

“You have met many people: with which of them can you say you’ve had an encounter?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

3. The event

Luigi Giussani

What we have described as human experience is the prerogative of all men and women.

The only genius who grasped all the different human factors, brought them to light, and revealed their definitive meaning by giving them value in an unimaginable and unexpected way was Jesus Christ. The historical encounter with this man constitutes an encounter with the resolving and clarifying point of view of human experience.

It is precisely this encounter that we wish to attain once again. Hence let us examine the initial moments in which it emerged. Here is the first historical record of the fact: “On the following day as John stood again with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at Him and said, ‘Look, there is the lamb of God.’ Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned around, saw them following and said, ‘What do you want?’ They answered, ‘Rabbi (which means Teacher), where do you live?’ ‘Come and see,’ He replied; and so they went and saw where He lived, and stayed with Him the rest of the day. It was about the tenth hour.”¹

One of the two is the historian narrating the fact and, now, as a centenarian, he remembers the moment in detail, for it marked the beginning of a new life for him.

The story proceeds with the encounters of Philip and Nathanael. The latter was the “old fellow” in the company, a shrewd individual, always on his guard not to be cheated by anyone. “Come and see,” they say to him. This is always the most persuasive argument. Jesus sees Nathanael arriving and He says to him: “Here comes a true Israelite incapable of deceit.” “How do you know me?” replies Nathanael, almost as if he does not want to be flattered. “Before Philip called you I saw you under the fig tree.” And Nathanael yields immediately: “Rabbi, you are the Son of God.”²

At this moment this man’s reputation began to emerge among the people. After their initial astonishment, the disciples are so struck by what He says and the way He looks at them, that they accept Him immediately; that is, they place their trust in Him. The following chapter of the Gospel tells about the miracle at the wedding of Cana and ends with these words: »

¹ John 1:35-9.

² See John 1:45-9.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*,
McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 59-60.

» "Jesus performed the first miracle. And his disciples believed in him."³ This shows that the event developed over time.

If those disciples had not seen Him again they would have forgotten that strange encounter, even though they had acknowledged Him as the Messiah since the first meeting. Instead, to reencounter Him was like deepening an original impression. They reinforced their belief in this continuous convergence of impressions and feelings. Not that previously they had been insincere or non-believing; rather, they followed the guiding principle of human awareness that implies this development.

Thus, even at other times, after the wedding of Cana, the Gospel notes: "and His disciples believed in Him." A depth is achieved that brings one to that degree of confidence and conviction where one is finally persuaded: *one is certain*.

Let us now single out those *aspects of Christ's personality* that were and are exceptional to their eyes and ours.

³ John 2:11.