at his sick servant with great compassion, love, and passion for his well-being. On

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<sup>111</sup> Mt 8:10.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Mk 7:25-30,

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Lk 7:37-50.

the other hand, he looked at Christ with truth, acknowledging God, acknowledging Him as the one Savior who can heal humanity, who can respond to the needs of life and the need for salvation in every person. *Faith is this right position of freedom, our freedom, between the need of humanity and God, of all of humanity, in us and in the whole world.* Faith is the right position that allows God to embrace the world, to save it, change it, transform it, renew it, that is, everything that all of us need, always.

Jesus pointed to the centurion's faith not to condemn the people of Israel or His disciples, but so that everyone would learn from this pagan to open up to the great miracle that Christ wants to do in our life: not so much the miracle of healing a sick person, but of making our life the space for the "Come!," "Go!," and "Do this!" that Christ pronounces over us, that is, our vocation to become the flesh of His presence in today's world.

The first and fundamental miracle of faith is our conversion to allowing Christ to live in us, in the community and thus in the world. The true miracle is that we obey Christ with simplicity of heart and trust, like the soldiers and servants under the centurion. The centurion said, "I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come here,' and he comes; and to my slave, 'Do this,' and he does it."<sup>114</sup> Maybe He was speaking of his dear sick servant. It was exactly this servant whom Jesus healed and restored to this position of "unhesitating" obedience, which, as Saint Benedict put it, "comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all."<sup>115</sup> Jesus healed the servant so he could return to living this obedience, but from now on it would be as if he obeyed Jesus more than the centurion, because from now on he would obey, work, and do everything with the life that Christ had given him, which was the life of Christ Himself in him. All his coming, going, and doing would be of Christ in him.

Think what fullness of life this would give us for living our faith!

We urgently need this faith so that we no longer live ourselves, but so that Christ lives in us, as Saint Paul said to the Galatians, so that

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<sup>114</sup> Mt 8:9.

<sup>115</sup> Rule of Saint Benedict 5, 1–2.

the presence of Christ becomes the entire vocation, mission, and work of our lives.<sup>116</sup>

## **Recognizing that we need salvation**

Looking straight on at the crisis in faith does not mean being pessimists, but *recognizing that humanity, the human condition, is in a permanent state of needing salvation*. The true crisis does not ask for solutions. The crisis asks for salvation, the salvation of people and communities, of peoples, of peoples at war. The crisis is resolved when we live it as women and men who are redeemed, saved, and thus as women and men who, in the midst of the crisis, even if the crisis continues, have a reason to be glad and at peace that no solution to the crisis can ever substitute.

Great faith is the faith of those to whom Christ can say, “You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you!” Faith is our begging openness to the event of Christ, the thirsty permission we give Christ to make His salvation happen in our lives, the good that only He can bring about.

There is nothing more urgent and necessary for each of us, for our communities, for the Church, and for the world than this faith, because nothing is more necessary than the event of Christ, Savior of the world.

*Regina Coeli*

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. Gal 2:20.

# *Sunday, April 16, morning*

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Piano Concert n. 20 in D minor, K 466

Clara Haskil, piano–Igor Markevitch–Orchestre des Concerts Lamoureux

Spirto Gentil 32, (Philips) Universal

*Angelus*

*Morning Prayers*

## ■ ASSEMBLY

**Davide Proserpi.** We have listened to *Il mio volto* [My face], this magnificent song by Adriana Mascagni, whom we remember with great fondness. “My God, I look at myself and discover I have no face.”<sup>117</sup> How often have we had this experience? When it does not happen, more often than not it is caused by distraction. We get up in the morning, look in the mirror, and realize we have no face. The more deeply we look, the more there appears to us endless darkness. And yet from the dark, from the depth of this darkness, which would be our existence if it were abandoned to itself, a light emerges. “Only when I realize that You are here / like an echo I hear my voice again / and I am born again like the time of memory.” This light becomes stronger and stronger, flooding all the space of our day, the light of the memory of the fact that we are loved and awaited today by Him who has loved us forever. We are not alone: He is waiting for us, calling us. The song by Anas that we have just listened to is an event that happens every morning when we open our eyes: “If you only knew how much I have waited for you / How much I have thought of you, how much I have loved you,”<sup>118</sup> says He who makes us now.

<sup>117</sup> Adriana Mascagni, “Il mio volto” [My face], in *Canti* [Songs] (Milan: Società Cooperative Editoriale Nuovo Mondo, 2014), 196.

<sup>118</sup> Antonio Anastasio, “Se tu sapessi” [If you knew], from the album *Pochi passi* [A few steps], recorded at the Tappeti Sonori Recording Studio, 2022; arrangement Walter Muto, © Fraternità sacerdotale San Carlo.



Last night you really let yourselves go, and after 1,700 questions the printer ran out of toner! They are very beautiful questions, not only those we have chosen and to which Fr. Mauro will respond. This shows that in these days Fr. Mauro has brought us to a new gaze upon ourselves and all of reality, and in fact, most of the questions are existential and touch on fundamental passages from the introduction and above all the two lessons on Saturday. So, without wasting more time, I'll read the chosen questions.

“The apostles did not believe because of what He said or the miracles He performed. They believed because of His ‘presence charged with a proposal.’” Could you speak more about this passage? How is this valid for people today, for example, our children?”

