

“YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH, AND THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE” (Jn 8:32) **A story that continues**

ASSEMBLY AND SYNTHESIS

Assembly

with Fabio Colombo, Francesco Barberis and Matteo Severgnini

Francesco Barberis. Good morning to you all! We would like to begin this assembly at the end of the Easter Triduum with two thoughts. The first is this: we have a great need to understand what we are living, and this emerged in almost all of the contributions that we received. As Fr. Fabio said Thursday evening, “We cannot fast forever; we need real food to satisfy us” and, in the introduction to the Way of the Cross yesterday, Fr. Giussani said, “Before we begin [or beginning this assembly] let’s ask the Lord who makes all things, the great Father, the origin of everything, and thus the origin of this brief instant of thought, of feeling, of desire that invades me.”¹ Let’s ask God for the grace to understand, to comprehend more and more, that our heart can comprehend more and more, always. This is the first thought that I wanted to offer you at the beginning of this morning.

And the second thought that came to me, that came to me many times in these two days, is one of gratitude, an infinite gratitude for all the questions that you sent, for their truth, for their profundity. Yesterday evening, reading them all with some friends, our gratitude for each one of you was evident, each one of you: you are unique, you are incomparable, and there is a greatness in each one of you that is truly moving.

Alright, let’s begin the assembly. To start, we have chosen a few of your questions that, in some way, take up similar themes. There are four themes. The first regards the necessity to recognize the presence of the Lord from signs and, together with this, the need for a reasonableness in believing or for a different way to use reason.

Intervention. My question was: I would like to look at all things and be grateful for them, like in the example that Father made about the glass. I want to know who put me there, that there is something behind a gesture or an object, but how do I do this? Do I have to zero in on every little thing?

Intervention. It was said, “Love the truth more than your plans.” I am a very precise and organized kind of person and yesterday I was surprised because I did not think, even for a second, about how things needed to go. I was not controlling the situation, but totally immersed in it, not a slave to my plans, and yet it was fine for me. And so I ask: what made this possible?

Fabio Colombo (Fr. Fabio). Thanks to both of you. You see that the questions that arise in the heart and in the reason of a person, a young person, can be a possibility for others to recover their steps or to take a step for the first time, or become re-attracted to something that »

¹ From the booklet used during the GS Triduum retreat, pp. 22-23.

» they had perhaps left by the wayside. And therefore, even a very simple phrase: "If there is a cup here (it is a piece of real reality, tangible, concrete) then it means that someone put it there", becomes a question: "Should I linger over every little thing?". It is not that you *must* linger over every little thing; it's that our reason, that is, the motor we use to "function," asks, demands, incessantly, the *reason* for everything. Therefore—as you can see—"Why do I get up in the morning?", then you fall in love, and so you ask, "What is love?"; then someone goes to heaven and so you ask, "What does it mean to die?", and then again, "What does it mean to live?" and then again, "What does it mean that I have just one life?". It is not an effort we take up out of a sense of duty, that we must slavishly complete, but rather it means "not disrupting" a dynamic that is within us as human beings. To use an example: if the motor works and I do not turn the key to kill the engine, then the motor is in motion; that is, our reason, as it comes into contact with reality, as it undergoes the impact of reality, is set into motion.

We must have, therefore, a freedom that is wide open, without wearing a raincoat! Yesterday, at the last station of the Way of the Cross, when we returned to the little park where we had begun (but also going around from one station to another) it was moving and surprising to see, beyond your faces, also the faces of those people we met there: what did they see? They saw people, but these people were acting a certain way, they were exhibiting a certain tension towards something that was happening, they were united, they were listening to songs or were remaining in silence, and then there was this cross being held by a young man and before and behind there was a people walking; then, as this body and this piece of reality was moving itself along the streets of that small town, those persons must have asked themselves, "But what is going on?! But what is this reality that is here before my eyes?". Certainly, people generally still know: it's a Way of the Cross procession... but what is it that moves, that brings 3,600 young people to get together for three days in Rimini to remain in silence, to listen to someone speak, to enjoy the beauty of the songs, to see Jesus who kneels before twelve people to wash and kiss their feet? And so, those persons who yesterday saw this real fact (our Way of the Cross) were not able to dodge the recoil that that piece of reality provoked in them, because reason is made this way; it is need for meaning and it does not stop or give up until it becomes aware of reality in the totality of its factors, until it knows. One could give an explanation, "Who knows: they must all be 'controlled,' like little robots," but it does not seem to me to be the case with you all. Another could give an alternate explanation and say, "Their parents paid them to be there" and, instead, it is the exact opposite: you all freely chose to be here.

And so, the reason of those persons who encountered this Body yesterday moving about must accept (not as an obligation, not because I tell them, "You must accept this," but because reason is not satisfied until it finds an exhaustive response): "But who are these people? But what are they doing?". Until reason finds an explanation that embraces the totality of factors, it remains a bit—as we can see—high and dry. If those people had asked, "But why are you all here?"... as, by the way, one of you from the ushering crew told me this morning at breakfast, "You know, Fr. Fabio, being part of the crew, you happen to meet the Firemen, and the Police Officers, and the Driver of the bus, you happen to meet these people who ask, 'But what are you all doing?'"—that is: what is the exhaustive reason, what is the motivation that embraces and holds all that I am seeing before my eyes together?—and this girl from the ushers very candidly told them, "But, there is this Jesus who died on the cross two-thousand and twenty-three years ago..." but He did not only die, "He also rose and from that resurrection, a people was born and today we are remembering the sacrifice that Jesus made for each one of us." I think that someone who uses their reason will have to welcome and come to terms with this exhaustive explanation, this exhaustive explanation that there is One who set 3,600 young people into motion! »

» And, if I can have another minute, allow me to take two further steps. The first: the other day—on this point—I said this phrase, “the difference lies in the use of reason, not that I go to church and someone else does not” because many of you had said, “My classmates do not go to church, they are not religious, so no chance that I could invite them here.” That phrase was meant to be an introduction for us to this further point: that the thing in common between me and my teammates from soccer, between me and my classmates at school is that they have their reason like I have my reason and, therefore, I can appeal to their reason just like I try to be reasonable about what I myself live; they too are predestined to an encounter with Christ and I am at the service of this. Soon, you will look back at the lesson of yesterday morning and above all *The Religious Sense* and you will go deeper into this point! Do you understand? Therefore: I have this need for meaning in my life, but so too does this classmate have a need for meaning, to understand why they are in the world; then, perhaps, they find themselves in a totally different phase of their life, perhaps they are losing themselves in drugs, or perhaps they are obsessed with soccer as if it was the only thing worth living for, perhaps they are in pain, perhaps “they go crazy” for fashion and just think about clothes, who knows... this is not a judgment on that person, but simply says to each one of us, “You can enter into dialogue with whomever (whether or not they go to church!).”

