

“Press on to make Him my own”
(Saint Paul)

Easter Triduum of the CL Student Youth
Rimini, April 17-19, 2014

INTRODUCTION, JOSÉ MEDINA
April 17, Thursday evening

Ballata dell'uomo vecchio [The Ballad of the Old Man]
Era de maggio [It Was in May]
Liberazione n. 2 [Liberation n. 2]

Here we are, Lord, “Bestial as always before, carnal, self-seeking as always before, selfish and purblind as ever before/ Yet always struggling, always reaffirming, always resuming their march on the way that was lit by the light;/ Often halting, loitering, straying, delaying, returning, yet following no other way.”¹ Full of urgency and desire to find someone who can fill to overflowing the greatness of the heart, “pressing on to make Him our own,”² to let ourselves be seized by He who came to help us.

We ask You, Father, not to abandon us. Illuminate us, sustain us. Come quickly to free us, to free us from the illusion that appearances are the substance of life. Come, Lord, to free us from the anguish of daily life. Throw our hearts wide open, that we may perceive the shadow of each thing, casting light on it, give each thing its true form. We come to You as beggars, Lord, aware of our smallness and Your greatness. Let's sing together *Come Holy Spirit*. Stand up.

Come Holy Spirit

THE CRY OF THE “I”

I'd like to thank you for the work you have done to prepare for this moment. I found your contributions to be sincere, the expression of the work and effort it took to decide to be “outrageously happy.” It is truly evident that you accepted Fr. Julián Carrón's challenge at the Beginning Day.³ I would also like to thank you for your presence, which in and of itself expresses the question each of us carries in our heart. We are small and very often distracted, and at the same time full of the urgent need, the desire to find someone who can fill the greatness of the expectancy of our “I.” Even if everything around us conspires to silence the “I,” to bury it, the substance of our

heart inevitably emerges in every corner. The “I” is expectancy, asking. We can try to bury these questions, to eliminate them, but as soon as reality presents itself unexpectedly, they cannot help but emerge again, demanding answers.

One of you wrote, “Last week a friend died in a car accident, and the question of my father’s death emerged with even greater force. The cry that I felt at his death re-emerged and continues to do so. When my father died I was little, and perhaps the explanation my brothers gave me [...] was enough at the time, but not any more. [...] Though many years have passed, the pain is still there, no more, no less. [...] But often it is easier to try to forget, to seek to diminish this cry, rather than face the pain [...] in daily life. The problem is that it inevitably returns.” Do you see? The questions cannot be eliminated with simple explanations, and in fact, they return. The heart is an insatiable need for an answer that the human person cannot escape. It is a lie to say the asking can be “parked” or forgotten. You and I are structurally expectancy, question, entreaty, not because you want it, because you feel it, but by your very nature. The human person is that level of nature in which nature becomes asking, asking for destiny and happiness.

WHAT IS THE ANSWER TO THIS URGENT NEED?

Usually we try to answer this desire for happiness, this need to know the meaning of life, with our own means. We think the answer must be something within our measure, something on the horizon of our imagination, an expression of our power. The point of departure is the claim to be define the total meaning of existence in a particular thing, that I have the power and the capacity to make it happen.

In response to the questions that arise in us about happiness, about the meaning of life, we usually respond that there is something to build or something to eliminate, something that we can do to give life meaning. And we think that the sense of disproportion, of incapacity, is a momentary lapse that will be resolved in time, eliminated through forgetfulness or at times even with prayer. In fact, we often say, “I can’t do it, but if God helps me, I’ll manage to obtain what I want.” So often our prayer becomes a request that God help us achieve the response we have in mind, the one we think is right.

This is our position before life: we think we know the meaning of every thing and therefore are capable of actuating the meaning of life. This is modernity, the dominant culture: the exaltation of the idea that man can be god, fulfilled, perfect, with no need of a relationship with God, and that everything that is not to my measure is something to fear or forget. This is our position: I respond to the question, and if I cannot manage, I ask for help, ask God to give me the strength to bring to fulfilment “my” answer.

But experience says something quite different. The details of life like friends, school, family and money do not seem able to give an answer as great as my desire. We expect everything from love, the love of a woman or a man, everything from good grades; we expect everything from money, but nothing suffices. In the end, everything disappoints us, fails to bring the liberation we hoped for. In fact, it makes us become violent, and over time even our friends start irritating us, and life itself annoys us. Listen to this friend, “Nothing particular or serious happened, but slowly, everything began to annoy me. Waking up in the morning annoyed me, going to school bothered me, spending time with my friends irritated me, and even the people who stubbornly continued to love me vexed me. In sum, everything in life galled me.”

All of us are led to be victims of this dominant mentality that claims to make the apparent the answer to the desire of the human person. We are convinced that we are masters of our existence and destiny, but this only brings us desolation. All our attempts lead only to desolation. The more we are convinced we can make it on our own, the more disappointed we get, the more insecure we become. The more we believe it is possible to do it ourselves, the more mixed up we become. One of you wrote, “From singing to school, to dance, to friends, to family, no matter how very important these things are for me, they are not enough [...] because they all disappoint me. [...] Every moment that passes I sense I am reeling more; I believe I can get up, and I fall, I give myself a pep talk and the next moment I start crying again.” It does not correspond! We imagine what will make us happy; we try to obtain it and end up disappointed. Another one of you wrote, “Just when I convince myself I am doing something for my own good, I fall into the most abysmal paranoia, which in some aspects could be compared to Schopenhauer’s desperation, ‘Life swings incessantly like a pendulum backward and forward between pain and boredom through fleeting moments of happiness’, [...] but can I consider this living? I feel like a robot that has begun behaving mechanically as if governed by a switch; I no longer find meaning in friendships [...] I’ve even grown weary of the people at my side.”

Life swings like a pendulum backward and forward between pain and boredom.⁴ The more you affirm your power, your ability, the more you become violent toward yourself and others. You immediately perceive the other, the unknown, as the enemy. We perceive the others as obstacles because they do not correspond to our image and so our relations with people become violent, that is, relationships of power.

Experience makes an *almost* ontological incapacity emerge in us, because in the moments when the dissatisfaction can no longer be hidden, the person who thinks of herself as the measure of everything remains alone, like a god without company. The hands try to grasp, to caress the beloved face, but there is no relationship. Everything dies and ends in an abysmal solitude that ultimately

leads to self-hatred, as Nietzsche described it, “One day the wanderer slammed a door behind himself, stopped in his tracks, and wept. The he said [listen to what he cries]: “This penchant and passion for what is true, real, non-apparent, certain – how it aggravates me!”⁵

The dominant mentality, which is nothing other than the exaltation of original sin, affirms, “You can be god without God.” But without the relationship with Him the human person is alone, disintegrated, and restlessness becomes anguish. You no longer wonder at the stranger, are no longer attracted, but fear, are made fearful by your own limits. Everything becomes condemnation, even your own “I.” Everything is reduced, even desire, to something that can be obtained only with your ability. Let’s sing together *Sometimes*.

Sometimes

I RESIGN FROM THE ATTEMPT TO BE HAPPY

“I resign from the attempt to be happy.”⁶ With this sincere and desperate statement the writer Jack Kerouac articulated the way you and I often live life. You cannot create your own happiness, nor can you remain yourself in the search for it; it seems impossible, and so you resign from your attempt to be happy. One of you writes, “You know, not reaching Happiness for many years leaves you tired and sapped of strength. So now I feel like there is nothing else to try; I don’t know what to do. My heart is full of scars, my shirt sweaty, shoes worn out, but I still don’t see the peak and even if I know it’s there, because I’ve already been there, I can’t find the road to reach it.”

We are incapable of making ourselves happy, and we do not even have the energy to be ourselves and live life listening to our questions, and so, with the passage of time, we resign from the attempt to be happy.

Everyone feels the urgent pressure of the heart, but the pain is too much, and they fall to earth and remain there, still. After having spent your youth trying to grasp something that can fulfil life, desiring to be outrageously happy, there is the risk of giving up. And this giving up contains an implicit statement: “Well, who cares? It’s not important.” It is a lie that everyone knows, never spoken out loud. You say there is nothing you can do to satisfy the cry of your heart, and since you feel this cry, this urgent need, and it hurts, you resign and say, lying, “Everything’s OK.”

Like many of us, Kerouac rebelled against the thought that happiness is unattainable, but he could not eliminate the impression of the power of an arid desert in his own life. Just think, that he wrote, “And already in my life I’ve had two wives and sent one away and ran away from the other, and hundreds of lover-girls everyone of em betrayed or screwed in some way by me [...] now I look at my mirror face scowl and it’s disgusting.” And in an instant of suffering sincerity he gives up,

articulating what we all ultimately believe, without ever saying it: “Everything’ll be all right, desolation is desolation everywhere and desolation is all we got and desolation aint so bad”⁷.

Ultimately, the proposal of the dominant culture is terrible: everything is equal, do what you please, because deep down, nothing matters. It implicitly accepts being unhappy, without saying it. This is human misery: the forgetfulness of the “I,” an existential abdication. This is the root of the anguish of living today. The goal of life is no longer discovery, no longer adventure, but bourgeois defence of the little you have. The attempt to eliminate any awakening to consciousness of the cry of the heart, of your “I,” to clutter it with other things. This is your predicament, my predicament.

Powerless to be themselves, people feel they have no energy for living. “I resign,” said Kerouac. They choose profound and total pessimism, and this means loss of the gusto of living, in favour of a bourgeois mentality without too many highs and lows. Things go well, on average. Certainly, there are highs and lows, but the important thing is that the average be acceptable and that the task of life no longer be to find the response to desire, but to hide the asking with distractions, with a collection of “experiences” to consume, giving for a moment the impression of being alive, helping you fool yourself that you can make it. A collection of emotions that hide the too strong pain of a life given to nothingness, so then you can get drunk or engage in self-cutting, you can study without measure. Everything to forget this cry of the heart!

The ideal of life easily becomes the bourgeois life, concerned with the momentary sentiment you feel or the opinion of others. We reduce the desire for happiness and love to an emotion. The proposal of the modern mentality is to conform, to resign from the attempt to be happy. The attempt of the courageous person to find the infinite is substituted with acceptance of being moribund, and thus reason becomes the affirmation of a lie, and freedom the bulwark of a lie.

This is the choice that contemporary men and women have made: to hate themselves, close the door on the impetus of their heart, rebel against the nature of their own heart. This is the misery of the modern person: extirpating the Mystery. In this way, though, they have not found themselves free, but slaves, slaves of the tyranny of the majority who preach forgetfulness. In this they are not free, not themselves. Let’s sing *Non son sincera [I’m Not Sincere]*.

Non son sincera

OUR GREATNESS

In contrast to this disappointment, the words of Pope Francis at the World Youth Day resound powerfully: “Have the courage to be truly happy! Say no to an ephemeral, superficial and throwaway culture, a culture that assumes that you are incapable of taking on responsibility and facing the great challenges of life!”⁸

Our greatness is in this original openness of the heart to infinite happiness, to infinite beauty, an openness we all can destroy with forgetfulness, desperation, distraction, indifference.