“Are we disadvantaged compared to the people before us? ‘Can a cultured man, a European of our days, believe, really believe in the divinity of the Son of God, Jesus Christ?’ (Dostoyevski)”

**Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori.** I think that if we are here, if we follow a charism, it means that the Spirit does not disadvantage us, just as He does not disadvantage any era or any human creature. In what way does He not disadvantage us? In the gift of a presence, the gift of a living encounter with Christ and thus in the proposal of the presence of Christ. The proposal of faith is the presence, the event of Christ in our midst. “I am with you always [every day], until the end of the age.”<sup>119</sup> This is the great promise of the Risen One. It is not possible that if Christ is present every day, He is less present than He was for the apostles, because Christ cannot be less than Himself. If we are promised His presence, the gift of His presence, and if this is what passes through all of history until the end of the world—every day, every month, every year, and thus forever, even in our era, this cannot be given less to us than to the apostles. What can disadvantage us is living in an era, in a cultural time, marked by a mentality that clouds our eyes and our freedom from recognizing this presence and welcoming the proposal that it is. There can be a fog that keeps us from living our faith with frankness. Saint Paul said to Timothy

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<sup>119</sup> Mt 28:20.

that he should stir into flame “the sincere faith that first lived in your grandmother [...] and mother,”<sup>120</sup> which literally means a faith that is not hypocritical, one that is frank, explicit, and honest. Because of this we cannot help but believe that faith is also a gift, a gift linked to the presence of Christ, the gift that the Spirit gives us so we can recognize Christ. Simeon went and recognized the presence of the Child because the Holy Spirit moved him to do so.<sup>121</sup> I believe we have to have faith in the Holy Spirit, who cannot help but accentuate (certainly not disadvantage!) the gift of the capacity to recognize Christ in an era in which everything fails to recognize Him. We have to realize this: among us and in the Church today there are testimonies that are exceptional, amazing, precisely because of the dark backdrop of a culture, a mentality, a time that does not favor faith at all. I think that this should make us feel more advantaged than other eras.

***Proseri.*** “You spoke about stirring up the embers of faith and that faith is a gift [and you’ve said it again just now] that we do not give ourselves. I would like to understand better how I can stir up my faith.”

***Lepori.*** To stir up, to ask to stir up faith—Saint Paul asks for something that Timothy’s freedom must do. We do not stir up our faith ourselves: it is a gift, a grace that is offered to our freedom, proposed to our freedom. Stirring it up is the task of the correspondence of our freedom to this grace. I think that we must be aware that also freedom is a gift: it is a charism. And as I was saying, freedom is also an irrevocable gift. God did not revoke this gift after the first sin and after everything that has happened in history because of the mistaken use of freedom. God remains very faithful to the irrevocability of every one of His gifts, in particular the gift of freedom. We must be aware that precisely because He did not want to revoke this gift, Christ died on the cross. He went to the cross because He did not take away Judas’s freedom to betray Him, the Pharisees’ freedom to condemn Him, Pilate’s freedom to try Him, etc. He went deeply into the gift of freedom and suffered the consequences. In this way

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<sup>120</sup> Cf. 2 Tm 1:5–6.

<sup>121</sup> Cf. Lk 2:25–27.

He confirmed it for us, and gave it to us even more: He made it even more precious; precious, however, in how He saves it, how He makes it good, a gift that is not wasted, but bears fruit. The fruit of freedom is that it becomes a yes, a yes to the event that opens totally, that is an openness, the openness of Mary, the openness of Our Lady to the event of Christ. This is the apex of freedom, of the redeemed freedom of Mary beginning with her conception and of our freedom redeemed by Christ on the cross, making it capable of stirring up faith, stirring itself up as faith, of being lived as openness to the presence of Christ.

**Prosperi.** What you say is very beautiful. Freedom is the first irrevocable gift of God, and it is the testimony to the truth of what you said the first evening: God never takes back His gifts. This is a source of hope and certainty for us as well. Christ does not ever revoke the commitment of the promises He makes for our lives.

**Lepori.** Yes, you welcome freedom as a gift when it becomes trust in God; you welcome it as gift when it is trust that we give to Him. Faith is trust in Christ, trusting in Him, believing in Him, following Him, saying yes to Him, having trust in the fact that He wants our good and loves us. Faith is this welcoming of the gift deep down and returning it.

**Prosperi.** “Today there were moments when it seemed that everything comes from God: faith comes from God, God makes unity, God resolves crises, as if God were a response to everything, sent down from above. But where am I?”

“Faith is a method of knowledge that involves the use of my reason. You said that ‘faith allows Christ to become the true subject of our life.’ In some way I feel that my humanity is eliminated. How can my humanity be the road and not an obstacle for the growth of my faith?”

**Lepori.** When do we use reason as reason and not as madness? When it embraces and recognizes all of reality, when it remains open to all of reality. Reason that closes itself upon an idea, a restricted concept, reason that rejects being an open gaze upon the whole of reality and understanding it, does not embrace the infinite (and the infinite is part of reality!). Revelation reveals to us that all of reality is

God who makes it out of the love that He is, and revelation proposes that we verify this. Thus, my reason, my “I,” exists if it is open to this, if it verifies this. Revelation enables and fully exalts the “I” of the human person inasmuch as it is capable of opening itself to all of reality. Understanding that my humanity is made for verifying this, for verifying that it is made for welcoming an infinite love, makes all of my humanity like a field that faith causes to bear fruit by opening it to all of reality, thereby broadening my humanity. Where am I? I am there where I open to all of reality. I am not there where I hide (like Adam and Eve among the bushes) as God comes toward me, the God who proposes to me His companionship and friendship, who proposes that I live all of reality at the source of His friendship for everything, the God who comes to stroll in the garden He created and made beautiful, that He gave to Adam and Eve to make them see that everything is gift. And yet they hid from this, they closed themselves against this! If my “I” closes to this, it closes to itself; that is, it mortifies itself and no longer knows where it is. When God asked, “Adam, where are you?”<sup>122</sup> Adam could not tell Him because he no longer knew where his “I” was, because the true place, the true position of our “I” is the You. It is saying “You” to God, to the You who makes you. Only if we are found do we know where we are.