The word “dialogue,” etymologically, has this structure: *dia-logos*, that is, it is formed by the particle *dia*, through-between, and *logos*, reason, at least two, mine and that of my companion from soccer or school or dance or volleyball—the syntagm *logos* in Greek is extremely rich: word, discourse, reason—: I, with my reason, with my heart, enter into relationship, through reason, with that friend who has the same reason as me and has the same heart as me, and, therefore, beginning from that and what I have seen, I can say, “Look, I discovered splendid things in Rimini and I’ll share them with you, but not because ‘I go to church and you do not,’ but because you and I have the same structure, we are made of the same stuff, of the same reactant and we are waiting to encounter and to know that other reactant that will make our lives explode; I, by Grace, already know Him a bit, so come and see!”. I’m not sure if you all study chemistry; in any event, there is only one reaction that makes my reactant “explode/flourish”; there are two agents, agent A and agent B, that come together and, if there are certain combinations, it produces the right effect, *boom!* And so, my friend from school and I, we are made in the same way, I and my friend from soccer are made in the same way and this year, there are 3,600 of us but next year, there will be 7,200 because each one of you will invite a friend, that one will invite another friend, that one will invite another friend communicating what made his or her life “explode.” Therefore, this is what I was trying to say with the distinction—let’s call it—between “church and not-church.” Fr. Giussani used to say: every human being has the religious sense, but what does it mean that they have the religious sense? That they are given reason, given a heart, that their hearts desire the good, their reason desires truth just like mine does and, therefore, they seek an exhaustive fulfillment, not a partial one! The religious sense is, therefore, at the level of these inevitable questions, at the level in which human beings wait for an *exhaustive* response to these questions. Therefore, every human being, as such, is religious! I hope that this helps you to understand a bit better...

One last thing and then I’ll be quiet. There was also a question on the Holy Spirit. The exhaustive reason, the exhaustive motive that gathers these 3,600 people cannot just be the response to a command: “The Exercises are taking place in Rimini. *Fine*, I’m going,” as if we were so many robots (as I was saying before), who receive an input and automatically perform a procedure; no, all of our freedom, reason, affection is involved, but in this space the action of the Holy Spirit is inserted; we are con-voked, called together. The etymology of the word Church in Greek is *ἐκ-κλησία*, that is, called-by; we are con-voked. And who »

» is it, what is that “chain”—let’s call it—that precedes us, that attracts us, that passes through each one of us and con-vokes us all together uniting us in the People of God in the Body of Christ, in the movement? And this is the action of the Holy Spirit who attracts us to the Father, making us sons in the Son. The Holy Spirit is that divine force that passes through each one of us just like He entered into Mary. And, when He enters into us, He makes us like the cells of a single organism; otherwise, one piece would be here, another piece would be there, but it would be a deformed body. Instead, the Holy Spirit is He who creates harmony. Pope Francis continues to say: the Holy Spirit is He who creates harmony, He is the “universal symbolizer.” The word symbol, *συμβάλλω*, means “throw-unite-together.” Who is it that unites all the pieces of our body? Who is it that unites that piece of the body that is in Rimini, the piece in Bologna, the piece in Turin, the piece in Milan, the piece in Puglia; who is it? Who is it that holds us all together, that binds us together? The Holy Spirit. It cannot just be the good feeling that I have towards Francesco or the esteem I have for Davide; yes, these things are also there, but, at a much deeper level, it is the Holy Spirit.

Matteo Severgnini (Seve). To the question of the young man who said, “I am a very precise and organized kind of person and yesterday I was surprised because [...] I was not controlling the situation, but totally immersed in it, not a slave to my plans, and yet it was fine for me.” Who knows how many of us had the same experience! And this, in my opinion, is a beautiful witness to the title “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” How many of us had the same experience these days together? How many? Before, you were full of your own plans and then something happens, someone frees you from your projects and an abandonment, a dependence, comes about. Van Thuân, a Bishop who was imprisoned for thirteen years, nine of which were in isolation, said that, “The belly button, which seems to be good for nothing, is an indelible sign of a totalizing truth: at least one time in my life, I was totally dependent, totally dependent.” Our plans give way when an enormous truth happens before our eyes, on which we begin to depend. Our nature reveals itself: we are dependent, and it is for this reason that we are free. It seems like a paradox but it is exactly that which our friend testified to with his question.

Barberis. The second theme that emerged from many contributions is simple: how can the experience that I am living continue?

Intervention. Fr. Fabio said that we need an experience but that I cannot “produce” it myself because it is God who comes to us. But how can I always have this experience? Why do I feel the communion with God here, but when I go home or to school, I don’t feel it anymore? And so, how can I tend to the communion with God in daily life?

Seve. Thank you. As you all can see, the vivisection that Fr. Fabio performed yesterday on Francesco and me on this table has served its purpose. We are still alive and we are here... apart from this, I wanted to go back to the first question, which struck me a great deal, because I think that it is one of the most profound desires of each one of us: how can this communion with God remain always, in every instant? On the first evening, I was fulminated by the story that Davide told us because this communion has the “time of eternity”; this communion, this covenant that God makes with you and me is a covenant that has the “time of eternity.” Jeremiah (this prophet that I love so much) has God say, “With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you” (cf. Jer 31:3). What is this communion with God? It is One who, from all eternity, seeks your heart, seeks it—as Davide and Fr. Fabio told us on the first evening—, One who went through all of history to come and »

» knock on my heart and your heart because with you He has created a covenant, He desires you, He desires your heart. But the amazing thing is that He desires your heart, He desires you, and He puts you in a flow, in a story; as we were saying in the introduction to this Triduum: "Look, He put you all in a story, in a companionship, in a communion." And it is an uninterrupted chain of people conquered and for whom their exploding heart began to say, "I am loved. I have met the truth and this truth has made me free." It is an uninterrupted chain of testimonies that has generated a people, a living communion, that reached the mother of Giussani, who told it to Giussani, who told it to Fr. Fabio Baroncini, who told it to Fr. Fabio, who told it to you all. And, in front of this, one can say, "But this communion... how can I trust Fr. Fabio?" There are two conditions: 1) Find someone who knows what he is talking about because he has met it. 2) Someone who wants what is good for you (who does not want to trick you!). The chain of witnesses has always had these two conditions. And you all try to think of your friends who are here, of the adults who invited you here: they are trustworthy testimonies. Fr. Giussani said that our life is like flowing water, a river, that has two banks in order to move, to live: the first is prayer, begging; the Church is our mother from this point of view: liturgy, sacraments, the Bishop came to greet us this morning; the second is a companionship, a company is there where God places you, chooses you, you along with others. And this visible, objective companionship makes an appeal and enters into your heart. These are the two banks that assure our communion with God.