What interests me is being fully human, being “crazy” about life, wanting everything and at the same time never fearful, and free. This is what interests me! What I want is never to compromise the desire of the heart. I want to live to the last drop this longing for one who can bring my humanity to its full realization. I do not want to censure the “I.” I am not resigned, and I refuse to give up on the attempt to be happy.

My friends, let’s help each other in these days to discover this tenderness for ourselves, because we are in this companionship to go against this pessimism. Our companionship is in a battle for the human, for the intensely human. If this is promoted, life grows, becomes something great, capable of great things. As Saint Catherine of Siena said, “Don’t be content with the small things. He, the Lord God, wants them great.”⁹ Let’s sing *La guerra [War]*.

La guerra

I SEE THE DESERT ADVANCE AND...

One of you wrote, “This year my school world fell down around me. They changed all the teachers of my main subjects, from excellent to very bad. [...] I feel as if my desire to learn has been suffocated by these people. I feel lost. I can’t find the motivation for studying any more. I can’t even find the motivation to go to school. [...] around me I see only desert, and no other concrete way for carrying on.”

So then, what is the answer to this pressing need? If my own power cannot answer and ultimately this need leads me to resign from the attempt to find happiness, what’s to be done? What can be done with this desert? What is the alternative?

Fr. Giussani wrote, “‘I see the desert advance, but what one realizes about the desert does not belong to the desert’: everything finishes in limitation and pain,” but you and I who become aware of the limitation and the pain do not belong to the limitation and the pain. “This is the nature of reason; this is the nature of the human heart [...] the fact that, facing any thing, you perceive its limitation and you are wounded by it [...]; the fact that [...] you realize the limitation and disappointment [...], and this does not stop it, but worsens it [...], documents that you do not belong to the limitation and pain, and for this reason are propelled, pushed, roused to try to grasp something else.”¹⁰ The experience of limitations, the experience of the disproportion between what I can attain and what I desire documents that I do not belong to this world, documents the need for an Other to whom I belong. I do not belong to the limitation and pain. My limitation is in and of itself the implicit affirmation of an Other. Your experience indicates the road: what you desire is

something else, different from the desert that you can generate. You belong to something else, you are something else. You see the desert advance, death, but the gaze that becomes aware of the desert does not belong to the desert.

Each of us searches for someone who can reawaken our “I,” who enables us to be truly ourselves, truly happy. You and I cannot live, cannot know, if not in the company of an other, who is outside me, extraneous, and yet corresponds to me profoundly. This is dramatic. The encounter is dramatic, unfolds such a dramatic nature that the capacity for wonder is needed to accept that something outside me, that is not me, but that I feel as mine, is the factor of my liberation. It is paradoxical: that someone other than you, extraneous to you, outside you, not you, corresponds to your heart, has a fascination that corresponds to what you are. This is the paradox: to affirm myself, I have to be You, Other than me. The human heart is relationship with the infinite, need for the infinite, need for an Other who tells you, “I am like you: I am your heart. I am other than you, because I am different from how you think, but I am your fulfilment.” It is this Other who you must comprehend, embrace, who you must make yours.

The heart aims for, desires something not imagined, absolutely unexpected and fascinating that corresponds to its own original nature. But at the same time I perceive, with fear at times, an extraneousness that often seems insurmountable. How is this possible? How is it possible that in order to be myself I have to be you? How is it possible that I am fascinated by something that “is not me,” something that corresponds to me, and yet that I cannot imagine? This necessarily means a battle, one inherent in reality, because of the dramatic nature of being destined to be fulfilled by an other who is not me.

This battle between saying “I am me, I act, I act myself” and “I am you,” indicates the whole road of the intelligence and the heart of Christians. My friends, the gaze that becomes aware of the desert does not belong to the desert: it is an Other, you are an Other, destined to an Other, my life is a You, I am not desert, I am You. Acceptance of this fascinating extraneousness, in paradoxical contradiction to my imagination and capacity, is the road toward my fulfilment, because without Him, in His absence, I do not live, I do not have a face, and life, as shown also this evening, is boredom. On the contrary, living with Him, belonging to Him present, saying “You,” fills life with gladness.

This mysterious presence, this You is what ensures the substance of my “I,” of my face. This presence of the You is the presence that must be acknowledged, otherwise the “I” dissolves in the glimmer of confused daily life. This is the dramatic nature of life; the battle between the affirmation of self as the criterion of the dynamic of living or the acknowledgment of this mysterious Presence as dominant and constitutive factor of my face. No longer I, but You live in me. No longer I with

my imagination, with my projects, with my hands, with my power, with my activism, but You. This is liberation. Let's sing *Il mio volto* [My Face].

Il mio volto

THE DECISION

Here is the choice: everything depends on this decision to follow yourself, and as ultimate consequence resign from the attempt to be happy, or, looking at experience, realize the fact that I, precisely because I am aware of the desert, also realize the fact that I belong to an Other, and therefore beg. You can follow your analysis, your dreams, or you can beg. This decision presents itself every day, every morning when you wake up, because either you get up with your gaze wide open, full of candour, conscious that the substance of your "I" lies in belonging to an Other, or you get up with your hands in front of your face, to defend yourself from reality, fearful.

Here we see the freedom of the human person as decision, as choice: to acknowledge being or to affirm yourself. Either acknowledge that you are created by an Other, chosen by an Other, loved by an Other, needy of an Other, in relationship with an Other, or affirm myself. Deciding to be outrageously happy means acknowledging you belong to an Other who profoundly corresponds and is outside you; it means saying yes because those who do not accept depending, ultimately resign, become lost, because you cannot imagine the thing that fulfils the "I." You cannot make it happen. It is not of this world because you ultimately are not of this world. Truth, beauty, is not a human measure. It is the measure of the Mystery.

We began by saying that the original structure of the heart is expectancy, asking for an Other, active need and therefore reality of relationship with the infinite, with the Other. Human beings are need of an Other, relationship with a You they cannot imagine. As Lagerkvist said, "Who are you who fills my heart with your absence? / Who fills all the earth with your absence?"¹¹ Let's sing, *Hoy arriesgaré*. I'll read you the translation: "The drama of existence seeks the truth. It wants to hide Your Presence, forget Your Incarnation. [...] My life is belonging to Him. Nothing can keep me from this."¹²

Hoy arriesgaré

MARIA

All women and men, without exception, sense this contradiction, this disproportion: that I desire an Other and that this unknown Other is my fulfilment. Also Mary, the Mother of God, felt this, felt this extraneousness within the proposal of the Mystery, felt the impossibility of reducing to a human measure the way the Mystery proposed she fulfil the promise made to His people. But she

said *yes* and said it reasonably, because she affirmed that the measure of the beauty of life was not hers, was not her capacity to grasp what the Mystery said. In the mystery of that moment in which the Angel came to Mary and told her, “The fulfilment of the promise you have been awaiting will happen in you in a way that you cannot imagine, in a way that you cannot grasp with your intelligence,” she immediately asked, “How is this possible?” but right away said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.”¹³ It is more reasonable to follow an Other, affirm this Other, who corresponds so much, than to affirm ourselves. Mary said, “May it be done to me according to your word.” She said *yes*. And this *yes*, the energy of this *yes* is the strength of freedom that adheres, that says “Yes, I acknowledge You, I affirm You.”

We all are called to adhere to the figure of the Virgin Mary, because the truth of myself is that I do not make myself. I am created. I am of an Other. This means asking, begging, is the true stature of the human person: being beggars of love, of beauty. Our existence is begging. Human nature is asking, expectancy, inasmuch we are aware of our own limit and decide not to be defined by our own limit, but decide to beg from an Other. Let’s ask Our Lady to grant us a simple, glad heart capable of adhering to her Son. Let’s ask Our Lady to protect us, waken us, sustain us, support us, so that we can affirm with freedom the desire of the heart: I do not resign, I want great things, I want to be outrageously happy. Let’s end by singing *Romaria*.

Romaria

LESSON, JOSÉ MEDINA

April 18, Friday morning

Al mattino [In the Morning]

Il giovane ricco [The Rich Young Man]

Canzone dell'ideale [The Song of the Ideal]

Yesterday evening—taking our cue from the Beginning Day—we began talking about our desire to be outrageously happy. But if in the attempt to be outrageously happy we reduce reason to what I can do, to my measure, the one thing that remains is the desert, boredom, toil, and faced with this we resign from the attempt to be happy. The alternative to this existential abdication starts from our experience. Seeing the imposing presence of the desert, I say: No, I am not the desert. I am not the limitation, the pain, the toil. I am not destined merely for death. I belong to an Other.

The heart of the human person is relationship with the infinite. It is need for an Other, but at the same time it is incapable of generating anything else than itself. This is paradoxical: that an other than yourself, not you, corresponds to your heart, fascinates you with its correspondence to what you are. That to be myself, I have to affirm You, who are Other than me. The heart desires something not imagined, absolutely unforeseen and fascinating, that corresponds to its own original nature. But at the same time I perceive, often with fear, an extraneousness that sometimes seems insurmountable. How is it possible? How is it possible that to be myself, I have to be You? How is it possible that I am fascinated by and feel correspondence to something that “is not me” and that I cannot imagine? At this point, a battle necessarily starts. Very easily, faced with otherness we draw back, at times even praying to God to spare us this drama that in and of itself defines what it means to be human. But, dear friends, this is modernist pietism, asking God to help me erase myself.

We have to cross the threshold, not remain cemented in the idea that I, with my power, with my ability, and with a bit of divine help in difficult moments, can make it, can make it on my own. It is necessary to enter into the relationship with this You for which you are made.

Certainly, it is evident that life belongs to an Other, that you do not make yourself. But it is not automatic that this become my “dominant thought” in my actions of every day. We have good intentions, but the encounter made, which led you in one way or another to be here today, has not yet become the dominant thought of my being and of my action. So, this is the most urgent question: how does the encounter become the dominant thought of my being and my action? I’ll repeat the question. How is it possible for the encounter made to become the dominant thought of my being and my action?

THE ALLIANCE

God intervened to show that He is capable of making the life of women and men human. Knowing that we cannot be ourselves on our own, God emerged from within reality to re-establish His relationship with us. He revealed the face of our destiny to us, revealing Himself through His companionship. It was this way for Abraham, for Mary, for Peter, and it continues to be so also for you. An event enters your life; God involves Himself, present at your side, as the dominant and crucial factor that gives meaning to your existence.

Abraham, too, heard God's invitation: "Go out of yourself, from what you imagine to be the fulfilment of life, and enter, cross the threshold, enter into what I show you, leave your ideas, your image of fulfilment, your projects, and follow Me." To this invitation of God to "leave your land and your relatives and the home of your father and go toward the land I will show you,"¹⁴ Abraham said yes, because he recognized in God as mystery an evident authority, a correspondence to himself. This marked the journey for him: God presented Himself as master of his existence. Here is the reasonableness. It was more reasonable to listen and follow an Other than to follow his own idea, than trust in his own ability. Abraham reached this conviction over time, through a lived familiarity with this mysterious Presence that ever since the beginning corresponded to his desire to be great.