If we let ourselves be found by this relationship that loves us and comes to us, a relationship that proposes Him to us and says “you” to us so that we will answer “You,” then we know where we are. We know where we are only if in front of us there is the you of the infinite God who gives us everything. This is what makes Christ become the subject of our life, that makes us live as a new subject, so that it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. What does Christ live in me? The fullness of my “I,” the fullness of my being created to be a child of God, being created in Christ. We are created in Christ and Christ lives in us. This is an experience of the fullness of the “I” that only Christ makes possible. And only by welcoming and realizing with wonder, like Saint Paul, that “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me,”<sup>123</sup> only by living this wonder does one realize who one truly

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<sup>122</sup> Gn 3:9.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. Gal 2:20.

is. I think that those who knew Saint Paul (and you see it from the letters) recognized that he had a very strong personality, and yet even a man like him had to realize that the fullness of his “I,” of his personality, was made to have a subject that was not the “I” he thought he was.

**Prosperi.** With respect to being in front of a You and the wonder of being children, I remember one of the posters from years past that showed the image of Marcellino, with his eyes wide open in front of a presence, which is not something juxtaposed to his “I” but is the source of wonder.<sup>124</sup> Like everyone, at times we are tempted to think that we are basically autonomous, as if God were not truly a father but someone who gives you the initial push and then you have to go forward on your own two feet. Instead, God does everything. Yes, God does everything and this is beautiful. This is the reason Fr. Giussani always insisted that our original posture is that of a child, and it is the reason we created that poster. A child depends totally, and this is not only his existential condition but also the gusto, peace, and continual wonder at a newness in front of an Other who does everything for us and in our life.

**Lepori.** Marcellino’s gaze is the same gaze that surprised me in Fr. Giussani, that gaze upon me, amazed at me, which revealed me to myself, amazed me and thus opened me, caused me not to live turned in on myself. As we said, living turned in on ourselves is the negation of the “I” and suffocates the “I” as relationship, as created in the image and likeness of the Trinity. This is why I say that Christian faith is not separate from communion.

**Prosperi.** We can read the next question, which is on this very point. “‘Christian faith is not separable from communion.’ What is the nexus between faith and communion?’”

We chose this question because it introduces the common thread of the journey of these days on faith. The entire second lesson focused on this.

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<sup>124</sup> The reference is to the protagonist of the film *Marcellino pane e vino* [Marcellino, bread and wine] (directed by Ladislao Vajda, Falco Film-Chamartin, Spain, 1955). The image is reproduced in the 1992 Easter poster.

**Lepori.** Christian faith is not separate from communion because of the simple fact that faith is believing in the Trinity. The whole reality that faith believes in is the Trinity who makes us, who wanted to create us, who created the entire universe and gives everything substance and being, the origin and end of everything. God is the eternal communion of persons and created the human person so we would participate in this nature of His, the divine nature that is love, this communion among the three persons, and thus so we would enter into this relationship. After all, the entire proclamation of Christ and all of revelation consists in making us enter into the trinitarian relationship as children of the Father in the Holy Spirit; that is, we have been given a place that is the place of Christ, a place as daughter or son within the Trinity. All faith is knowing and experiencing this, as Jesus said in chapter 15 of Saint John: “As the Father loves me, so I also love you. Remain in My love. If you love one another, you remain in My love.” Everything is there: “As the Father loves Me, so I also love you.”<sup>125</sup> What can be greater, more infinite than being loved by Christ as the Father loves Him? There is nothing, there is no being, there is no reality outside this. “As the Father loves Me, so I also love you,” and “remain in My love.” Jesus links this remaining in His love, this being loved by Him the way the Father loves Him, to our loving each other. For this reason, unity is linked to the totality of the Christian experience. Living communion together means opening ourselves, which is asked of us and given to us, to this infinite experience that is recognized only by faith, that faith recognizes and that faith embraces. Faith is believing in this love, in the proposal of this love. Therefore, you cannot distinguish the life of communion from the life of faith, nor the life of faith from the life of communion, because there is no faith outside communion and there is no communion outside of faith. This is such a great mystery that you cannot respond.

**Prosperi.** This leads us to the next questions.

“What does it mean to be united and at the same time to maintain your own uniqueness and diversity?”

“You insisted a lot on unity. In the October 15 audience the pope told us that ‘unity does not mean uniformity.’ In fact, the first Cistercians

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<sup>125</sup> Cf. Jn 15:9–17.

[see *Three Religious Rebels*] and then Saint Bernard founded a new order and Fr. Giussani became the founder of a new thing within the Church. What is the contribution of my humanity?"

**Lepori.** Here, too, the unity that Christ asks the Father for us is in imitation of how the Father and the Son are united in the Holy Spirit. From the little I know of them, it seems to me that the three persons of the Trinity are very different from each other. I don't think there is a more evident diversity. Do you understand that communion is exactly this unity in a diversity, because the person is "diversity"? It is originality, isn't it? But there is a love in Being, there is love that is Being, that unites that which is the least uniform possible, I don't know how to say it. This is reflected in ecclesial communion. I see it in the life of monasteries: the more the monks and nuns age, the more their personality becomes original, not because they separate from communion and do whatever they want; in fact, often they are the most united, the most obedient, the most inside, those who are the most involved in the life of the community. Yet their personality becomes increasingly more original, truly, and you are amazed at the originality of their person as a gift that is precisely their charism, the gift of being what the Lord gives them to be, the "I" that He gives them to be. Well, the uniformity that the pope condemns is a unity that apes the trinitarian communion, the communion of the Church, instead of living it. In fact, communion does not subtract from the Spirit the richness of the gift of the charism given to each person that is necessary for communion and enriches the communion among us. This holds within a community, a family, a fraternity, an order, and in the whole Church. We have to be careful not to conceive of the identity of each person as something that divides. Normally this happens when a gift is separated from communion, that is, when it is lived as something that does not build up communion, that is not nourished by and does not nourish communion. This is the one, true problem. Instead, when the originality of each person is welcomed as a gift of the Spirit, you understand that each of these gifts is the life of the one body of Christ. Thus, I experience peace in living my own gift and the gifts I don't have if I have the awareness of living in a body. For example, people say to me, "Well, you monks don't go on

mission!” Certainly, but the Church does! I am a member of a body and I know I have a bond with those who go on mission, just as those who go on mission know they have a bond with those who pray and offer their life in another way. This makes us touch and experience all the richness of the communion, which does not kill the identity of each person and is not a uniformity that mortifies the gift, the shining spread of the gift of Christ to the world.