Two super quick examples. Many years ago, when I met GS, I heard about St. Francis Xavier who is the patron of missions of Europe. He was sent to China—to China!—to evangelize Asia, and his friends wrote him letters that, as he got further away, would arrive to him later and later, even after a whole year; he would read the letters of his friends and then, given that he was on the move so much and could not keep all of the letters, he would cut out the name of his friend and put it in his breast pocket, close to his heart. When they found him after he'd passed away, they found so many names of his friends there, close to his heart, because he was continually living in communion with those who were living the grandiose experience of the love of God with him. When you go to play tennis, when you are in class, when you are taking an exam or a quiz, all of these friends are here (in your heart), because they are the greatest help to remember Who has taken hold of us. And then there are moments that help us in this continuing memory: think about being able to say the *Angelus* together at school in the morning, beginning the day with the memory that I am not alone, or the School of Community, the Raggio, or the possibility to see each other in the hall, because a look is enough to say, "But you are mine, but you are the face with which the good Lord—who makes a covenant with me—makes Himself present now." But how beautiful is it to be able to meet each other continually in this way and to not feel alone anymore because the heart has been conquered!?! And so, these are the two banks: on the one hand, prayer, because we are made to ask for the meaning of our life, of He who has already reached us, and on the other hand, a great companionship, the one that was described yesterday evening.

Thinking about this question, a passage that is among the most beautiful in all of world literature came to my mind: the Unnamed of Manzoni. The Unnamed, during the terrible night in which Don Rodrigo brought him to Lucia and he encountered her gaze, is tormented; he cannot sleep and in the morning, early on the road, he hears a clamor and goes to meet Cardinal Federigo, who is the reason why these people are celebrating. The Unnamed finds himself attracted by the Cardinal and when he comes into his presence, he finds himself totally embraced. In this embrace, won over by a total love, unmerited, "his eyes, which had never shed a tear since childhood, began to swell up; and when the Cardinal's speech was over, »

» he covered his face with his hands, and broke into a passionate weeping.”² And Manzoni tells us that in that moment, he knows himself (!) because the promise of communion with God in this companionship is to know oneself. At the end of this moving encounter, Manzoni continues, “So the Cardinal moved closer to the nobleman, and spoke to him with that air [... of] old and intimate friendship. ‘You must not think,’ he said, ‘that I shall be satisfied with this single visit of yours today. You will come back, won’t you?’” and the Unnamed says, “Do you need to ask if I will come back? If you turn me from your door, I shall wait outside as obstinately as any beggar. I need to talk to you! I need to hear your voice and see your face! I need you (the companionship).”³ We are beggars of this companionship, of this communion because He is a beggar, through this companionship, of my heart. I hope that was clear.

Barberis. Many of you all have testified to the fact that the relationship between encounter and the experience of freedom described by Fr. Fabio (freedom from our images of God, freedom from needing to perform etc.) is not mechanical or automatic.

Intervention. Often, I live as a slave to things, thinking that my life is a performance or all about what I am capable of reaching, while there are certain moments in which I have experienced being loved. I desire to be able to live this love in all of my life, even in daily situations. However, how is this possible?

Seve. Thank you. I’ll begin, then after Fr. Fabio will say something.

Don Fabio. Go ahead!

Seve. You say, “Slave of things, slave to the results, slave to the performance, slave to the image that I have of myself or of the image that others have of me.” I could be here in this precise instant with the same concern on my own performance: you have no idea how nervous I am, by the way! But worrying about doing things well, about being able to “succeed,” that is, being able to put love into what we do, or even being “worried about the result” is not completely wrong because it is a sign that we “care” about what we are doing. We desire that, when we study, a good result will arrive, because we love what we are doing, and this is right and just. But we feel a great fear rise up in us, which is the fear of failure. Sometimes, the result is less than what we would have hoped to obtain. Certainly, at times, we fail (at times truly one gets less than they thought they would), but the true fear comes because we conflate, at times, our failure with our being a failure, and this is a lie, this is the lie! We are not our failures, we care about living and living well, and if we happen to fail, we must keep in mind that we are not our failures. We would reduce ourselves, we perform a total reduction of ourselves, because we are not our failures. It is for this reason that we are slaves of our performance. We think that success or, worse, failure are the definition of ourselves. It is not true! We are more than any failure.

In the ten years I lived in Africa, I heard Rose repeat to me not once, not twice, but thousands of times, “You have infinite value!” and in these two and a half days, I have been looked at in the exact same way: according to the value, the infinite value that I am. I remember (sorry, I’ll take just a minute to use a real example) that in 2012, when I was in Africa, I met Italians, expatriates; we went to get a beer together and they told me, “You know, Seve, here in Africa, there are two types of expatriates (that is, two types that come here): the first »

² A. Manzoni, *The Betrothed*, Penguin Books, New York 1972, p. 417, trans. Bruce Penman.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 422.

» are the enthusiasts, with a bunch of ideas, a bunch of ideas of how to save Africa; and then, there are the cynics and the skeptics, who are the enthusiasts after a year because they have seen that all of their ideas and their objectives have come to nothing!". By Grace, it did not take me a year to pass from enthusiasm to skepticism; it took me three months because all of the goals that I had set—all of them!—were not met and I began to say, "Dang, I am inadequate, I am incapable. How will I make it?!". I was totally a slave to my own performance. Then, because each of us has a bit of self-respect, I began to say, "Hmm, maybe it's not I who is inadequate. Perhaps it's the others who are not understanding, perhaps it's the others who are inept" because, sooner or later, we blame others. I began in this way to become angrier with myself and with others, so much so that—I swear—after three months, I packed my bags, went to Rose and told her, "Rose, Africa is amazing, truly, but it is not for me. I've made a mistake." Rose looked me in the eyes and said to me, "Seve, many people have come to Africa before you and many will come after you, but what I desire, what all desire is your 'yes,' is your 'yes' before God who is making your heart in this moment. Not everything you think you are or are able to do. This is the greatest contribution that you can give to the world, to your brothers and your sisters: your 'yes.' But your 'yes' to what? To the face that the good Lord is not only giving you, but choosing, on purpose, for you, to love you." In failure, then, our infinite value is not compromised, because we are this 'yes,' or rather, what's more, when we obtain a bad result, it gives us a great occasion that can become articulated in a question: "But if I am not my performance, then what am I?". The question of Fr. Fabio yesterday: "Who am I?". And it is there that begins the great adventure of the discovery of the true content of ourselves. When Rose told me, "I need your 'yes'," what began was the great adventure of discovering the true content of myself, the true content of my being that is a relationship with its Meaning. It is interesting to note how even with all of our efforts, we have trouble liberating ourselves from our measures, from our failures, etc. We must be able to enter into a new gaze, we must be able to encounter, recognize, and desire, to be available and to put ourselves on the path of following that Gaze that entered into our life and give Him credit, and give credit. And then "I desire to be able to live this love in all of my life even in daily situations" is not an illusion; it's crazy, it's impossible to get rid of this desire from your heart once you have encountered it, and this desire becomes a question to a You, to that neighbor who shows, who indicates an Objective Point that is outside of you to whom you can say yes. Something objective, something that is outside of you, corresponds to your objective heart and this frees us. I've outlined it this way. Fr. Fabio.