Abraham also communicated to God his own desire, just as he had understood it. He told God, "See, You have given me no offspring; I have no children and so the steward of my house will be my heir." But God responded that it would not be this way. "No, that one shall not be your heir; your own issue shall be your heir."¹⁵ To this announcement, as well, Abraham said yes.

But this journey of familiarity with the Mystery is not automatic at all; it is dramatic. When Sarah, the wife of Abraham, heard the announcement that in her old age she would conceive, she said, "No, how is it possible?" and laughed, sceptical, at the idea that God could truly do what He had promised.¹⁶ Abraham, instead, in the face of that otherness, in front of the fact that God had told him, "Behold, I keep my promises, but in a different way than you imagine,"¹⁷ chose to affirm Him, chose to affirm the project of an Other, to obey the correspondence he felt in his heart.

Certainly, you can say, "It is easy to obey an Other when my idea of fulfilment coincides with the will of God. But it is much more difficult when the fulfilment that I imagined does not coincide with His will." This happened to Abraham, too, when God asked him to offer the son He had given him: "Take your son Isaac, your only son, whom you love [the one he had asked God to give him] [...], and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."¹⁸ When the fulfilment does not coincide with my idea, with my image, then it

is a struggle. Here the battle, the drama of the human person takes place: in the face of reality, in the face of everyday circumstances, God's question "Do you trust Me?" and the human person's "Do you love me? Will you protect me?" emerge anew. Abraham was so certain, his consciousness of himself was so dominated by the relationship with the Lord, that he said yes.

At a certain point in Israel's history, the same question re-emerged with Moses. God liberated the people, led them out of Egypt, promised to lead them to the promised land, gave them food, protected them, but for the Israelites the way this happened was not as they had imagined, and so they lost patience and forgot God. In the moments of difficulty, in the moments in which my own image does not coincide with what God has prepared for my good, the drama emerges with my "but," my "however": "How is it possible?" "Why this way?" "Are you sure this is for my good?"

In the moments when circumstances seem to affirm the opposite of the fulfilment we imagined, when they seem a sacrifice because they are not the way we imagined them, what do we affirm? Ourselves or an Other? This is the drama you face every day. Every moment, you have two roads in front of you: either affirm your project, your idea, your image, or affirm the design of an Other. This is the radical choice. It is the choice, my friends, between death and life, between affirming that ultimately nothing has meaning, that everything is equal because everything is destined to die, or affirming an Other, that is, asking. Let's sing together *Ma non avere paura* [*Do Not Fear*].

Ma non avere paura

GOD COMES OUT TO MEET US ON THE WAY

In His tenderness, God wanted to facilitate your journey. He wanted to eliminate the distance between human beings and the Mystery. This fact happened. God entered life according to a human form, so that you can grasp Him with your thought and your affectivity.

John and Andrew, the two who followed Jesus on the banks of the Jordan River, were the first protagonists, after Mary, of this recapture of the human: they were the first to encounter an exceptional presence, one they had not imagined before. Living with Jesus, they experienced a correspondence they had never before experienced, not even with the most beautiful things.

But at a certain point for them too, as happened for Abraham and Mary, Jesus showed Himself in His otherness. Nobody was like Him. He could not be "explained." One day He said, "Unless you eat My flesh and drink My blood, you do not have life within you. [...] Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood remains in Me and I in him."¹⁹

Here is the drama, the battle. Friends, this is Communion, the Eucharist. When Jesus said this, the disciples who had lived with Him and experienced the correspondence, asked "How is this possible? I cannot even begin to fathom what You are saying." Jesus was aware of this, and said,

“Does this shock you? [...] Do you also want to leave?” That day in the synagogue everyone experienced the same wrenching sensation. Some started yelling. Others wanted to kill Him. Many left. But that upsetting question did not stop Peter. Though he was distraught, he was grounded in the correspondence he experienced with Jesus, and blurted out, “Lord, we don’t understand anything, but if we leave You, where will we go? You alone have the words that give life meaning. If I do not believe in You, I can’t even believe my own eyes.”²⁰

Peter did not say this because he understood more, or was more eager, more capable than the others. His answer came from the experience of correspondence he had in living with that man. The point of departure for Peter was the experience of a correspondence he never could have imagined, beyond his measure. His answer came from the conviction born of the relationship with Jesus.

Profoundly reasonable, Peter chose not to be defined by his own limitations, by the things he could or could not understand, by his own fear. Peter did not start out from his own image, from his own prejudices, but from the experience of correspondence he had in living with that man whose words changed his life, made his heart leap. Peter perceived He was true because his heart leapt, because it vibrated. Maybe he could not understand so much, but he realized that He was true.

Peter was bowled over by Jesus, by that man whose gaze revealed Peter’s being. He was convinced by that gaze that embraced his whole story without excluding anything. He felt seized by Him, to the point that it was natural, almost natural, to affirm Christ instead of affirming his own fear. It was reasonable to affirm that intuition of truth that he had seen.

For many, Jesus was interesting (He also worked miracles) but for Peter, He had become the dominant factor of his life. Faced with that shocking question, he decided to adhere to the intuition of truth revealed in the relationship with Him, instead of his own idea. Like Abraham and Mary, Peter also acknowledged that Presence, profoundly mysterious and at the same time familiar.

Another person who felt this wrenching was the rich young man described in the Gospel. He had encountered Christ and was fascinated by Him, to the point of running toward Him, asking, “What must I do to have life the way You talk about it?” Jesus told him, “Sell all that you have and come with me”²¹ with an invitation that was different from what that young man had imagined. He decided to affirm himself, what he possessed, instead of the intuition evoked by Jesus. He resigned, because he decided to be defined by his own limit and he remained fearful, a slave to his possessions. He was afraid of losing what he owned (that bourgeois life we spoke of yesterday), rejecting the intuition of truth, and therefore was unreasonable because that intuition of truth existed, and could not be denied.

This contradiction exists in all of us. This profound ambiguity that has seeped into the roots of our being is original sin, that point within us that resists adhering to the intuition that to be myself I

have to be You, an Other, that the fulfilment of my life coincides with becoming one with an Other. It seems like losing something, dying, losing our individuality.

But precisely in those moments of sacrifice and difficulty, our self-awareness emerges. Adverse circumstances call us to “reveal the thoughts” of our heart. In precisely those situations the heart must obey the encounter, must adhere to the intuition of truth it had. In precisely those daily situations, the heart must obey the Mystery, as Abraham obeyed God. We are called to obey in those circumstances—when your mother is sick, when your lessons are boring, or when a friend dies. How can you live without the consciousness of this overwhelming love that forgives and embraces you without measure?

Do not fear your “madness,” no matter what degree it reaches within us, because we are embraced by Him, embraced by Jesus, who became man to make you see it, died on the cross to make you see it. He died so that I could finally say, “I am I because You live in me.” “I live, no longer I, but You in me.”²²

The roughness of the road, the difficulty, is not an objection but a blessed opportunity to affirm Him and therefore to be truly ourselves, to affirm the intuition of the truth instead of our idea. This is possible only if God is present. Let’s listen to *Ojos de cielo* [*Eyes of Heaven*].

Ojos de cielo

FOLLOWING

So then, if it is not enough to encounter Him (because the rich young man encountered Him) and if we are aware of the question of how this encounter becomes dominant thought (as it was for Peter, Abraham and Mary: saying yes), what follows? That the encounter is the beginning of a relationship that continues as following. But Jesus introduces a different kind of following than that proposed by other teachers of the law or philosophers. The following that Christ proposes involves a companionship, involves participating with our whole selves. Following is not learning to do some things or a theory, but “living with,” or in other words, communion. No great teacher in Christ’s time put following, participating in his life, as the center. Many indicated to road toward the truth. “You have to do this.” “Pray in this way.” “When these things happen, do such and such.” Instead, Jesus proposed that we put at the center of our being His very life, participation in His life as essential factor of the journey.

For us, as it was for His disciples, following means becoming one with Him, involving ourselves in a living experience, through which His dynamism, His gusto in living “pass” inside me, almost by osmosis. A new heart communicates itself with mine. The heart of an Other begins to move within mine. He begins to live inside me. Following requires the critical comparison between my

heart and the gaze of the person who leads. Following does not mean doing as the master does, but entering into the gaze of an other.

Therefore, following involves a work: the critical comparison between your heart and the proposal that is made. This is not at all automatic, because it means being true to your own original needs, to your own desire for happiness. It involves sincere attention to the proposal that is made, without reducing it in the anxiety to find an answer ourselves, because often we re-invent according to our imagination the proposal made to us. For example, if we are told, “Observe silence,” we react thinking, “Well, he said ‘Observe silence,’ but he doesn’t mean really silence silence.” We re-invent. We are invited to participate in a gesture with all our selves and instead, we adhere to what apparently best pleases us. And so we remain outside, at the threshold, and do not enter into the relationship with this You. We remain on the level of the “but, however, how is it possible?”

I’ll read you a letter from a friend that gives us an example of following: “I am in love with a girl who doesn’t even live in Italy. This is terrible for me, because I always felt that loving someone meant a physical relationship, and I haven’t seen her since last summer. The hardest thing for me is that I’ve become a slave to my cell phone, because it is the only means I have for being in touch with her and so, since I can no longer live just for those messages [he gets up in the morning and immediately goes to see what she has written], I brought up the question at School of Community.” It is simple. He wants to love, and it seems to him that the distance is the enemy. He cannot live this way. So he asks his friends for help. He does not give up on his need to be “outrageously happy.” He continues, “what really struck me at School of Community was the words of a young guy [...] My first reaction to his testimony was to think that he is either ostentatiously pious [what he says is impossible] or I can love, too, doing what I have to do, living my life [and he wagers on this possibility]. [...] After a few days [...] a grace happened that I’m not sure how to explain, [...] eating with some friends, I was moved because I realized that there with those four friends something enormous was happening to me that enabled me to love my girlfriend even though she wasn’t present or hadn’t written me [...]. Someone happened to me, One who made me truly love my life, [...] I perceived a will for my good, [...] I loved her and it seemed to me like she was there with us. I can’t forget this. I wasn’t drunk and I didn’t imagine it. It happened. I need to love this Someone again, to say my yes [...] So I have a great desire to come to the Triduum because I want to spend three days with Jesus.”

Here is the point: following, which means saying yes, I find a fulfilment that I could not have imagined. That fellow thought it wasn’t possible to love his girlfriend long distance, but instead, the separation was no longer an obstacle, but became an opportunity find a good. So then, following is saying yes, adhering to the Mystery through the instant, that is, following an order that is already

there and that is not yours. Becoming one with a person who makes the need of our heart dawn within us, who makes life “movement.” Following, obeying, saying yes. Following in the circumstances, even in those that look like sacrifice.