***Prosperi.*** There are some questions that touch on the point of originality when it undermines communion or unity. Among these we have chosen this one:

“In a passage of the morning lesson you mentioned one of your monasteries and spoke of problems that involve the ‘more or less sincere’ freedom of people who are entrusted to you. You also spoke of your reactions of anger, dejection, and sadness in front of all this. At times I have a similar experience. Faced with those who affirm themselves (their opinion, power, or simply their need for attention) [this holds true in a family, too] in a hostile way against the work others do to build or nourish unity, speaking with duplicity, manipulating the reality of facts and people (and the weakest are often those who pay the price) I can’t always say I’m capable of entrusting this to God and finding peace. Sometimes I only have a foggy consciousness (if not as an ultimate judgment, at least as a sentiment that encumbers me) that the unity of the community does not depend on me but is a gift. Yet it is true that I am also entrusted with the task of defending uniqueness and the weak. How do you deal with the evil of division, a freedom that does not recognize [unity] and ‘rows in the opposite direction.’”?

***Lepori.*** Thinking of my own experience first of all, I believe that exactly in such a situation it is important to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and not on the person or people who incarnate a position in the community (or in the order, the movement, etc.) that divides, a bit like Judas. I’m not saying they are all Judases but that in a certain sense they become dividers, they create division.

***Prosperi.*** We all have a bit of the temptation of Judas.



**Lepori.** We all have this temptation. Therefore, the first thing to be aware of is that I, too, could be that person, and that at times without realizing it, I am that person for others. For Jesus, Judas was a painful wound but not a fixation. In fact, the disciples had lived with Judas for three years, but up to the end, nobody realized that Judas was a problem. In a certain sense, it seems that Jesus always covered the situation a bit out of love for him and because of the irrevocableness of the gift He had given Judas in calling him, in giving him freedom, having chosen him. It is as if Christ hadn't been able to say, "No, leave!" In fact, Judas rejected Jesus and left, but the gift remained. This makes us deal with people and situations that torment us with a backdrop of mystery; people are never defined only by their behavior, by what they do, by what they may be plotting. Anyway, there is something that really freed me in a time when I was the object of a more evident hostility: the realization that God does not ask us to face the enemy frontally; that is, like Peter with his sword against the enemies, because the enemy is stronger than us, especially the enemy with a capital E, who often hides behind people's fragility. Judas was a fragile person. In his ambition he was a fragile person who the devil succeeded in making his instrument of division. It does me a lot of good to read the psalms in which there is the image of God who overcomes the enemy, because I realize that the enemy is stronger than me, but that God is stronger than the enemy. What does this mean? It means that I do not have to face head-on the experience of hostility, animosity, deceit, etc.—I only have to face it in my relationship with Christ. I have to pass through Him, entrusting myself to Him, first of all. It means fixing my eyes on Him more than on the problem the other represents for me. This is an exercise of asceticism because it is true that when someone torments us it becomes a fixation. We can't stop thinking about it, can't sleep at night, because it torments us psychologically. This, too (maybe this is why Jesus left Judas free to the very end) drives us to a conversion so that truly even in this, and above all in this, we cannot claim to save ourselves by ourselves or to save the community or the Church by ourselves. Often in the lives of the saints or the popes one asks, "Why in the world did he bear having that person next to him? Why didn't he send him away? Why didn't he get rid of him? Why did he let him act?" I think actually that this

was part of their holiness. They understood they had to leave God the time and the way to resolve these torments, these trials, because God wants to save the enemy, too; He doesn't want to destroy him but to save him and thus He makes us patient so that with our patience we allow Him to win completely, not only overcoming the problems, the division, and the deceit that torment us, but also overcoming the deep division in His body, of which certain phenomena and people are just the tip of the iceberg, because the true problem is always that there is a much more powerful enemy behind it and only Christ defeats him by dying on the cross.

***Prosperi.*** This reminds me of Jesus telling the Father, “They belonged to You, and You gave them to Me [...] so that they may be one just as We are.”<sup>126</sup> When we forget this, it is as if we become masters of the companionship and the road we all travel.

***Lepori.*** As always, we need to allow ourselves to be surprised by how God solves these problems better than we can. When I said, “the enemy is stronger than me, but God is stronger than the enemy and so I trust in God,” I was given peace in that situation. I was surprised that God found the solution in me, created it in me, and gave me the grace to be at peace in front of an enemy. It was the peace of Jesus in front of Judas, the peace that He always had in front of His enemies.

***Prosperi.*** “In the afternoon lesson, you said that having faith does not mean doing nothing and having God do everything, but taking the right position between reality and God [this expression struck many, and many questions were about this], being the go-between between the Savior and reality. What does it mean to find the right position? Can you talk more about how, existentially, I can learn this right position in my daily life?”