Don Fabio. I'll go back to this in the synthesis.

Barberis. I'll permit myself to say a brief word about this because while Seve was talking, something that we recited yesterday during the Way of the Cross came to mind, that marvelous prayer of Grandmaison: "Give me a sweet and humble heart / that loves without asking to be loved in return, / happy to lose itself in the heart of others, / sacrificing itself in front of your Divine Son; / a great and unconquerable heart / which no ingratitude can close and no indifference can tire."⁴ I think that to not be slaves or to not be determined by our capabilities, what we need—as Davide said at the beginning—is faith, that is, the experience of someone who loves you as you are, freely, because you are good just as you are. The other week when I was in Nisida with friends from Naples, I was struck by a young man who was telling his friends that many horrible things had happened to him in his life, and then he stopped and said, "But something great has happened to me, he is sitting right next to me (his teacher). From the time I met him, I am determined by the gaze that he has on my life." »

⁴ L. de Grandmaison, *Prayer for the Heart of a Child*, in *Book of Hours*, Nuovo Mondo, Milan 2009, p. 13.

» Last theme: preference and mission. The last questions will lead us into Fr. Fabio's synthesis.

Intervention. After these days, a question arose within me; seeing all these persons and the strange familiarity between different communities who began to have a relationship, I began to think that this kind of familiarity outside is unthinkable: at school assemblies, with teachers, and at the bar. But why, among seven billion people, was I chosen? I do not know how to do anything, I do not know how to speak well. What do I have that the others do not have? Why in the world are some chosen rather than others? Thanks.

Intervention. In these past few days, I have heard many things which I perceive to be ultimately beautiful. I recognize the truth and I have even more hunger now to live it out. I would like help because I realize that often, all of these great and reasonable things do not transform into a taste for living and—in the final analysis—do not free me.

Seve. Thank you.

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» Synthesis by Fabio Colombo

Now then, to introduce us to the synthesis that began with the two questions that emerged, together with the choir, we decided to propose the song, *Vuestra soy*. It is a song written by St. Teresa of Avila and it describes the availability of one's heart to respond to the call of God. While we listen to it in all its beauty, let's follow and read the translation.

*Vuestra soy
Hoy arriesgarè
Leaning on the everlasting arms*

Thank you! All three of these songs get at the essence of this attempt to arrive at a synthesis of this morning: "My new law is the story that has been given to me to follow, great is His mercy even if I did not deserve it" (*Hoy arriesgarè*), this frees us from all of our problems or anxiety or anguish about our own worth... have any of us perhaps needed to "earn" the fact that Jesus died on the cross, have we done anything? Have any of us "earned" being here today in this sea of beauty and reasonableness? Have any of us "earned" meeting this Face in this companionship, listening to Davide the first evening, or listening to my introduction, or hearing the responses of Seve or participating in the Way of the Cross, who can "flaunt their earnings," who can flaunt something? The gratuitous love of Christ precedes us and, as we were saying yesterday in the last meditation of the Way of the Cross: when Jesus has his arms extended on the cross, behind Him—like in the song we just heard—there is One (the Father) who supports Him; there is One who is with you, behind you, and who sustains you, carries you, on the path. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is this hand reaching out; it is the modality with which God stretches out his hand even when we fall. We are loved even when we fall and, therefore, what objection could we possibly have before so great a Love? What problem would we dare to raise before a Love that is so powerful that even a fall (which hurts us, falling hurts us!) is not the final word, because there is Someone who offers his hand to us again and pulls you up, saying to you, "I absolve you from your sins!". Evil, our mistakes, are "crushed" and he who fell, instead, is raised up and therefore we are no longer slaves, conditioned by our sin, caged in by it.⁵ There is a "measure," a Love that is "without measure, incommensurable," that is called Mercy, that continues, again and again, to rouse us, to wake us up, to recall us; what do I need to fear if there is this eternal Mercy that sustains us even through the faces of this companionship that begins from the "womb" »

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1468: "The whole power of the sacrament of Penance consists in restoring us to God's grace and joining us with him in an intimate friendship. *Reconciliation with God* is thus the purpose and effect of this sacrament. For those who receive the sacrament of Penance with contrite heart and religious disposition, reconciliation 'is usually followed by peace and serenity of conscience with strong spiritual consolation.' Indeed the sacrament of Reconciliation with God brings about a true 'spiritual resurrection,' restoration of the dignity and blessings of the life of the children of God, of which the most precious is friendship with God." N. 1469: "This sacrament reconciles us with the Church. Sin damages or even breaks fraternal communion. The sacrament of Penance repairs or restores it. In this sense it does not simply heal the one restored to ecclesial communion, but has also a revitalizing effect on the life of the Church which suffered from the sin of one of her members. Re-established or strengthened in the communion of saints, the sinner is made stronger by the exchange of spiritual goods among all the living members of the Body of Christ, whether still on pilgrimage or already in the heavenly homeland." N. 1470: "In this sacrament, the sinner, placing himself before the merciful judgment of God, *anticipates* in a certain way the *judgment* to which he will be subjected at the end of his earthly life. For it is now, in this life, that we are offered the choice between life and death, and it is only by the road of conversion that we can enter the Kingdom, from which one is excluded by grave sin. In converting to Christ through penance and faith, the sinner passes from death to life and 'does not come into judgment' (Jn 5:24)."

» of the Trinity, that walks in history and that leads me back to His same womb, my origin, my history, and my fulfillment?