Friends, after the encounter it can also be hard. Even Abraham complained, and Moses trembled. Nobody is spared the drama of being human. But there is always the possibility of a choice: solitude and resignation, or adhesion to Being. In the face of the first objection, we often say, “It’s impossible,” and we even end up praying “Lord, I don’t want this dramatic situation.” We pull back and slowly slip into scepticism. On the contrary, what must never lack in us is sincere adhesion to this perceived correspondence: when the emotion no longer accompanies us, when the initial charge maybe is no longer felt, what must remain in us is loyal adherence to Christ, the affirmation of what He has done, of what He has done for you. This affirmation is the most reasonable thing there is: to acknowledge Being instead of affirming my nothingness.

Self awareness, the fact that the encounter becomes the dominant thought of life, happens when we follow. Let’s sing *Lasciati fare*.

Lasciati fare

THE FRUIT OF FOLLOWING

This encounter becomes the dominant thought of my being and of my action—we see it in the life of the apostles, in the life of Peter—when you live with Christ (communion), when you say yes not to the idea, to the reinvention of what happened, but to the intuition of the truth, to the correspondence experienced.

So then, it is right to wonder what the existential consequence of following is. What happens in me? When you follow, when you live with Christ, you rediscover yourself in acknowledging and belonging to Him, saying yes to Him. The sentiment of the “I” that arises from belonging is like that of a birth. It is a new reality you never could have imagined. Listen to this letter: “My experience of GS began about a year ago, when I found myself just like Dante at the beginning of *The Divine Comedy* [nice, this!] in a kind of dark wood, in a somewhat dark moment of my life, and up to that time I had surely followed a road that was not right, even if on the surface it seemed the best and easiest [bourgeois life, my friends! The easiest, what seems the best, to appearances]. This journey that I have made with GS was just like Dante’s journey beyond the tomb. It made me open my eyes, and I learned to see life and human relationships differently. It made me rediscover myself, the true me, because up to that moment I was a fake, and I didn’t know myself [beautiful, this letter!]. Everything began with an encounter, just like when Dante encountered Beatrice. [...] It was the same thing for me, the encounter with my ‘Beatrice’ made me begin a new life. [...] I drew

close to her [...] because I saw something special within, something shining, like a star. So I began following [this is one of you]. In other words, I began to enter into the life of this new friend, to grow in friendship with her. Her way of thinking fascinated me, how she faced things and the way she threw herself in, and above all the way she related to others. I fell in love with her way of living. This impact with her has already had many effects. It made me rediscover a part of me that I had forgotten. With her I could be myself [...] finally, thanks to my ‘Beatrice,’ I found ME.”

When you cross the threshold and enter into the relationship with Christ, with the other, a change happens, a transfiguration of our face. It is no longer my gaze, but that of an other, that of Christ. When you say yes, the way you relate with others, the way you attend lessons, how you greet your parents, how you face the death of a dear friend, everything changes radically. The friend continues: “Initially I didn’t understand well what this companionship was. [...] However, I understood one thing [...]. I felt happy right away. I saw in their friendship and in their bond something special that I had never seen before [a correspondence]. [...] With them I met a new type of friendship, true and pure [...] [that] notably changed the way I face school. [...] It completely changed the way I conceived of life, that is, it made me understand that no moment of our life is never thrown away.”

When you adhere to an intuition of the truth, the instant gains an unexpected power, because every instant, every encounter, is given for my good, for me. This is Jesus’ promise to His apostles: “Those who follow Me will have eternal life, and the hundred-fold here below.”²³ But the hundred-fold here below does not mean that the things you usually hear and see are multiplied by a hundred. It is even more. It is something different. It is a new life. It means experiencing good even in difficult circumstances that pain you, in bad situations, in distance. It means experiencing a life that is more alive, more desirous, more impassioned. When the instant is lived according to its true nature, which is the way the Eternal takes you and tells you, “Come,” and you say, “Here I am!”, then life becomes a very great thing. I’ll read you another letter. “Around October they found my mother had some kind of illness. In the first days I went to visit her in the hospital, I had a lump in my throat and at a certain point I said to myself, there are two ways to live here. Either I begin to live this suffering as if nothing has meaning (which was my initial tendency) or I can begin asking why this happened, how to face it, how to be able to stay in front of it.” Here, again, the crucial point: I can affirm my idea, condemning myself to say that nothing has meaning, that everything is death, that nothing is of worth, or I can affirm an Other and ask, follow, say yes. The letter continues, “I began to go to Mass every morning before school and I asked to look at that difficult moment not as an obstacle. In this period I have truly come to realize that what at the beginning seemed senseless [her mother’s illness] and that I saw only as an enormous burden, is making me grow. [How is it possible?] [...] I began wanting to stay home more, something that I avoided as

much as possible last year, and also I have slowly begun to face my studies not as something imposed on me, but as an opportunity [...] I have found myself staying in front of the circumstances in a way I had never before experienced, and above all, I am happy [“above all, I am happy”. Someone hearing this would exclaim, “You’re nuts!”, because what you say is so impossible]. Every morning I pray that this beauty that I have seen in these months may continue.”

The value of the instant does not lie in the reverberation of sentiment or emotion that it generates, but in the fact that in saying “yes” you strive to adhere to the great design of an Other, you reach out toward Destiny. The concept of uselessness is abolished for those who decide to adhere. Nothing is useless. What is useful or beautiful is not determined by you, by your limit, by how you feel, by your emotivity. Following Christ in His companionship produces a change, a capacity for relationship that is a hundred times greater than before. This is the victory of Christ: the rediscovery of the human. No moment of life is ever thrown away.

No sooner do you enter, cross the threshold embracing this extraneousness, deciding to follow, than the inexorable and immediate consequence is an unexpected love for the instant in which you find yourself, no matter its form: love for the person you meet, love for a test at school, love for sickness, toil, sacrifice, joy, your friend.

Adhering to the will of God, saying yes, gives you peace, gladness and the energy for living and acting. The companionship of Christ transforms you: it changes the way of seeing things, changes your intelligence, the way you become fond of people, the way you work. It generates a new life.

The Christian life matures, charged with conviction like that of Peter’s, in the degree to which you can say you have experienced the fulfilment of this promise, the change of life, the new life that is brought with adherence to Christ. Let’s sing *A new creation*.

A new creation

FROM DEATH TO LIFE: VIRGINITY

I wanted to read with you a few passages of a very beautiful book that I recommend if you want to understand, or better, immerse yourself in what I said today. It is *The Tidings Made to Mary*, a play by Paul Claudel, and it summarizes what I spoke of today. First I’ll give you the background of this scene.

The main character is Violaine, a very simple woman whose richness is that she responds with her heart in every moment to the question that the mystery of God asks her through her life. Jacques is her fiancé. He is perfect, a hard worker, faithful and precise, but, for him, the measure of life is duty as he perceives it. He does not waste life: everything has to be calculated, precise and just, but according to his measure.

In the beginning, Violaine has the good fortune that everything God asks of her corresponds to what she desires. She is happy. She will marry the man her father wishes, Jacques, whom she loves. But for Violaine, this simple correspondence between her tenderness, her human desire, and the will of God suddenly breaks, is broken with a kiss. The same lovingness with which she obeys what is given to her every day by the Mystery, motivates her to share with Pierre de Craon, a cathedral builder, a leper, who had attempted to rape her, the love she received, with a very simple gesture of charity, a kiss, a kiss of compassion and sharing of that man's pain, and her engagement ring, the only thing she possessed.

Mara, Violaine's sister, sees this scene and, jealous of her sister because she also is in love with Jacques, runs to him to accuse her sister of betrayal. Jacques does not believe her because he loves Violaine. Just think: Violaine loves Jacques, and this mutual love is wanted by God and by her father. Everything is perfect. But that kiss of charity given to the cathedral builder, a leper, had unexpected consequences. In fact, Violaine has to tell her betrothed something terrible: that morning she saw the fist sign of leprosy on her breast. She had become a leper. Violaine is aware that the news will put her fiancé to the test. She feels the wrenching, the drama. It is not that she thinks Jacques does not love her, but his response to the sign of leprosy will be the proof that he loves her totally. Violaine must tell him.

Let's listen to the dialogue between the two:

Jacques. Is it really true, then, that this is the day of our betrothal, Violaine?

Violaine. Jacques, there is yet time, we are not married yet. If you have only wanted to please my father, there is still time to withdraw; it concerns no one but us. Say but a word, and I would not want you any more, Jacques. For nothing has yet been put in writing, and I do not know if I still please you.

J. How beautiful you are, Violaine! And how beautiful is the world of which you are the portion reserved for me! [...]

V. Jacques! After all, I do no harm in loving you. It is the God's will and my father's. It is you who have charge of me! And who knows if you will not know perfectly how to defend and save me? It is enough that I give myself entirely to you. The rest is your affair, and no longer mine.

J. And it is like this you give yourself to me, my flower-o'-the-sun?

V. Yes, Jacques.

J. Who then can take you out of my arms?

[...]

V. Husband and wife are one soul in one flesh, and nothing will separate them.

J. Yes, Violaine.

V. You want it! And so then, it is not right that I keep something to myself, and hide this great, this unspeakable secret.

J. Again this secret, Violaine?

V. So great, truly, Jacques, that your heart will be saturated with it, and you will ask nothing more of me, and that we shall never be torn apart from each other. A secret so deep, Jacques, nor hell, nor Heaven itself will ever end it, or will ever end this moment in which I have revealed it, here in the burning heat of this terrible sun which almost prevents us from seeing each other!

J. Speak, then!

V. But tell me first once more that you love me.

J. I love you!

V. And that I am your wife and your only love?

J. My wife, my only love.

V. Tell me, Jacques: neither my face nor my soul has sufficed thee, and that is not enough? And have you been misled by my proud words? Then learn of the fire which consumes me! Know this flesh which you have loved so much! Come nearer to me.

V. Nearer! Nearer still! Close against my side. Sit down on that bench.

J. Violaine, am I not mistaken? What is this silver flower emblazoned on your flesh?

V. You are not mistaken.

J. It is the malady? It is the malady, Violaine?

V. Yes, Jacques.

J. Leprosy!”²⁴

Violaine asks to be embraced even if she is leprous because if one loves, one embraces the other even if leprous. The young woman sees a good in the leprosy, the opportunity for fulfilment, not a condemnation but a promise, “so great, truly, Jacques, that your heart will be saturated with it, and you will ask nothing more of me, and that we shall never be torn apart from each other. A secret so deep, Jacques, nor hell, nor Heaven itself will ever end it, or will ever end this moment in which I have revealed it, here in the burning heat of this terrible sun [...] What I am about to tell you is so great that your heart will be saturated with it.”