***Lepori.*** Faith recognizes, asks for, transmits, and proclaims God's relationship with reality, with our reality; in this relationship He creates, loves, redeems and saves—it is a relationship that is mercy. Today

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<sup>126</sup> Jn 17:6–11.

is Divine Mercy Sunday,<sup>127</sup> which expresses exactly this mystery of God's relationship with our reality. Faith recognizes that God's gaze is mercy. When the apostles saw Jesus lift His eyes toward the approaching crowd (whom the apostles viewed only as an enormous pain in the neck), they recognized that Jesus's relationship with the crowd was one of compassion and mercy. His love was one that embraced, welcomed, and gave His life for them. Well then, faith is recognizing God's relationship with reality and God's gaze on reality, even on my enemy. This means I can look at my enemy with the eyes of faith, and not just starting from my own psychology, in order to discover that a true relationship with reality is not just me and the enemy, but me passing through God to look at the enemy. Our place is to recognize this in living our reality, the reality that is given to us every day, the reality I live with my family, in my work, in my illness, in my sin, the reality that for the centurion was his sick servant—at that moment, for the centurion reality was concentrated on his sick servant with an urgency, pain, and a feeling of love and friendship. What did he do? He was the go-between for this reality and Jesus who saw how Jesus embraced this reality, how Jesus looked at it, saved it, and healed it. This is the great task. This allows the event of Christ to happen because Jesus does not look at reality from outside, but embraces it, becomes an event inside human reality. This means that human reality, which sin took away from God, is put back into His hands so that He does what only God can do. When the centurion put his sick servant in Christ's hands, he found him healed, restored to him, redeemed, and he found himself to have been the instrument of this event. He understood that his faith was enough, in a certain sense, as if to say, "My faith is enough to bring You to my servant. Just say a word and my servant will be healed," that is, "Your presence is so great that one word suffices for everything." Just one word, welcomed with faith, brings the entire event of Christ into the reality that is entrusted to us. I think that in order to understand more deeply and existentially how to learn this correct position from within our daily vicissitudes, we need to look at the cloud of witnesses that surrounds

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<sup>127</sup> "Divine Mercy Sunday," instituted by John Paul II in 2000, coincides with the Sunday after Easter.

us. I was speaking about Jone, but Jone had spoken about the stupendous witness of the way Fr. Giussani and John Paul II lived their illnesses. She transmitted to us her gaze on the cloud of witnesses and on these saints. There is a continual communication to each other of the testimony of how people, in particular in illness, in the face of death, etc., allow this reality to be taken into the hands of Christ. Their testimony is a road for us. First of all, it has appeal because there is nothing more fascinating than a life or situation, even of evil, danger, illness, or death, that allows itself to be taken into Christ's hands. There is nothing more fascinating as a proposal of fullness of life for me because I know that my life is made for this. The road consists in following each other and welcoming the testimony we give to each other, which becomes a proposal that all of us can verify.

***Prosperi.*** Even so, our friend asks: "It seems that the cloud of witnesses I have encountered is not enough for me to be certain of the love of Christ, to reach true faith in God the Father. There is always space for doubt. How can I be certain that Christ operates in the people I meet and wants to communicate Himself to me through them?" And another person asks: "This doubt seems like a betrayal that is too great and continuous. Could you help me understand better the dynamic of doubt? Is it impossible to escape from it?"

***Lepori.*** Since testimony is always about an event, it is always greater than the witnesses. There is no need for the witnesses to be greater than what they testify to (no apostle was greater than the Risen Christ). The greatness of the witness lies entirely in his or her testifying to the greatness of Christ. For this reason, witnesses are worthy of faith, not so much because they proclaim themselves, but precisely because they manifest the greatness of the event of Christ in their lives. The more a witness is wretched, poor, and maybe sinful, the more the testimony is about Christ, as with the Samaritan woman at the well, who returned to her village and became a witness to Christ. She was the most improbable person, and did not claim to be greater than Christ; rather, she did not claim anything, but just asked, "Is He perhaps the Messiah,?" and testified to Him and brought everyone to Him. Who among us has ever brought our entire city or town to encounter Christ? This woman did

so. This is part of the charism, part of the gift of the Spirit: my poverty transmits and testifies to the infinite greatness of the event of Christ. Certainly, it takes humility, but in front of the wretchedness of the witness who brings us to Christ, the humility asked of us is the humility of not believing that the event, Christ, comes to me for a greater reason than His gratuitousness, His mercy. It does me good that Christ is testified to me through poor sinners. It does me good to know that I, too, can become a witness. I need not fear, because this testifies to me that the event is greater, that the event is Christ and not that person. The important thing is not to reduce the event to the person who bears witness to it, something that Paul denounced in those saying: “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas.”<sup>128</sup> This is a reduction of the event of Christ to the person who testifies about Him to us, which means not transmitting Him truly and not allowing Him to be transmitted. I think that in any case, doubts can be part of a journey because they make us walk. However, we must realize that there are doubts that betray and close us off, and in that case we have to be careful that the doubt does not become closure. Doubt that questions and asks is okay, but doubt that closes in on itself cheats me because when I close in on myself, I no longer welcome the event; I no longer welcome Christ and thus I ruin myself.

**Prosperi.** You said that mission is born from fixing your gaze on Christ. Since you linked the origin and the fulfillment of faith to fixing your gaze on Christ, many did not understand clearly the link between faith (which is personal) and mission.

“What is the relationship between missionary drive and recognizing unity as a gift of Christ so that the world may believe?”