“What was from the beginning [this is St. John the Apostle who is writing to his future friends, so that even those who arrive in 2023 could remain in communion with the original Event that remains in history], what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life—for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us—what we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We are writing this so that our joy may be complete.”⁶

I believe that the First Letter of St. John the Apostle contains an adequate synthesis of these days we have spent together and can also show us the next step we must take, as soon as we leave here: all that I saw from Thursday evening, all that I began to see on the Winter Vacation in January, 2023, all that I began to see in the GS Equipe of September, 2022, all that I began to see in the last Meeting: “we proclaim it to you”! Certainly, we do not need to understand all of the day of April 8, 2023; it is, as we’ve said, “a story that continues” and, little by little, God who is Father educates each one of his own children: something will come to your mind during a Vacation, another will be gained at the World Youth Day with the Pope in Lisbon this summer, another will happen when you begin CLU at the University, another when you get married, another when you go on mission in Brazil. You need time for the Temple to grow: it is not as though the Church is made out of one brick and then it’s done! One brick at a time, then another, then another, and then the problem arises: how do you make the cupola? And so, it will be necessary to stop a moment and reflect and ask yourself: how do you make a cupola? What does it mean to get married, what does it mean to serve God in the priesthood? Little by little, in time, these questions will be faced, remaining faithful to this companionship! In time, but not by being plant-like, like vegetables—like these plants that are here in the Great Hall, who cannot understand what I am saying—, but a time inhabited by what?

By the *question*, as Seve was saying earlier, a time inhabited by *prayer*!

Fr. Giussani described prayer in a way that was a bit different from how we usually think about it. He defines it in a more aggressive way, saying, “Asking for being.” “As freedom, the nature of the participated being expresses itself [...] as *prayer*. If freedom is acknowledgement of Being as Mystery, the relationship between the participated being and God is only prayer.” And “Prayer is entreaty, entreaty to be. God wants there to be someone who asks to be.”⁷ And those who think that it is a mere mechanical repetition of formulas messes up big time, because Fr. Giussani defines prayer as “the outpost of the men who go into battle,”⁸ in the battle that is life, of life—as we remembered: “*Militia est vita hominis super terram!*”⁹—in the battle for happiness, in the battle that is school, you can be there with the certainty that Another has already won, that Jesus has already defeated sin and death, that He is with you, and therefore our freedom is not eliminated, but is called into account to make ones own and experience for itself that victory, asking and praying like Seve, to respond with one’s own “yes”: I am in Africa and I pack my bags and turn back or I begin to “wage war,” to respond with my “yes”: “Lord, You give me the strength, what do you ask of me, how »

⁶ 1Jn 1:1-4.

⁷ L. Giussani, *To Give One’s Life for the Work of Another*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal & Kingston 2022, p. 12.

⁸ L. Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà [An Event of Freedom]*, Marietti 1820, 2002, p. 11, our translation.

⁹ *Nova vulgata*, Iob 7,1.

» can I respond, give me faces with whom to walk, Sacraments on which to lean, a heart and reason to judge!". I ask Him for the strength to remain in the circumstance in which I find myself and to face "the battle," to remain in Africa, to allow me to discover what there is to discover: "How can I serve You? Help me to see and to accept the steps," like we just listened to in the song *Vuestra Soy*: "*Que mandais hacer de mi?*" (What do you want to do with me?). Prayer is the "awareness of the Ideal and the entreaty for the Ideal to become realized in ourselves."¹⁰ Think that in 2001, at age 75, Fr. Giussani had the following to say about himself after—I'm saying this poorly, excuse me—"he had set in motion all that he had set in motion," which was the Holy Spirit through Fr. Giussani. Listen to what position of heart he lived and indicated to us, "I say what life has taught me. A great soul is needed, a great heart, the heart of a child, because the Lord has said in the Gospel, not 'if you are not scholars, like many scholars, scientists, like many scientists, clever, like many clever people...'", we could say that he does not "expect a performance" from us, an academic level to reach, a *master* but says, "'If you are not like children, you will never enter in.' [...] I urge myself, I have always urged myself every morning of my life to pray to God, in other words to be a child, because being a child means feeling this totality of grasp, this possession which Another has of us. An Other: the Mystery. The expression of this Mystery in us is entreaty, it is prayer, i.e., the entreaty of prayer, prayer as entreaty, as begging—man begging for Christ, just as Christ begs for man. [...] Let us live prayer as the first outpost, the farthest outpost of the battle in our lives."¹¹ Not too much time has passed since you all were children and I'm certain that you remember that all of the strength of a baby is not in itself; the horizon of the life of the child is characterized by the certainty of the presence of the father and the mother!!! How could he have it in himself!? His strength is not in himself! He has legs that tremble, how could he?! But it is in the certainty of the gaze of the father and the mother, one "pushes" him, "launches" him to take his first steps and the other is there waiting for him to arrive. The baby walks because he fixes his gaze, behind him he has the arms of the father and so, timidly, awkwardly, just as he is able, begins to walk and to take some steps; this is the law of all of life, even at 75 years old: I ask to be like a child, completely reliant on His presence in this ecclesial companionship, completely reliant on the force of the Sacraments! Completely reliant in my steps on the solidity of the Rock that is Christ, as we were saying: the rain can come, the wind, but I remain firmly on the rock, He guarantees the solidity of my path. He is the "rock who acts as the rock," my "problem," if there is one, will be to remain above and to not build on sand, but you think about remaining attached, on the rock; in fact, Jesus says: remain in My love!¹² Have you seen something beautiful and useful for your life in this companionship, in these days? Remain! There is another way to say this: how does everything continue after the Triduum retreat, once you are home? Remain. Remain in this companionship with this question, remaining firmly in the two banks, as Seve was saying: guided company and prayer (sacraments). Remain. I think that in a synthetic way, this whole dynamic can be summed up with one word, which is the word *vocation*.

Vocation! Our life is vocation. It is vocation from the first instant in which your conception came about: none of us had a "preliminary call": "Say, what do you want to do? Do you want to be born on the 15th of October, 1922? (birthday of Fr. Giussani!)." Each of us has been called into being; through the tangible love of our parents, a greater Love has called us into this world and then we were immersed in a great stream, a great river of the baptized, »

¹⁰ L. Giussani, *L'uomo e il suo destino* [Man and his destiny], Marietti 1820, Genova 1999, p. 100, our translation.

¹¹ L. Giussani, "Prayer: The outpost of our embattled humanity," *Litterae Communiois-Traces*, 10/2002.

¹² Cf. Jn 15:9.