For Jacques, instead, that mark indicates a breakage and he wishes it were not there. Therefore he responds to Violaine, “Ah this is too cruel! Tell me something, even if you have nothing to say, and I will believe it. Speak, I beg you! Tell me it is not true.”²⁵ Aware of the fact that he loves her, that this love has not disappeared, Jacques finds himself asking how it is possible. He does not want this, because it is not the fulfilment he imagined. Thus he sends Violaine away, outside the city, to

live alone, ostracized. Jacques lives according to his measure, his measure of justice. He did what was right because in those times leprosy was the punishment for sin, thus that sign in his eyes is the evident proof of her sister's accusation. Man's justice cannot accept an infinite love that does not coincide with his own measure. Sent away, Violaine lives alone far from the town. They bring her food every day and in the end the leprosy makes her blind.

In the meantime, Mara, the jealous sister of Violaine, marries Jacques, and they have a daughter, who, however, dies while Jacques is away on a trip. Mara thinks her sister killed her daughter in vengeance. So one morning she brings the cadaver to the leprous woman and throws it at her. Violaine takes the body of the little girl in her arms, a drop of milk comes from her leprous breast, touches the mouth of the child, and she lives again. It is a miracle. Crazed with joy, Mara brings the child home. Jacques returns, unaware of all this, and cannot stop looking at the eyes of his daughter, which after the miracle have taken on the color of Violaine's eyes. Mara, seeing her husband look at those eyes, reaches the apex of hatred, returns to her sister and pushes her under a cart of sand.

Understand, kids? You follow your justice, follow your idea, and what it leads to is hatred, hatred of others, hatred of yourself. On the contrary, Violaine does not live according to a human measure. For her, the fulfilment of life is not living according to her own idea. But this is not immediate. It is not immediate for her that the fulfilment of love is not being able to embrace physically, to the point of being sent away by the man she loves! However, acknowledging Christ through this burning pain, through the normality of daily obedience, brings life, brings a good. And thus the miracle. The miracle of the change that you, you too, can experience. From adhering to the will of God, life is reborn. From my putrid and dying flesh, resurrection flows, not as I would have imagined, but a hundred times more. It is another thing, maybe not consistent with my feelings, but it is life, true love, because this love is what I desire: being loved by another even if I am leprous, being embraced in my pain, in my limitation. The alternative is the righteous small-mindedness of Jacques and Mara, the small-mindedness of your own measure that accepts only what is humanly possible and that ultimately brings nothing other than violence and destruction, nothing other than desolation, nothing other than resignation from the attempt to be happy.

Violaine's father, who returns at the end of the play, describes this hundred-fold, saying in front of his daughter's body, "Is the object of life only to live? [...] It is not to live, but to die, and not to avoid the cross but to embrace it, and give in gladness what we have. There is joy, there is grace, there is eternal youth! [...] What is the worth of the world compared to life? What is the worth of life, if not to be given? Why torment ourselves when it is so easy to obey?"²⁶

Violaine's gaze, the love that flows from her is not the result of a moralism or voluntarism, but a new life, a new way of facing life that flows from becoming one with Christ. This new gaze on life

is called “virginity.” This new gaze indicates Christ’s own way of possessing, He who died on the cross out of love for you, so that you can be yourself. This new gaze shows the way Christ possessed and possesses reality: a possession of reality according to its eternal destiny, a relationship with the beloved for her destiny, according to the way revealed to your soul by God. Living the relationship with a person without loving her destiny is not loving.

Virginity is saying “You” to the beloved, affirming that the destiny of the beloved is not myself and therefore I cannot do what I please with him. You are other than me. You are not the result of my idea, of my thought, you are different from me. What dignity, what sacredness in finding yourself truly say “You” to your friend, your girlfriend. “You”! In this way, if I look at you according to your true origin, according to your true destiny, according to what you are ultimately made of, precisely inasmuch as I look at you this way, your figure becomes very powerful in my eyes, your reality highly beloved, your form to be adored. If you have never loved this way, if you have never felt this wave within you, this veneration, this sudden adoration of the face of the beloved, of the face of your friend, you have not yet experienced what love is.

This is amazing! And you worry about not being bored in lessons, about finding a girlfriend... but look at what an opportunity! When Christ becomes the dominant thought in our thinking and our way of acting, everything, even death and difficulty becomes worthy of adoration and love. Nothing is thrown away. Nothing is useless. This is the promise: the fulfilment of your desire to be outrageously happy. The journey is simple. Just say yes with simplicity and sincerity. Let’s sing *Favola [Fairy Tale]*.

Favola

I’d like to make a very simple comment on method. I hope I have communicated to you how I feel, how I felt, starting from your contributions, the mystery in which we are participating. Holy Thursday, the celebration of communion, of the Eucharist, being “one” with Him; Good Friday, the journey with Christ along the Way of the Cross. So then, the indication is very simple: you need to identify, become one, immerse yourself in something that is not you. To do so, you need to follow the instructions that you are given, follow an order that you do not set. So I encourage you above all not to re-interpret or re-invent, but to adhere with simplicity and sincerity. You will also have many moments of silence in these days. Use the instruments given with intelligence: read the booklet and your notes not with the intention of understanding in the abstract, but to enter in, immerse yourself in what is said, so that the journey of the Way of the Cross is a journey with Christ, so that all the moments you will live in these days may mark an entry into, a crossing of the threshold of this relationship. There will also be many times when you are distracted. As I said yesterday, that is no

problem. As soon as you realize you are distracted, start again! If I get distracted, if my friend gets distracted, I'll help you, and you begin again. Christ promised that those who enter into this relationship receive the hundred-fold, a new life. This is the verification. I assure you that it is true. Have a good retreat!

ASSEMBLY, JOSÉ MEDINA

April 19, Saturday morning

Ballata dell'uomo vecchio [Ballad of the Old Man]

Lela

Il popolo canta [The People Sings]

Alberto Bonfanti. The richness and liveliness of the assemblies in the hotels are a testament to the way all of you have participated personally in the gesture of these days, made up of listening, singing, personal prayer and journey. All of you have gotten involved and have compared the proposal with your own lives. We have chosen a few questions that seemed to touch some fundamental points, not to answer them exhaustively but to begin a work that will continue in the coming months.

First of all, I would like to introduce the assembly reading the message that our friend Julián Carrón did not want to fail to give, even though he is in New Zealand and Australia to meet our friends who live there. It is striking how admirably he summarizes the heart of the proposal we have made in these days.

“Dear friends, the desire to be happy sooner or later surfaces in the life of each of us. From that moment, life is different, and you understand that it is something serious. ‘Life is mine, irreducibly mine,’ said Fr. Giussani. Nothing is as serious as life, because your happiness is at stake, that is, the reason for living.

And so life becomes dramatic.

Why?

Because you can no longer live as if such a burning desire has not been made present.

Because of the fact that I sense it, I am already different. From the moment I sensed it, I stopped being a child.

Thus begins the adventure of living, and the battle.

It is the battle between taking this desire seriously and pretending not to have felt it.

But there is a difficulty: you have to truly love yourself to engage in this battle in which all my being, all my humanity, drives me relentlessly.

In the final analysis, life is a matter of affection, affection for yourself.

Precisely to reawaken this desire, ‘One died for all,’ and rising again, won, as documented in the faces of Peter and John as they ran to the sepulchre on Easter morning.

Who does not desire an affection like this?

Happy Easter, friends.

Julián Carrón.²⁷

Thursday you spoke about the desert, having the desert around you, and you said that if you see the desert advance and you become aware of the desert, you do not belong to it, and that if you realize your own limitation, your own pain, you do not belong to that limit and that pain. Actually, this did not seem right to me, because I often am aware of my limitations, my difficulty, my lack of understanding, and exactly the opposite happens to me: I feel crushed by these limitations. You also said that it is in the nature of the heart of the human person to become aware of the limitation and not belong to it. It seemed to me that this was something natural, almost spontaneous, automatic, but exactly the opposite happens to me. Why do you say a person realizes she does not belong to the desert? How can I not belong, not be crushed by my limitations?

Josè Medina. Of all the things that were said, this most powerfully remained. Why?

Because more than the other things, I experience this in my daily life.

Medina. And so you realize it. You were struck by this point that judges you, that has to do with you. Do you remember what we said before quoting Fr. Giussani about the desert?

No.

Medina. Right at the beginning, Thursday evening, we spoke about the fact that in the face of life, when we start from the idea we can resolve everything by ourselves, sooner or later we realize that we cannot do it. And so the limitation, the fact that you cannot manage, irritates you, because you do not want to be limited by anything. In the face of this limitation, what do you usually do?

I get angry, because I realize how much I always let myself be limited, crushed, even by petty things. So I think it's not possible that everything should be conditioned by something that happens during the day, even something small, like quarrelling with my mother, a bad grade at school, or being unable to go out with my friends, and that I make such a big deal out of it.

Medina. So then, if in the face of the limitation you say: this is not good, and you add other experiences and it still is not good, and more experiences, and it is not good, and nothing is good, what does this say about life? If you put together all these circumstances, what is life for you? If you say you have the desire to be perfect, unlimited, that life be truly beautiful, and then you find yourself in front of many circumstances that are not as you would like, then what is life?

Put this way, it seems that nothing remains..

Medina. It seems that nothing remains. It would be a punishment to live like this. Imagine if you are thirsty and someone said, "Do you want some water?" And you say, "Yes, I want some water." And he, "You can't have any." After a while he says to you again, "Are you thirsty?" "Yes," you

answer, and he says again, “No, you can’t have any.” You desire some water and sense that it is necessary for you. But if what happens is that you can’t have the water right in front of you, then what in the world does life seem like to you? You turn to God and ask, “Excuse me, but why in the world did you create me with this insuperable desire?” Nietzsche said: I hate myself, I hate my desire, because every time I take life seriously, every time I experience this desire for an instant, nothing fulfils it. So then, if life is this, what do you do? You resign. We often say, “I am thirsty, but since there’s no water within reach, I’m not thirsty.” But is it enough to convince yourself you’re not thirsty? Does this seem reasonable to you?

No.

Medina. There is another possibility, that is profoundly reasonable and human: to acknowledge that if I have this desire within me, there’s something that fulfils it. But we reached the point (we spoke about this Thursday during the introduction) of doing everything possible to forget our desire. But you can’t tell me that this is reasonable or human, because I find the desire inside anyway. I don’t create it. You desire to be loved, but since nobody loves you, since you do not see this love you want now, you say, “No, this is just a thought. It’s not so important.” So then, what does this tell you about yourself, realizing this desire you have, the fact that you perceive the limit? What does it tell you about yourself, that you desire to be loved, but being loved totally does not seem possible to you, that you want to be happy, but the things you do or that others can give you do not make you happy? We search for happiness; we truly try to find it. You find a boyfriend, you try to study to have a fulfilling career, and yet nothing seems to fulfil your desire. This is the reality of everyone. You would like to be always loved, but it seems impossible; it seems that there is an insurmountable limitation. What does this tell you about yourself?

That I can’t manage, that I can’t manage, and that’s all.

Medina. Well, you stop at the observation of your limitation. I propose that you go beyond. You say: I can’t manage. Reality can’t do it. You cannot manage to fulfil your desire. I say: in the face of the limitation in me, there arises the thought that perhaps I am not made for this desert. I come from something else. I have meaning. Maybe I’m crazy, because I have the impression that I do not belong to this world because nothing satisfies me, nothing is enough for me. I can have everything, all the money, all that you can imagine, but it is not enough for me. So then, repeat for me what you have understood.