**Lepori.** Fixing your gaze on Christ is recognizing and keeping your gaze fixed on a presence that is given, gratuitous, that is given to me and to the entire world. Therefore, missionary drive originates in Him, and the more you fix your gaze on Christ, the more you realize that mission is a universal gift that embraces the world, as we have said many times. Missionary drive is linked to the recognition

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<sup>128</sup> 1 Cor 1:12.

of unity as Christ's gift, that the world may believe, because (as I was saying) unity is generated by and has its substance only in our belonging to Him. There is no unity without belonging to Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles, we have the story of Peter and John interrogated by the Sanhedrin leaders. "Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as the companions of Jesus."<sup>129</sup> They saw simple men and recognized them as companions of Christ, people who belonged to Christ (it was the one quality they had in common), which made them missionaries, witnesses. They saw their unity because Christ was in their midst, because each of them was attached to Christ. If each of us is attached to Christ, then we are all united among ourselves; there is no alternative to this dynamic of the Christian event. Understanding that in the unity with the person next to me the communion with the entire world, the peace of the entire world, is played out, means understanding the infinite greatness that Christ brought to our relationships. Belonging to the person I have next to me, in unity with her, with my small community, with the people of my community, means communion with the whole world, the event that saves the world. This makes my fraternity, my fraternity work into a universal service for world peace, and for this reason the pope asked us to help him in a "prophecy for peace."<sup>130</sup> The prophecy for peace begins with how I am with the person beside me, how I treat my relationship with the people of my family, my community, my fraternity; this is true because of the nature of the event that our poor Fraternity brings as an immense, certain treasure in clay vessels.<sup>131</sup> However, the clay vessels contain the treasure, the treasure for everyone. Being attentive to this among ourselves before wanting to be so, being attentive to this reality by which Christ bound our belonging to Him in unity, thus my belonging to the people I am with; being conscious of this means welcoming the event of Christ in all its import. Our unity is something similar; it seems insignificant but through it we welcome the event for the entire world, and I welcome it for the person who is the furthest away from me. I don't know how to say

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<sup>129</sup> Acts 4:13.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Francis, "Holy Prophetic and Missionary Restlessness," 19.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. 2 Cor 4:7.

this, please forgive the poverty of my somewhat tired expression: I believe that fixing your gaze on Christ in our midst is the most revolutionary work we can do, the thing that is most transformative of the world. If this demands sacrifice, humility, and renouncing ourselves, we are at least aware (as Christ wants us to be) that the sacrifice is not just for this little detail of reality that is my relationship with someone, but a sacrifice we make for the entire world, a sacrifice for all of humanity, for the peace of everyone. Today is Easter for our Orthodox brethren. A few days before I came here, I received a message from a friend who is sharing Easter with a group of Ukrainian refugees in Italy, and they have been following the Exercises from Assisi. That message has been on my mind a lot in these days—it transmitted all of their difficulty in living this situation in a world that is progressively forgetting the war, and maybe we, too, are beginning to get used to this drama, this terrible wound in their flesh that they cannot forget. Well, I think that the response and the help we can give them and the whole world, the answer we can give to the wars, the upheaval in Sudan, etc., begins from the communion among us, from the sacrifice of communion, because it is a sacrifice we make for Christ. Insisting on unity is not insisting on something to do; it is insisting on the presence of Christ who is given to us for the world. Therefore, it is an immense responsibility lived out in the least detail of my gaze upon the person next to me, upon my life and my community. We offer this because if we do not offer this love of the unity among us, we do not offer Christ to the world, and if we do not offer Christ to the world, our faith is in vain, that is, it does not exist: it is an empty faith. But Christ is risen and has revived us in this, and we must be grateful that in His infinite mercy He always revives us, always makes us instruments of this. Therefore, let's thank Him!

*Prosperi.* Thank you! I believe our gratitude is well-deserved. These days have been very dense and we will have a year to reflect on everything you have said.

# HOLY MASS

*Readings: Acts 2:42–47, Psalm 117; 1 Peter 1:3–9; John 20:19–31*

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP FILIPPO SANTORO  
ARCHBISHOP OF TARANTO AND SPECIAL DELEGATE  
FOR THE *MEMORES DOMINI***

Very dear sisters and brothers,

The experience of faith proclaimed in these Spiritual Exercises reaches its greatest liturgical expression in this Sunday’s celebration, which is not called the second Sunday *after* Easter, but the second Sunday *of* Easter, a Sunday that lasts during the entire time of Easter. Today this same Easter day bursts into our life. One great day, the day of Christ risen, which has no end.

The Lord has visited us in these days of Spiritual Exercises and now He is in our midst as He was with the disciples in the Upper Room. John’s gospel says: “On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side.” Imagine the apostles—what wonder, what amazement to see Him again, alive! John’s gospel simply says that “the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.” We rejoice with them as well because we have seen Him in these days and in our life.

The presence of the Risen One was unthinkable for the apostles: every time Jesus told them about it, they had not even take it into consideration, and they had not believed Him. Now they see Him with the physical signs of the wounds in His hands and side. It really is Jesus, risen and alive! Seeing Him evoked their faith and joy. A preexisting faith is not what made them see. Before, they were disheartened and fearful, incredulous. Faith is a consequence of seeing. They see Him, as happened to us, when He made Himself present in an encounter that was truer and more beautiful than all others. In the Galilee of our first encounter, we saw the signs of the passion, the glorious wounds, the unmistakable sign of His presence in a face, in a relationship that could not be explained without Him. We followed Him, each on his or



her own journey. In my case, I was asked to go on mission to Brazil, which was the most upsetting experience of my life, but was possible because He was there. Fr. Giussani's voice inviting me to depart was the voice of the Lord making Himself present.

Then Jesus said again to His disciples, "Peace be with you!" and He added, "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." He gives the Holy Spirit and forgives our sins, just as has happened in these days. The Lord makes Himself seen, chooses us, defeats our fear, and sends us as He was sent. He is the sent one, and in turn He sends us. By nature, He is inseparable from the Father, in whom He has all His substance. He gives us a foretaste of the fact that we, too, have a fully realized face only in reference to our Lord, who has constituted us from the very beginning. As the Father is everything for Jesus, the source and life, so for us our encounter with Him is everything, in a relationship in history. The new creation and our substance today lie in the encounter with the Risen One today. This is not because we are good and deserve His love, but because He has reached us and fills us with amazement and thus adoration. The same thing that happened to the apostles has happened to us. They could never erase that encounter from their lives, nor can we cancel our Galilee from the dawn of every day that begins.