» through Baptism He has chosen us, called us, called us by name.¹³ And so, the secret of life is that it is vocation, it is a continual response to One who calls me... but, then, how does He call me? How is He calling me? We must always think about the Virgin Mary to whom Jesus turned for His daily needs and that Her response was always: "May it be done to me according to your word,"¹⁴ that is, I am willing to live out my relationship with You, and whatever happens, I trust in You. And when Jesus was born, they spoke like a mother and child, and then like a mother and young boy, and then like a mother and grown man: Jesus, what are you doing today? What are your plans? And Jesus easily would have responded like you do to a mother, "Today I'm going out with Peter; we are going away for a few days. Today, I'm going to see Lazarus, Martha, and Mary at Bethany; today, I'm going on the Sea of Galilee" and so Mary would have responded, "Be careful, do You need anything, can I get anything for You, what do You need?"; that is, Mary responded to the relationship with Jesus in what she was called to do, just like us. I, we, we are called to live different circumstances like family, school, soccer, music, traffic on the highway, the Mass, Christmas dinner and Easter lunch, friendships, but within those circumstances, I live my relationship with God, within the relationship with reality, I respond to the Reality that is God; now, you are asking me to study, great: "Be it done unto me according to Your word." How much more beautiful is it to throw yourself in, to enter into a circumstance responding to Another, studying not because "I absolutely need to get an A" or "because otherwise I can't go out" or "because otherwise I can't get a moped," or "because otherwise what will I be worth in the eyes of the others?", but because I desire to grow, because it is a love for myself, because I respond to Another and, responding to Him, I enjoy what I am called to do... with how much love must have the Virgin Mary prepared the "sandwiches" for Jesus and St. Peter, with how much care and dedication... I can put the very same effort into my studying, or into living friendships or into loving! "Lord, I respond to You, in this hour in which I study Greek, or mechanics, or health sciences, or while I organize a singing night for my friends in GS." This is life as vocation—responding, and while responding being a sign of His presence in the world—this is our vocation: each one of us called to sanctity. Then, certainly, each person living, in prayer and in conversation with wise adults, will discover his or her own particular modality with which to serve the good Lord, in which to cooperate with Him in this *story that continues*, who knows how I will be an instrument so that others encounter what I have encountered, raising a family, or embracing the path of *Memores Domini*, or that of priesthood, missionary or diocesan, of religious life; in the tree of our history there have been so many flowers and fruits that have blossomed! Who knows where you will be in 10 years!?

And here I'll open a parenthesis: the question of the "preference," if not faced according to its nature and as Giussani truly spoke about it, can become something pathological, causing us great confusion, and can even become a pretense that can destroy us! Preference is not what we usually think it is, but is the way God loves, each of His Children personally, the way God loves you is preferring you, *sic Deus dilexit mundum*¹⁵, I cherish, I favor, I love, I prefer. Every love is an election, a choice, but each one of us is! He preferred Peter. He preferred John. He preferred Zacchaeus. He preferred Bartimaeus. Each one of us is loved in a particular way: with St. John, it was a certain way, with me it will be another! But loving each one, that is, preferring each one of us involves each one of us in a mission and therefore, the preference is never exclusive, but, rather, embraces whoever! It is not "I need »

¹³ Jn 15:16-17: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you. This I command you: love one another."

¹⁴ Lk 1:38.

¹⁵ *Nova Vulgata*, Io 3,16.

» such and such a person to be looking at me 24/7, if not, it means I am not preferred and nobody cares about me!" It is not: "Whatever, I am preferred and you figure it out," but each is chosen by God and loved by God to announce, to involve others, He called me, preferred me, to call someone else! So that I might love another as He has loved me, and the more that a preference emerges in friendship, the more that friendship is wide open, the more within that relationship thousands of persons are embraced; in fact, in friendship, in the embrace of Jesus and the apostles... we are there too!¹⁶ Jerusalem for all people!¹⁷ He did not say: great, let's make a *private club* with the 12... the others can do as they want! No, from those 12, came another 12 and so on... up to us! It is a friendship that has as its method that of the love of preference... if there is not a greater breath, even preference dies, because it suffocates, it lacks air! The bottle, filled with a bunch of water or good wine, overflows and satisfies whoever is thirsty or wants to taste some good wine; do you see that the calling of each person is for everyone!? And each person is loved by God personally, not as an indistinct mass. The water overflows and fills another bottle that, in turn, overflows and then fills another life and then another! We are the pipe, the channel, within which the Grace of Christ acts, like in the system in which water can flow and quench thirst, and we pray not to clog it up!

Small and great choices await you, but I ask you, that the most present prayer, the most repeated and renewed every holy morning be that of "Be it done unto me according to Your word," be the entreaty for an availability to collaborate with His calling, according to the signs, the events that the good Lord does not leave us without along the way. Listen to how the Pope described the discovery of his vocation, "A strange thing happened during that confession, which changed my life: it was the surprise, the wonder of an encounter, in which I realized that He was already waiting for me. This is the religious experience: the wonder of encountering someone who is already waiting for you. From that moment on, God is He who anticipates you. You are searching for Him, but it is He who finds you first. [...] I have always been struck by a reading in the Breviary in which it says that Jesus looked at Matthew with a gaze that could be defined as 'mercy and election.' It was exactly in this manner that I recognized that I was looked at by God in that confession. And this is the way in which He asks me to look at the other: 'Look, I call you by name, you have been chosen and the only thing that is asked of you is to allow yourself to be loved.' This was the proposal that was made to me."¹⁸

I want to read you a letter that "completes" the one we heard yesterday and that expresses well this dynamic I have just described of a gift given that is for all. Listen to what was generated in what seemed like only a situation of death (as I was saying, "free from death")... The daughter of that mother about whom we heard yesterday simply invited her classmates to the funeral of her mother and do you know what happened to a girl who participated, what they saw? Reason is the same for everyone and stays before the facts, if it does not censure them, interrogating itself and drawing conclusions. This schoolmate saw her friend in the days before the funeral, then she saw her on that same day, she did not know the mother »

¹⁶ Acts 10:34-35: "Then Peter proceeded to speak and said, 'In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him.'"

¹⁷ Tobit 13:8, 10-11: "Let all men speak of his majesty, and sing his praises in Jerusalem [...] May he gladden within you all who were captives; all who were ravaged may he cherish within you for all generations to come. A bright light will shine to all parts of the earth; many nations shall come to you from afar, And the inhabitants of all the limits of the earth, drawn to you by the name of the Lord God, Bearing in their hands their gifts for the King of heaven. Every generation shall give joyful praise to you, and shall call you the chosen one, through all ages forever."