That if I sense that in this world nothing of what I can have, of all that I can give myself, is enough, then usually I ask to remove...

Medina. Do you realize that what you are asking is to remove your desire?

I don’t know. The desire exists, but I ask: “Satisfy it” so at least I am at peace.

Medina. It is interesting that you ask that the desire be removed, that it disappear so at least you are at peace; you don't ask for your fulfilment. When you desire water, you say, "Jesus, make me not thirsty," and you don't ask Jesus for some water. Do you understand? You desire to be loved, and you ask, "Lord, keep me from feeling this desire to be loved," and you don't ask instead, "Lord, do you love me?" Do you understand the difference? In the final analysis the dominant mentality in which we live is seen precisely as the will to eliminate desire, to erase it. But I don't want to forget the desire for fulfilment. I want to find what fulfils me. Is it the same for you?

I don't think so. I don't know. I wouldn't know what to say. It's difficult..

Medina. Imagine you are in prison, sitting on a chair behind bars, in a small cell. You are there, imprisoned. What would you ask for?

To get out.

Medina. Perfect. What does the experience of that reality make emerge in you?

The thought that I don't want to be there.

Medina. That is, the desire to be free. So then, given this desire, what do you do? Given that there are bars and that you cannot get out, you say, "Lord, don't let me feel that I am not free. Don't let me feel that I am a slave. I'll stay in prison, just keep me from feeling this desire for freedom." Does this attitude seem reasonable to you?

No.

Medina. You would seem nuts if you wanted to behave this way. You're sitting there... "Do you want to be free?". "No, truly no, I just don't want to feel this desire for freedom I have inside." This is why often our prayers are pietistic, because we ask the Lord to cancel our humanity. Given the pain I feel, I ask the Lord to remove this desire. But if you were in prison and you wanted to be free, what would you do?

Ask to get out.

Medina. Ask to get out. And if they didn't let you leave, what would you do? Ask some tricky friend to help you escape? If you are intelligent, looking at this experience, what does this desire for freedom you find within tell you? Evidently, you have never been in prison, so think about being in the classroom: you're at a lesson and you can't stand it. You're bored and you say, a bit like Jesus said in the first part of His dialogue with the Father, "Let this hour pass." You're in class as if you were in prison and you want to be free. What does this experience tell you about yourself?

That my desire is to be free..

Medina. This is your desire, but reality is saying something else. So then, do you pertain to this reality, or to something else?

To something else.

Medina. Immediately, the experience you have every day tells you that you are something else, that you are not of this world and therefore immediately it drives you to search elsewhere, because this world is too small for you, too little for you. And this seems like a natural, simple experience for you. It is simple, but not automatic. I find within a great desire of the heart: the desire to be free and to be happy, to love and be loved, and at the same time I sense an immense disproportion, because it seems that nothing around me can fulfil that desire. So I consider all this and I say: I am not of this world, maybe I come from another world, I'm an extraterrestrial. I know things, but it seems there is no reciprocity, they are not familiar to me, they are not enough. I want something else. I was thinking of this years ago as I watched the film *Superman*: the main character is hurtled to earth from another planet, lives with a family, but is always uncomfortable. You seem like me, have the same face as mine, but I am not you. You are not enough for me. Maybe I'm from another world! That film reflects a daily experience. It is precisely within the experience of the limitation that I realize that I am not of this world, that there is something within me that belongs to an Other. In this sense, Thursday I said that it is natural to recognize this. It is natural because you look at your experience and you discover this. But let's not confuse what is natural with what comes spontaneously; it is natural, but it is not automatic. It is not automatic! Think a bit. The difficulty that you and I have had in our conversation derives from the fact that what is automatic for you is not being yourself, saying, when you want water, "I don't desire water." You fall in love, and want to be loved by that boy, but you say, "No, I am not in love," and you convince yourself of this. This is automatic in us: to erase what we are, thinking in this way to be at peace. When I feel this extraneousness, that nothing around me is enough, that I am not of this world, what do I do? I say: "It's not true." This is why an instant of true sincerity with ourselves is needed: sincerity, reasonableness with ourselves, but above all sincerity and, as Julián said, affection for yourself, because if I have the desire to be free, then I desire to be free. Don't come and tell me that you don't have this desire. Don't come and tell me that the fact that you cannot make yourself free causes the desire to lessen. On the contrary, it makes it grow greater. This happens because my desire is latent within me. I have it, no matter what. If the police line up outside the door right now and say, "You can't leave!" what happens to my desire? It becomes even greater. Don't tell me it diminishes or disappears because they tell me I can't leave. The more I perceive the limit the more powerful my desire becomes. Do you understand that this is natural? Instead, the problem is that spontaneously and naturally we say that this is not true. So then, it is a problem of sincerity with ourselves, of affection for what we are. Think what it means to meet a person who enables me to express myself and my desire, who enables me to say: "I want to be free." You have been in prison for twenty years, or better, you have been at school for fifteen years. Your teacher is teaching, and then

someone arrives who sits next to you and reawakens your desire, enables you to be sincere with yourself. This is already a good, because this person's companionship, her being close to you, enables you to be yourself, enables you to overcome the inertia of the spontaneous, of the apparent that makes you say: "Everyone does this; I've been attending lessons for fifteen years, we all go, it's necessary to go," that enables you to overcome the attitude that responds to the desire to be free and happy by saying: "Forget this!". Instead, a person who enables you to be yourself is interesting, because it means that this other, who is not of this world, is here. So then, what do you think about what I just said in response to your question?

That I have to love myself, that I needn't limit my desire because I have it, so that...

Medina. Stop there, good! You have understood that the problem of life is to love yourself and be sincere with yourself. The fact that I perceive the limitation around me makes me immediately discover that I am not merely this, that I am other. To say: "I have to love myself," makes you immediately feel that the urgent need of your life is to find someone who enables you to love yourself, because you can't do it on your own. Your urgent need is to encounter someone who enables you to be yourself.

So then, life becomes simpler, because now you have a question with which you can enter into your circumstances. I want to find someone who enables me to desire, to be myself, to walk. And if you encounter a person, how can you understand that she is the one who enables you to be yourself?

If I felt a change right away.

Medina. You feel right away that staying with her, your limitation no longer is a problem in the sense that you said, "It crushes me, and makes me forget myself," but she makes you desire more. Unfortunately, we are afraid to desire. It's like we are sitting in prison and when the desire to be happy arises in us we crush it.

Thank you.

In these days you said that to be able to affirm ourselves it is necessary to acknowledge an other, because in the end all the other options are useless. My doubt is whether there is the risk of losing our individuality, or in other words the I that I affirm is no longer truly I.

Medina. Think of what I just said to your friend. If you desire to truly love yourself, you have to find an other who enables you to be yourself.

But if finding this other means putting yourself completely in his hands, and thus you are not yourself, but it is him; as you said Thursday and Friday, to be able to truly recognize myself, I shouldn't focus on myself, I don't have to see everything thinking of myself as only protagonist, but...

Medina. Let's be true to what we said, because your objection is your interpretation of what I just said. So then, it's necessary to understand well what I said. The fact that I, my presence, makes you feel more yourself, does this mean erasing yourself?

No, in these terms no, however when it becomes more radical, that is, when it passes from saying that you have a friend to saying: "The friend is you," when someone tells you that to be yourself you have to be that friend, then the issue is less obvious.

Medina. If being with me you feel you are more yourself, if it is beautiful to be with me, if you really enjoy life, what does this fact tell you? You've been here three days. Were they good days?

Yes.

Medina. How did you feel?

Good.

Medina. What did you experience in the companionship of these people? Are you more yourself today than last Wednesday? Do you feel more yourself?

I think so, because I am more aware of the questions I have.

Medina. Well, you are more aware. Being here with six thousand people has helped you. Do you perceive the fact of being here with me, with us, this weekend, as something good or as something bad?

As something good.

Medina. And the more time goes by, the more time you spend with us, the more this perception of a good continues. At a certain point, you think, "Being with you, I am really well. I am really myself. I don't feel like a slave," because this means being yourself. "I don't feel crushed by reality, but I feel this desire within me that launches me into reality, and I really enjoy life." So what do you do about this experience?

I continue to spend time with you.

Medina. You continue to spend time with me. And you continue. And after years, what do you do with this experience? If I were in your shoes, I would begin to be a bit curious, and would want to understand why you correspond so much to what I desire, because I am well-off with you, I feel more alive. In these days, have you done what you wanted? For three days, we have all been here doing what someone tells us. I arrive in the hotel and they tell me: "Dinner is at 8, and at 8:25 you have to be here again." But in all this obeying an other, have you felt you have lost something?

No.

Medina. So your experience in these days responds to your question. If in staying in a place where you do what you are told, if in obeying you discover a good for you and you don't lose yourself, why do you have this objection?

Because this doesn't always happen. I don't spend the whole year here.

Medina. Why not? Does the proposal of Student Youth end here? Is being here with six thousand people, listening to someone who doesn't even speak Italian all that well, so different from being at lessons? Why is being at school different from having to do what another person tells you here? At school, too, they always tell you what you have to do. Why is it different here?

Actually, I don't know whether it's so different.

Medina. In fact, it's not different. So then, why do you experience it differently? What is here that isn't there? The problem is not what you do, because it is fairly similar. You could even think you have more freedom to do what you want at school than you do here. Here they tell you: "Observe silence in the bus." Is there someone at school who tells you to be silent on the bus? If at school they tell you, "Be silent on the bus," do you do it?

No, I don't do it.

Medina. You don't do it. Why? If your teacher tells you...

There's no reason to do it.

Medina. Why? What would be a reason for doing it? What has been the use of the silence for you in these days?

Having space for reflecting.

Medina. Excuse me, but when you're at school, don't you need to reflect? What do you do in order to reflect?

I'm quiet.

Medina. But at school you don't do it.

Every so often yes...

Medina. Do you realize that our life here in these three days is not different from the life you will live next week? The proposal is clear: we have done and we do School of Community, we pray together, we look at what happens and we see what this experience says about our life. But if after having prayed all these days, taken life seriously, allowed reality to raise questions, rediscovering ourselves, if after all this you forget and return to living as before, why do you expect a different result? It is like saying: you were here and said yes two hundred times—and it is not normal for a teenager to keep silence. It is not spontaneous, so much so that if your teacher tells you "Be quiet" you say "You're crazy!" Is it true that this happens? It is spontaneous for you not to keep quiet in class. Instead, someone here told you, "These days, be quiet," and you said "yes." You spent three days saying yes and in the end, after having observed silence, you discover a good in your experience; you discover that living this way is good for you. So then, how is this different from being at school? What is the difference?

Perhaps here it is a bit more explicit, clearer that it is a good for me, while instead at school...

Medina. Why is it clear? If you give me an example maybe I can understand, too.