But on that day, Thomas was not with them when Jesus came to the Upper Room, and he did not believe the apostles when they told him about Jesus risen from the dead. He said, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in His hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." And eight days after Easter, exactly like today, Jesus came into their midst and told Thomas, "Put your finger here and see My hands, and bring your hand and put it into My side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." Just as in Caravaggio's painting, Jesus gave him a direct and personal experience of His presence. After Thomas touched Jesus's hands and side, he said to Him, "My Lord and my God!"

The man who had doubted in front of the faith of the apostles yielded before the experience of touching the Lord. He who remained incredulous and far from the affirmations of the apostles had the privilege of touching Jesus's side near His heart, had this experience of the Lord, and acknowledged and proclaimed Him, not because he was

good, but because he was loved and not even for a moment reproved.

Saint John Paul II wanted this Sunday to become “Divine Mercy Sunday,” referring to Jesus’s mercy to Thomas. The Lord shows Himself to us, loves us and forgives us. Today, too, faith is born of concrete facts, of the Lord showing Himself in a living encounter with people like us, the concrete sign of Him who is the living one. Jesus asked Thomas: “Have you come to believe because you have seen Me?” The great exegete, Ignace de la Potterie, interpreted these words to mean “Blessed are those who without having seen [in other words, *without having seen Me*, directly] have believed.”<sup>132</sup> The allusion is not to the faithful who would come in the following centuries, who should “believe without seeing,” but to the apostles and disciples who were the first to acknowledge that Jesus had risen even though the visible signs that testified to it were exiguous. Jesus wanted to indicate that it is reasonable to believe the testimony of those who *have seen* the signs, the indications of the living presence of the Lord. Blind faith is not asked of us. It is the beatitude promised to those who in humility acknowledge His presence starting from signs, albeit exiguous ones, and give credit to credible witnesses, as happened with us.

In Saint Luke’s narration of the disciples of Emmaus, which happened that same day (the evening of the first day), Jesus, after having walked with the two, entered their house, sat with them (sat with them!) and broke bread, and their eyes were opened and their hearts burned, as happened to Thomas. This then happened to the disciples of the apostles and also happens to us. Jesus sits with us and our hearts burn from His presence. Still today the Lord sits with us in the Eucharist, sits with us in everyday life, in our unity. This is why Jesus prayed to the Father, “I in them and You in Me, that they may be brought to perfection as one, that the world may know that You sent Me, and that You loved them even as You loved Me.”<sup>133</sup> Ever since we encountered Him, our life has not been the same, because through

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<sup>132</sup> “Brani di difficile interpretazione della Bibbia VII, Gv 20,29 [Bible passages of difficult interpretation, VII, Jn 20:29] in Ignace de la Potterie, *Storia e mistero: Egesi cristiana e teologia giovannea* [History and mystery: Christian exegesis and the theology of the Gospel of John] (Turin–Rome: SEI-30Giorni, 1997). Our translation.

<sup>133</sup> Jn 17:23.

baptism and the grace of the charism we have been made part of His body. The signs of His hands and His side today are the signs of our unity, the signs of the passion of the Lord and of His glory.

Saint Paul told us, “As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.”<sup>134</sup> In this way a greater desire for His coming is born. From the Lord’s passion comes the resurrection, which, like an unstoppable river, crosses through the ages and reaches us in the sacraments, in the sacrament of the Church and in the sacrament of our charism, embraced and recognized by the pope. It also reaches us through the grace of these Spiritual Exercises and this Eucharist. Among ourselves we bear the unmistakable signs of His presence and we proclaim it to the world, to the ends of the earth, until He comes.

“‘Yes, I am coming soon.’ Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> 1 Cor 11:26.

<sup>135</sup> Rv 22:20.

## TELEGRAMS SENT

*His Holiness Pope Francis*

Your Holiness,

In these days, about 32,000 people, including 5,000 present in Rimini, and others by video link in many Italian and foreign cities, have participated in the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation.

The Exercises, entitled “Our Eyes Are Fixed on Jesus, Who Is the Origin and Fulfillment of Faith,” were preached by Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, the abbot general of the Cistercian order. It has been an opportunity for all of us to dwell on the content and the foundation of our faith in Christ, the one Savior of the world. Fr. Mauro accompanied us in this journey, helping us to understand again how faith, the acknowledgment of the presence of Christ alive and present in our midst, “informs” all of our life with His presence, making it attractive and worth living, and that the form of faith in Christ is our communion in obedience to you and the Church, with concern for the unity of our movement and of all the Christian faithful. Thus, we have understood even better your words to us in Saint Peter’s Square last October 15: “Never forget that first Galilee of the call, that first Galilee of the encounter. Always return there, to that first Galilee that each one of us has lived.” Only in that encounter do we constantly find the words of eternal life that, as Fr. Giussani often repeated, “can explain existence” and send us on the missionary task that has been entrusted to us.

Grateful for the blessing you sent us, which has accompanied us in these Exercises, we all continue to pray for you.

*Davide Proserpi*

*His Eminence Cardinal Matteo Zuppi  
President of the Italian Episcopal Conference*

Most Reverend Eminence,

This weekend the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation have taken place with about 32,000 peo-

ple, including 5,000 present in Rimini, and others by video link gathered in groups in many Italian and foreign cities.

The Exercises, entitled “Our Eyes Are Fixed on Jesus, Who Is the Origin and Fulfillment of Faith,” were preached by Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, the abbot general of the Cistercian order.

Fr. Mauro helped us to understand again how faith, the acknowledgment of the presence of Christ alive and present in our midst, “informs” all of our life with His presence, making it attractive and worth living, and that the form of faith in Christ is our communion in obedience to the Church. In this work we have been urged to the missionary task that has been entrusted to us.