¹⁸ Cf. J.M. Bergoglio, *Papa Francesco. Il nuovo papa si racconta. Conversazioni con Francesca Ambrogetti e Sergio Rubin* [Pope Francis. The new pope tells his story. Conversations with Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin], Salani Editore, Florence 2013, our translation.

» directly (even this is an interesting aspect: an indirect way of knowing), and so Federica writes this, "I will always carry in my heart the funeral of Caterina because it rocked me like a hurricane [but that morning, as soon as she woke up, how could this girl know what would happen, what she would learn? She herself could not "procure" an outcome, she must have had the preoccupation of responding to an invitation, to ask for a heart available to learn even in such a painful circumstance, like that of a child, as they were saying before] and it revealed even more the presence of Christ victor in my life [she did not see God in the highest Heavens, but she saw Him as victor in the persons who were at a funeral... how can it be more concrete than this, more material than this, more within history than this?!!]. That funeral was for me a moment of maximum light. That brilliant light did not come from me, but from Martina who was shining with the face of Christ." I do not believe that she had visions, hallucinations in which she thought that she was seeing the face of Christ before her, but evidently her classmate, through the face of her friend, saw the light come shining from another Face, like the moon with the sun: the moon does not emit its own light, but is limited to reflecting the light of the sun, the moon absorbs and receives all of its own light from the sun and, therefore, whoever sees the moon is certain that that light comes from Another.

This classmate realized that her friend, even in pain, was beholding the Face of God, of Another! But how? She was sad for the distance from the maternal presence, and yet, she was an instrument of this for another person! We polarize everything, please pay attention to the way you do this (if it's faith, it's not reason, or vice versa), if there is pain, then there is no joy, instead, no, it is all together, the polarization never helps. In fact, even in the pain, a Face appears on the face of the friend. Remember: even a true element, if we absolutize it, gets us off the path! And then, in truth, the image of the moon is not enough, because it remains still something exterior, external, like a sun tan; instead, Christ is *in* us, He is a light *in* us: the Holy Spirit enters into us and illuminates us from within, one's face comes alive, becomes luminous, *from within!* Let's think about a bedside lamp. An inner bulb, with a lampshade around it! In this way, our eyes, our faces become luminous, resplendent, but from within! We are the temple of the Holy Spirit! In fact, Fr. Giussani loved to say, "They will recognize Me from the gladness in your faces!"¹⁹ From your joyful faces, this is the greatest form of testimony, whether in pain, in joy, I am glad!

St. Paul said, "I am overflowing with joy all the more because of all our affliction."²⁰ How can one be glad in the midst of suffering? The letter continues, "Seeing her so strong in Christ [as I was saying, it was not her capacity, but that she was placed on the Rock!], gave me great strength and fullness. I, so small in front of this great immensity that is God, I've understood that my smallness makes sense because I am loved and because I love. Therefore, I am saved!". Federica never had the pleasure of knowing Caterina, but on the day of her funeral, she understood that even a person no longer present could be known through the testimony of others, and it is profoundly reasonable! I cite, "Caterina loved her family, her friends and this love was what I felt around me seeing the church full of people who were there to accompany her to the nuptial banquet with the Father. When I went to embrace her, it was Martina who consoled me with these words, 'Christ conquers, what great glory He has shown to us today!'. And that's really true." Christ conquers and saves us. The funeral became for her an occasion, an encounter with Him. "I am grateful to Caterina because she moved something within me that is difficult to explain, but that overwhelms me with great strength and power. I truly hope to give what I have experienced to others as she did in life and as she continues to do from above."²¹ »

¹⁹ Cf. L. Giussani, *To Give One's Life for the Work of Another*, op. cit., p. 128.

²⁰ 2Cor 7:4.

²¹ *Il dolore abbracciato* [An embraced pain], signed letter, *Tracce*, n. 5/2023, p. 5.

» Before ending with a final letter, one last step: because once Christ is crucified and placed in the tomb, there is someone, a power, that would like to impede his resurrection!

This then is the *nota bene* before the end: we are allowed to realize that the playing field of history is not neutral, it is not just myself and God; there also is an Adversary, an Enemy, the current power that also has as its active accomplice, the World—in the Johannine sense—that is everything that is opposed to light, truth, life, resurrection and to those who belong to the People, to the Body of the Risen One, who would like that we become separated, διάβολος, that we become divided, “The next day, the one following the day of preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said [listen to how they conspire, how they attempt to quiet what, instead, they ought to have been amazed by! You must come to grips with this action of the power of darkness that insinuates that the truth does not exist: ‘But why are you speaking about the truth? At most, one can express mere opinions, but truth does not exist, it is only the invention of the Church!’, ‘Sir, we remember that this impostor while still alive said, ‘After three days I will be raised up.’ Give orders, then, that the grave be secured until the third day, lest his disciples come and steal him and say to the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead.’ This last imposture would be worse than the first.’ Pilate said to them, ‘The guard is yours; go secure it as best you can.’ [Pilate, in a political mode, had already washed his hands over the truth of the matter, saying: ‘You all can choose if you want Jesus or Barabbas, I don’t care, as long as there is not tumult and violence... it’ll take away my government position!’; and now he continues in the same vein, playing the game of the “buck-passer”: ‘You all have your guards of the Temple, fine, so use them and put them in front of the tomb!’. So they went and secured the tomb by fixing a seal to the stone and setting the guard [that is, they sealed everything with silicone, which would make it quite difficult for him to really rise again!].”²²

But how can you stop the truth from exploding and from going around on all of the roads of the world?!? Today, this power still exists and therefore we must be shrewd and know that this *life as vocation* must come to terms also with this aspect of existence! There are many ways in which the truth becomes sealed... Today, while we are here in Rimini peacefully reunited in this space, a panoramic view of the world tells us of the members of the same body who live in Nicaragua and who are persecuted. Listen to what is happening while we are here among the “violins and the grill-outs”, “‘Nicaragua, a persecuted Church’: how is it possible? Someone must document this tragedy. The dictatorship began 2023 in a very aggressive way, banning all activities of public piety, processions, rosaries, that are always held around this time. Before, there were ‘only’ the profanations, the theft, the ‘graffiti’ on parishes and churches, with hate messages like ‘terrorist-priest,’ ‘rapist-priest,’ ‘we will kill you,’ etc. I was able to identify 13 priests who were threatened with firearms aimed at the temple by the National Police, by paramilitary units and by the CPC, guerrilla groups who have the authority to do absolutely anything and enjoy impunity because they are protected by the regime. The year with the highest number of attacks was 2022, which ended with 140 aggressions against the Church. In 2018, there were 81, in 2019, 76, in 2020, 58, and in 2021, 54. Therefore, the past year was the most nefarious year against the Church. And 2023 risks being even worse. Today, Nicaraguans, including the Catholic Church, are tied hand and foot, because the State, which should be the guarantor, the protector of our human rights, is the one who is violating them. A Nicaraguan bishop, Rolando José Álvarez Lagos, opponent of the government of President Daniel Ortega, was condemned to 26 years and 4 months of jail, deprived of his nationality and of his rights as citizen which were suspended for life.”²³ And so, we must keep in mind that our vocation and our testimony pass through martyrdom, if »

²² Mt 27:62-66.