I was happy to do the Way of the Cross, four hours walking and praying; maybe no one would, "That was a blast," but I was happy.

Medina. A four hour Way of the Cross—is that what you usually do with your friends on Fridays? “What are you doing this evening?”. “Let’s go do the Way of the Cross for four hours.” It wouldn’t exactly be your natural propensity, would it? The difference that I see is that in these days you said yes, and accepted living life as proposed to you by another person. In this case fundamentally it was me, but not just me, who asked you to live in a certain way, even in the details, like observing silence in the bus, reviewing the lessons, walking, you were even told when to get up and when to eat. And in this living life with my gaze, you found that there was a good for you, and you said yes to this. So then, why do you say that your individuality is lost in following another? It seems like the opposite to me.

The fact that you chose—actually, you had the opportunity to choose, to say yes and observe silence or say no and talk—was this against you?

No.

Medina. Do you all understand that the objection we make does not correspond to the experience? This is what I want to emphasize. If you look at your experience, if you observe yourself in action, many of the objections we have don’t bear up to scrutiny. Why? Because, for example, your objection about individuality (“If I follow you, I lose my individuality”) is due to your interpretation of what it means to follow, but you have the experience of following right before your eyes; you lived it in these days and you found it was something good for you. The beauty of our staying together is being on a journey, so that the opportunity to follow, to live life with the same heart of an other who enables you to be truly yourself, to embrace your desire, is continuous. To me, this is evident, because it emerges from experience. But we do not listen to experience, and instead we listen to our ideas, and so if someone says “How were these three days? Was it a good thing for you? Are you really sure?” we react right away, saying “Yes, but I have a problem with following.” It means that you have an interpretation of what it means to follow, that is, that following erases you. Instead, speaking with you and with the friend who spoke before you, one sees the opposite. Experience makes you see the opposite. It is natural that it should be this way. When you fall in love with a girl, you want to spend time with her. You want to look at life the way she sees it, but you do not erase yourself. Rather, when you fall in love you succeed in living better. It is natural, and this means that it is the dynamic of being human. This dynamic is that in the relationship with my mother, in the relationship with certain friends, I discover I am myself. So

then, the objection about individuality being denied in following comes from the fact that we think we exist alone. Existing alone means thinking that I give my substance to myself, that the thing that has the greatest value is me, alone, me alone. But I cannot be myself unless I am in relationship with someone else. This is what you perceive when you fall in love, that staying with you I breathe more freely; I perceive in you a good and for this reason I want to be with you. Unfortunately, right after, you employ all the reductions possible. You do your re-inventions and little remains of the initial love. But precisely this is the point. You realize that you and I live as modernists who decide that it is better not to be ourselves, that it is better not to desire, that the supreme value of life is the “I” alone, individuality. But experience does not say this. Your experience of these days tells you the opposite. So then, aware that in these days you had an experience of a good and that when you are not here, as you said, this good is not present, what is the problem of life for you?

Maybe setting this aside in order to box everything up in tight logic.

Medina. Do you realize that for us everything is eliminating something? You are telling me that the problem of life is to “set it aside.” Our friend before said that the problem of life is to resolve the question of desire, eliminating it so at least she can be unworried. In response to my desire for water, our proposal is to forget it, hide it; if you don’t give it consideration, the desire disappears. Here you are, you’ve walked three days in the desert and you reach water. You’re about to have some but you slam against a glass barrier. You see the water, but there’s glass between you and the water and you can’t get it. Our reaction is to tell me just to turn around and look the other way, and even if I haven’t drunk in three days and I need water, it’s not a problem anymore and so everything is fine. The problem of life is not to eliminate the problems or set them aside, but to follow with curiosity that which interested you. The task of life is to follow the fascination aroused in you by an encounter. It is not to set aside your thoughts. When you hear “You have to give your all,” you ask, “Everything? Really everything?” But the problem is not your everything, but whether there is something fascinating there, and then I want to be there because everything I have fails to fulfil me and ultimately does not interest me. It is like a thin line that you sense in our speaking, the automatic reaction in us is contrary to our nature. When you see a beautiful girl, I mean really beautiful, what is the first thing that comes to your mind?

To think how beautiful she is.

Medina. The first thing that comes to mind should be to go toward her. The first thought would not be to have to forget all the other girls or set her aside. The issue is, if I have seen something fascinating, the more I am with her the more I experience a good. So then my problem is to remain here, in this place that represents a good for my life. How can I stay here with you more? Think, this is the experience of the apostles, who pursued Jesus with a curiosity desirous of the truth; they

followed the intuition they had had. At a certain point, as you return home today, sitting on the bus, you should ask yourselves if it will be possible to live school as we lived in these days. The problem is not to eliminate or forget school, but to have the curiosity to discover how God will make it possible for me to live everything in a true way, even school.

Bonfanti. I think this point is key: to follow what has interested you. The experience of Peter and John is precisely this, the experience that many of us have had is that of a fascination provoked by an encounter. If I think of my experience, the thing that has made me grow, the thing that continues to make me grow, is following what has fascinated me, not all the doubts that arise. Everything is involved within this following.

I was struck by your insistence, Fr. Josè, on the contrast between the idea I have and the design of an Other for me. You said that our fulfilment lies in adhering to this project. But I continue to remain bound to what I think and want, because there remains in me the atrocious doubt that deep down what God has in mind for me is not what truly corresponds to me. I am, as you said, “on the threshold of the Mystery,” and I can’t entrust myself totally because I am too afraid.

Medina. What are you afraid of?

That it is not for me, that it is too hard, that I won’t be happy.

Medina. You see a guy and say, “This guy is really handsome, and he really loves me,” but right after you say, “Well, no, I’m afraid.” Does this thought really arise? “Too fascinating. I’m afraid.” This fascination of his is a bit strange. Where does the fear come from?

From the fact that I am afraid to lose the people and things that I feel are mine. In effect, you already answered a bit when you said that if a thing fascinates you, that is the point. I think of this image: it is as if there were a ravine, with me on one side and the thing I most desire on the other, but I am afraid of jumping to the other side. It seems that at times this fear freezes me.

Medina. If I see something fascinating, I forget about my cell phone, I forget about my girlfriend—a friend said earlier—I go after what I saw and only afterward do I realize I have left behind all the rest. Do you think that this was a problem for me when I saw something fascinating? When you all say “I am too afraid” this is an intellectual objection, fruit of the modern mentality that operates within our heart. It is an objection that is not born of experience. You see something fascinating and you go after it. This is the experience.

Yes, even if the difficulty that remains concerns the sacrifice. For example, I perceive that in the relationship with a friend, the way of loving him better consists in the fact that the relationship is

not the way I want. I would like to but am unable to sacrifice myself completely. It's like I know everything, I am certain of my faith, I am certain that God loves me, but then, ultimately...

Medina. You don't know anything!

...I keep clinging to my idea.

Medina. You know everything intellectually, as discourse, but it is not your dominant thought. You don't know anything, because knowing is recognizing. Knowledge is not something intellectual, but it is knowing an other. Maybe you know the words, but to know Him is another thing. You see something fascinating, and it is natural that you get up and go toward it. It is natural. There is no theory here. Coming to Rimini from Milan, along the road there were a lot of Ferraris. There was one in the rest stop parking lot, and since I like beautiful cars I went to see it close up. I did not for a minute think that Albertino would leave me behind, or that he would touch my bag, my things, all my things. The rule of life is to follow what is fascinating and that coincides with being truly yourself. You do not know what happiness is until you recognize it, until you see it present itself to you. So then the point for you becomes finding someone who helps you look with passion at what fascinates you. Have you found this here?

Yes.

Medina. So what do you need to do?

Continue to look at these people.

Medina. Perfect. Continue looking, that's all. Thank you.

In these days you continually said that there are two options: either thinking that everything dies, everything finishes and nothing has meaning, or entrust yourself to Him, say yes and thus become one with Christ. But I don't understand what it means to become one with Christ, how it is possible.

Medina. Why is this a problem for you?

Because in these days you said that to entrust yourself to Him you need to become one with Him, and this interests me.

Medina. And why is Christ a problem?

Because He seems totally other than me.

Medina. Yes, that's right. If you think about it, becoming one means feeling life with another's heart. And this other, in these three days, was me, Fr. José. You followed life through my gaze. I asked you to stay with me, to be one with me and to look at me. But to truly follow, it is not enough to mechanically do the same things that I do, for example, to sit when I sit. Following is looking with the eyes of an other, allowing the gaze of an other to enter into me.

But even if I try to look at life the way you've seen it or described it, it is not the same thing as saying "Christ." In this case you are you, or another person, not Christ.

Medina. It is not Christ, but what do you know about Christ?

Nothing.

Medina. Nothing, and yet you assert that it is not Christ. If you say "This is not Christ," it means you know who Christ is.

No. It is precisely the fact that I do not know who Christ is that keeps me from becoming one with Him.

Medina. Truly?

If I do not know a person, how can I see things as he sees them?

Medina. You are talking about the mystery of the Incarnation. This is how we ended the Way of the Cross. I am curious to understand how He decided to remain with me, and we have had some suggestions, some signs during these days, at least for me it has become evident through the sacrament of the Eucharist: "Remain with me, eat my flesh," Jesus told His disciples. To become "one" with Him, this is the objective sacrament. But there is also the companionship, the incarnation of Christ within the communion of His own. Since we are part of a movement called "Communion and Liberation," the word communion for us is fairly important because Christ decided to remain with me and you through a human companionship, so that both of us can have today the same experience as Peter and John's: the experience of living with someone who makes me more myself, so that, living with him, following him, looking at life the way he looks at it, I am free, I am more myself, the world that seems so small to me becomes mine, the things that seem to crush me, that seem against me, through the fact that I know him and that I look at them the way he does, all this give me an enormous freedom. This is the experience of Christianity. This is the Christ who I know. I ask you: do you know Christ? Do you understand why we sang: "He has your face, your visage, and is terrible for me?"²⁸ How is this possible? In His mercy, in his tenderness for you, God introduced into the world a man so that you could know who God is and who you are. Take heed here, because we think we know Christ, but we relegate Him to the clouds. Instead, Christ is here, present. For me as well, saying these things is terrible, saying that through my testimony about communion with Him, I am Christ for you. Admitting this makes me a little fearful. This is the Christ who I know: encountering a man in whose presence I perceive a good for my life. When I read Fr. Giussani in the School of Community I find the gaze of a man upon my life that brings a good to me. So then, what does this say to your question?

I think I have understood that if I am in my GS group, I can see Christ through them and thus He is present to me.

Medina. It is really hard for me—excuse me, this is an incapacity of mine—because I cannot “see” Christ through people. When people tell me they can see Christ, I become a bit afraid and ask, “What do you see? Do you perhaps see a ghost appear?” I understand that it is an expression that summarizes a widespread sentiment, but it seems to me that it makes Christ abstract. I’m not saying it is mistaken. I think it is beautiful, too, but I have a problem with that expression.