Thanking you for your closeness, and asking for your blessing, we greet you with heartfelt cordiality.

*Davide Prosperì*

*Most Reverend Bishop Nicolò Anselmi  
Bishop of Rimini*

Dear Bishop Anselmi,

Thanking you again for your closeness and your personal greeting, I am writing to inform you that the Spiritual Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation, entitled “Our Eyes Are Fixed on Jesus, Who Is the Origin and Fulfillment of Faith,” have taken place with about 32,000 people, including 5,000 present in Rimini, and others by video link gathered in groups in many Italian and foreign cities.

The preaching of Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori, the abbot general of the Cistercian order, helped us to understand again how faith, the acknowledgment of the presence of Christ alive and present in our midst, “informs” all of our life with His presence, making it attractive and worth living, and that the form of faith in Christ is our communion in obedience to the Church. In this work we have been urged to the missionary task that has been entrusted to us.

Asking for your blessing for the journey of our Fraternity, I greet you with heartfelt cordiality.

*Davide Prosperì*

## ART IN OUR COMPANIONSHIP

*Prepared by Sandro Chierici*

Mary was the first to have the privilege of being able to fix her eyes on Jesus, and her gaze was never drawn away from the life of her Son. She totally entrusted herself to God's design even before the Annunciation; she entrusted Jesus to the good gaze of Simeon, as she entrusts Him to our gaze today.

### *Nativity of Mary*

- 01 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 02 Icon, Novgorod School, Moscow, The State Tret'jakov Gallery
- 03 Carpaccio, Bergamo, Accademia Carrara

### *Presentation of Mary in the Temple*

- 04 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 05 Carpaccio, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera
- 06 Vrancke van der Stockt, Madrid, El Escorial Monastery, detail

### *Marriage of the Virgin*

- 07 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 08 Raphael, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera
- 09 Raphael, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera, detail

### *Annunciation*

- 10 Coptic fabric, Vatican City, Vatican Apostolic Library
- 11 Paolo Veneziano, Venice, Accademia
- 12 Fra Angelico, Florence, Convent of San Marco
- 13 Antonello da Messina, *Virgin Annunciate*, Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia
- 14 Leonardo da Vinci, Florence, Uffizi

### *Visitation*

- 15 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 16 Ivory, Salerno, Diocesan Museum
- 17 Pontorno, Carmignano (Prato), Saints Michael and Francis

*Nativity*

- 18 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 19 Agnolo Gaddi, Prato, Cathedral, Chapel of the Sacred Girdle
- 20 Guido Reni, Napoli, Certosa San Martino
- 21 Icon, Rublev's workshop, Moscow, The State Tret'jakov Gallery

*Adoration of the Shepherds*

- 22 Matthias Stomer, Turin, Palazzo Madama
- 23 Gherardo delle notti, Florence, Uffizi
- 24 Lorenzo Lotto, Brescia, Pinacoteca Tosio Martinengo

*Adoration of the Magi*

- 25 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 26 Zillis, Saint Martin, wooden ceiling, detail
- 27 Benvenuto di Giovanni, London, National Gallery

*Presentation in the Temple*

- 28 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 29 Ivory, Salerno, Diocesan Museum
- 30 Fra Angelico, Florence, Convent of San Marco
- 31 Giovanni Bellini, Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia

*Flight into Egypt*

- 32 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 33 Juan de Borgoña, Cuenca, Museum of the Cathedral
- 34 Caravaggio, Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj
- 35 Caravaggio, Rome, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, detail

*Jesus Among the Doctors—The Finding of Jesus*

- 36 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 37 Mosaic, Monreale, Cathedral
- 38 Simone Martini, Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery

*Daily Life of the Holy Family*

- 39 Raphael, *Madonna of the Veil*, Chantilly, Musée Condé
- 40 Guido Reni, *The Madonna sewing*, Rome, Quirinal Palace
- 41 Rembrandt, *The Holy Family with Angels*, Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum
- 42 Modesto Faustini, *Holy Family*, Loreto, Sanctuary of the Holy House

*The Wedding at Cana*

- 43 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 44 Ivory, Salerno, Diocesan Museum
- 45 Fresco, Dečani, detail

*Mary at the Foot of the Cross*

- 46 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 47 Rogier van der Weyden, *Deposition*, Madrid, Prado Museum

*Lamentation*

- 48 Giotto, Padua, Scrovegni Chapel
- 49 Michelangelo, *Pietà*, Rome, Saint Peter
- 50 Michelangelo, *Pietà*, Rome, Saint Peter, detail
- 51 Bellini, Milan, Pinacoteca di Brera

*Pentecost*

- 52 El Greco, Madrid, Prado Museum
- 53 Icon, Moscow, Trinity of Nikitniki

*Death of the Virgin*

- 54 Fra Angelico, Cortona, Diocesan Museum
- 55 Jacopo Torriti, mosaic, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore
- 56 Paolo Veneziano, Vicenza, Civic Museums

*Assumption into Heaven*

- 57 Bartolomeo della Gatta, Cortona, Diocesan Museum
- 58 Titian, Verona, Cathedral
- 59 Titian, Venice, Basilica dei Frari

*Coronation of the Virgin*

- 60 Giotto, *Baroncelli Polyptych*, Florence, Santa Croce, Baroncelli Chapel
- 61 Jacopo Torriti, mosaic, Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore
- 62 Paolo Veneziano, New York, Frick Collection
- 63 Bergognone, Milan, San Simpliciano
- 64 Master of Cesi, Paris, Musée Marmottan

*Judgment*

- 65 Michelangelo, Vatican City, Sistine Chapel, detail
- 66 Michelangelo, Vatican City, Sistine Chapel, detail



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Translation from the Italian by Sheila Beatty

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