But earlier, you said that for me, now, you are Christ.

Medina. I said that you, staying with me, experience a thing that is not of this world, that is not the desert. There is something divine in you. It is not you; it is not your intelligence or your capacity, but there is something divine in you. This is what interests me. Do you understand? This is why I have trouble with this expression, because it seems to me that it reduces the Mystery, which is terrible. How is it possible that my life has changed so much that your life can be changed through the fact that you are with me? How is it possible that a man like Fr. Giussani could have changed my life, brought something to my life that is not of this world? This is the incarnation. This is the Christ that I know. And your companionship bears witness to something new only if it lives within this communion. It is not automatic, because for us indifference is automatic, sitting and saying, ok, let’s hope that this desire will pass, let’s do what we want. When I sense next to me someone who brings something divine, a chill passes through me; it makes me uncomfortable because I feel that I cannot say the silly things I usually say. I feel it makes me stand up a bit straighter. This is the Christ I know, when I speak of the Other I’m not talking about an other up in the clouds. I’m talking about this real Other, present here and now. When I speak of obedience, I do not mean saying “Lord, tell me what I have to do.” I’ve tried it lots of times, “Lord, tell me what I have to do.” But He did not answer! It is not this way. There is a physicality, a carnality that is beautiful, terrible, because it is mysterious that God should have decided to be a man with you, alongside you. It is terrible, because it immediately provokes that wrenching that makes you ask, “How is it possible?”. It seems impossible, and yet it is fascinating and real. When I perceive this fascination, I say yes. I say yes to the fascination of the truth that I see in front of me.

But if I do not see Him in the people I know, where can I see this fascination?

Medina. Look for other people, look for something that is fascinating. It is not that you go to school and say, “I have to fall in love. Let’s see who’s here. Giacomo, no. Alfredo, no. Well, that’s ok anyway, this is what is available, I’ll fall in love with whoever.” No. If there is not someone who fascinates you, you go look elsewhere.

But if you say that you can’t find Him in people...

Medina. I say that you cannot find Him in this world as a product of our hands, but He exists in the world through the incarnation. The friend before said, “Being here, staying here with you and

with these six thousand kids, is good for me.” I am made of flesh. I am a man. I had this experience with Fr. Giussani, with Fr. Carrón: the experience of encountering a person who is fascinating. So I want to understand better who he is. And I ask, “I want to understand the divine in you, the source of this divinity, which is not of this world, because I am tired of the world, but there is something in you that interests me.” Think a bit, the disciples ask Jesus, “What do you do with money? Do you have to pay taxes? On the Sabbath what do you do? How do you look at these things?” The common fund is proposed to you: a new way of looking at money. Charitable work is proposed to you: a new way of looking at love. School of Community is proposed to you: a new gaze on your life. So then, how do you immerse yourself in this? You say yes to what is proposed and then you verify whether saying yes (to School of Community, to the common fund, to charitable work, to the vacation) is a good, but a good on this level, that it makes you desire more. Otherwise we live a pietistic bourgeois life in which we do things, but only so that everything is tranquil.

You said that in general, our life is a demand, and that we also have this attitude of demand in our prayer. Yes, it's true, when I pray I demand. What should I ask, otherwise, when I pray? For example, if I pray about an upcoming test, it is obvious that I pray for a good grade. I certainly don't pray for a fail.

Medina. You pray that the Lord will give you a good grade?

Yes, when it happens.

Medina. I have a bit of trouble with this point. Excuse me, I am a very literal person. In response to your prayer, what should God do? Should He take up your pen and say, “Come on, stop writing and I'll do your test for you?” I don't understand.

Not a bad idea, but... I always pray that it will go well. What should I ask otherwise when I pray?

Medina. What should you ask? The problem is that you all have “stabbed” your desire to the point that you ask truly small things. Is a grade really what makes your life different? Imagine you are on the verge of death, with all your urgent need, and what do you ask? Is this what you ask?

No.

Medina. Is that prayer truly the broadest expression of your desire?

No.

Medina. Because what you ask manifests what you desire and what you think makes you happy. So then, what makes you happy?

Now? I don't know.

Medina. You don't know.

I wouldn't mind a good grade in math.

Medina. But what do you need that math grade for? Does it have the power to make you live life as it happened in these days?

No.

Medina. So then, why do you ask for it? If you have the opportunity to meet the Italian President and he says to you, “You are the most beautiful Italian in the world, what do you want?”. “I would really like to pass my math test.” Is this all that you ask? What would you ask?

I would ask to be made happy.

Medina. There. And what does that mean?

I don't know.

Medina. You don't know?

I came here to ask it.

Medina. This is why I say that very often your prayer is bourgeois. Why? Because you ask for truly small things. Small in the sense of what is convenient; it is convenient to have an A+ . It is convenient, and it makes life simpler; people think you are smart, too. But does it make you happy? If you have the opportunity to be heard by God, ask what you truly–truly!–want. And what do you want? Don't you know?

No.

Medina. We do not know what makes us happy, because happiness is something you encounter; it is not something that I can make happen. It is encountered. Certainly, it is right to pray for the things that are dear to me, for example, my mother's health, but aware that not even her healing will make me ultimately happy. What makes me happy is that You, O Christ, through this human reality, come to meet me. What makes me happy is the fact that I can discover You in all those things I do, find something mysterious, divine, in all the circumstances I face. What interests me is living school with the same intensity with which I have lived these three days, find something divine in everything, even in suffering and even in death. Certainly, there are circumstances I do not want because maybe I cannot deal with it, maybe I am tired, but the toil is not a problem, we realized yesterday: even Jesus struggled. And if things were hard for Jesus, then we can also make it, following Him. But the way Jesus and Mary prayed is different from ours, because Jesus also said, “I don't want to deal with this struggle, but may Your will be done, because what I am interested in is You, Father.” This is Christian prayer. “Lord, heal my mother, but may Your will be done, because I know that You love me and my mother. I say yes to You.” Pray for whatever you want—for the love of God—but pray above all to discover something divine, something that corresponds, not of this world, something beautiful, fascinating in all that you do. The good grade

will pass. You got one, good. But what interests me is the possibility of finding something divine, something that corresponds, something beautiful in that test at school, so that the instant is full of density. I encourage you in this: walk together! You do not realize, maybe I realize it more, but for me it was wonderful to see you walk together in these days. It was beautiful, moving. It is a journey toward Him. It is a journey to rediscover ourselves. The disciples took three years to understand what the incarnation was, who this man Christ was. Maybe we will need a bit of time, too. Let's accept this. Let's have the patience to follow, because we are always tempted to obtain everything immediately. Instead, you are invited to walk, to be in relationship with Christ in the flesh, this flesh, not with a Christ up in the clouds. You are invited to say yes to what is fascinating, to that intuition of truth that you sensed. In this way you could return home from the Triduum saying, "If this being together has been so fascinating for me, maybe I'll also say yes Monday at school." It is a journey, an education. You do not realize what immense power there is in your saying yes to what is proposed, simply. "Look: we pray, we do School of Community, we study together every so often, we live together, we pay the common fund, we do charitable work." Say yes to these things, with simplicity, and you will find yourself changed, as you discovered you have changed in these days. It is the simplicity of saying yes to what has fascinated you, saying yes to what you have before you, fascinating and correspondent. It is the opposite of saying no to all the things to which we usually say no. The problem of the rich young man is not that he possessed many things, but that at a certain point, his gaze shifted away from Christ. Instead it is natural, when a friend says "I am going to Rimini" to answer, "I'll come with you," that is, I follow something fascinating, as many of us did going after the fascination of a man, because the book *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* is the testimony of a man, Fr. Giussani, who spoke to me and who speaks to you, as I speak to you now, who re-awakened me and now I follow that fascination, because all the rest, personally, does not interest me. "I strive [says Saint Paul] in the race to obtain Him," running, walking toward Him. And the rest, the rest is "rubbish," as Saint Paul says. Without Christ, the rest for me is rubbish, does not serve me. I treat it like rubbish: I throw it away. It does not interest me, does not interest me in the sense that I do not see the value. It does not interest me because without You, life is a condemnation, but with You, life is beautiful. The problem is not life. The problem is not the circumstance. The problem is when You are not here, Christ, because when You are here, I live. That is everything!

Let's conclude by singing together the song of praise to Mary.

Regina Caeli

English translation by Sheila Beatty

- ¹ T.S. Eliot, Choruses from “The Rock, VII”, in T.S. Eliot: *The Complete Poems and Plays: 1909-1950*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1980, p. 108.
- ² *Phil* 3:12.
- ³ Cf. J. Carrón, “*We Want To Be Outrageously Happy, Too.*” *Life As Vocation*, November, 2012. Available on the CL International web site: http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=19889.
- ⁴ Cf. A. Schopenhauer, *The World As Will and Representation: Volume I*, translated by E.F.J. Payne, Dover Publications, New York, 1969, p. 312.
- ⁵ Cf. F.W. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, transl. Walter Kaufman, Vintage Books, New York, 1974, p. 246.
- ⁶ J. Kerouac, *Desolation Angels*, Riverhead Books, New York, 1965, p. 50.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 124, 126.
- ⁸ Francis, *Message for the XXIX World Youth Day 2014*, January 21, 2014, 2.
- ⁹ Cf. *Le lettere di Santa Caterina da Siena*, [*The Letters of Saint Catherine of Siena*], vol. III, Giunti-Barbera, Firenze 1970, p. 204.
- ¹⁰ L. Giussani, *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro (1988-1989) [What We Hold Dearest]*, Bur, Milan 2011, pp. 491-492.
- ¹¹ P. Lagerkvist, “Uno sconosciuto è il mio amico,” in *Poesie*, [*An unknown is my friend*, in *Poems*] Guaraldi-Nuova Compagnia Editrice, Rimini-Forlì 1991, p. 111.
- ¹² O. Clemotte, “Hoy arriesgaré,” *Canti [Songs]*, Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2014, p. 287.
- ¹³ Cf. *Lk* 1:34.38.
- ¹⁴ Cf. G. Cocquio, “Abramo [Abraham]”, *Canti*, op. cit., pp. 179-180.
- ¹⁵ *Gen* 15:3-4.
- ¹⁶ Cf. *Gen* 18:12.
- ¹⁷ Cf. *Gen* 18:14.
- ¹⁸ *Gen* 22:2.
- ¹⁹ *Jn* 6:53,56.
- ²⁰ Cf. *Jn* 6:61.67.
- ²¹ Cf. *Lk* 18:18,22.
- ²² Cf. *Gal* 2:20.
- ²³ Cf. *Mt* 19:29; *Mk* 10:29-30
- ²⁴ P. Claudel, *The Tidings Brought to Mary: A Mystery*, Bibliobaazaar, pp. 71-74.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ J. Carrón, Greeting at the conclusion of the Easter Triduum of Student Youth, Rimini, April 19, 2014.
- ²⁸ C. Chieffo, “Ballata dell’uomo vecchio [Ballad of the Old Man]”, *Canti*, op. cit., p. 218.