²³ P. Manzo, *La donna che ha rotto il silenzio sulle persecuzioni dei cristiani in Nicaragua* [The woman who broke the silence on the persecution of Christians in Nicaragua], *Tempi*, January 16, 2023.

» not that of red blood, at least the white kind. St. Peter was crucified head-down, St. Paul had his head cut off.

How to describe three-dimensionally all that we have said up to this point, that life is vocation, that the relationship with God is lived in each circumstance, that our life is called for a mission, that we live for the Truth and that there are persons or structures of multiple persons that oppose this?

What follows is the testimony of Shahbaz Bhatti, the Pakistani minister for Religious Minorities killed on March 2, 2011 by a commando who that day, while Bhatti was going to work, stopped his car and filled it with bullets. They “punished” him because he was seeking to change the Law on blasphemy that in 25 years of application had cost the lives of hundreds of Christians and, at that time, had led to the long imprisonment of a Christian mother, Asia Bibi. Let’s listen to the spiritual testament of this man (he had already received different death threats, and he found himself in the same situation as Seve, he could have said, “I’ll pack my bags, step down and go to live in a more peaceful country, instead...”):

“My name is Shahbaz Bhatti. I was born into a Catholic family. My father, a retired teacher, and my mother, a housewife, raised me according to Christian values and the teachings of the Bible, which influenced my childhood [up to this point, it could be any one of us being described!].

“Since I was a child, I was accustomed to going to church and finding profound inspiration in the teachings [because faith needs not only testimony, but also teachings; in fact, Jesus “did and taught” life and doctrine, truth and charity, both, because the one does not stand without the other. Never polarize!], the sacrifice, and the crucifixion of Jesus. It was his love that led me to offer my service to the Church. The frightening conditions into which the Christians of Pakistan had fallen upset me. I remember one Good Friday [Look at what can emerge from a simple Good Friday, just the kind we experienced yesterday!] when I was just thirteen years old [Now, let’s not slip immediately into the measure of a performance, ‘Look, this guy at 13 already understood these things and I do not’... Instead, let’s remind each other to ask for the simplicity of children, ‘What can I learn from him? What can I ask from God for my conversion?’]: I heard a homily on the sacrifice of Jesus for our redemption and for the salvation of the world [ABCs of Christianity: Jesus, God, died on the cross for you! He allowed Himself to be struck, he was not impervious to reality, he did not turn the sound off!]. And I thought of responding [this is life as vocation!] to his love by giving love to my brothers and sisters, placing myself at the service of Christians, especially of the poor, the needy, and the persecuted who live in this Islamic country [see that there is no contradiction between preference and mission: I discovered something and I put it at the service of others! I am an instrument of election for another, for others!].

“I have been offered high government positions and I have been asked to put an end to my battle [*militia est vita hominis*... but let it go, stay at home, do not get too wrapped up in it... the temptation could come to say “think only about hanging out and Play Station, fill up on television series and *let your worries go*”], but I have always refused, even at the risk of my own life. My response has always been the same, ‘No, I want to serve Jesus as a common man’ [he was not thinking about his performance, his career as a minister, his work career, but said: I want to be a common man, serving Jesus... then, if I’m the Minister, I’ll serve Him as Minister, if I open a restaurant, by opening a restaurant, if by making bread, then by making bread well! Serving Jesus in what you do].

“That devotion makes me happy. I do not want popularity, I do not want positions of power. I only want a place at the feet of the cross of Jesus. I want my life, my character, my actions to speak of me and say that I am following Jesus Christ [life and faith are not two parallel lines that never intersect, but, rather, the contrary: they coincide so that my life is an announcement of Christ!]. This desire is so strong in me that I consider myself privileged »

» whenever—in my combative effort to help the needy, the poor, the persecuted Christians of Pakistan—Jesus should wish to accept the sacrifice of my life. I want to live for Christ and it is for Him that I want to die [like the testimony of the mother from yesterday, do you remember? Whether I live, or whether I die, I am Yours!]. I do not feel any fear in this country. Many times the extremists have wanted to kill me, imprison me; they have threatened me, persecuted me, and terrorized my family. I say that, as long as I am alive, until the last breath, I will continue to serve Jesus and this poor, suffering humanity, the Christians, the needy, the poor. I want to tell you that I find much inspiration in the Holy Bible and in the life of Jesus Christ. The more I read the New and the Old Testament, the verses of the Bible and the word of the Lord, the more they bolster my strength and my determination. When I reflect on the fact that Jesus Christ sacrificed everything, that God sent His own Son for our redemption and our salvation, I ask myself how I can follow the path of Calvary. Our Lord said, ‘Come, take up your cross and follow Me’ [remember the ‘come and see’ from yesterday? You live the life that you need to live, with its crosses, but what keeps you upright is the relationship with Me]. The verses of the Bible that I love the most read, ‘I was hungry and you fed me, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you took me in, naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, imprisoned and you came to see me.’ And so, when I see people who are poor and needy, I think that below their features, it is Jesus coming to meet me. For this reason, I seek always to be of help, together with my colleagues, to bring assistance to the needy, the hungry, the thirsty. I believe that the needy, the poor, the orphans, whatever their religion, must be considered above all as human beings. I think that these persons are part of my body in Christ [after, we will say bye to one another before leaving, and some will return to Milan and others to Sicily, but how different is it to say goodbye while recognizing that the other is part of the same ecclesial Body, part of me, part of my life], that they are the persecuted and needy part of the body of Christ. If we bring this mission to its conclusion, then we will have won a place at the feet of Jesus, and I will be able to look at Him without feeling shame.”²⁴

And so I’ll conclude, with Pope Francis, who speaks to us in a penetrating way:

“Dear young people, we didn’t come into this work to “vegetate”, to take it easy, to make our lives a comfortable sofa to fall asleep on. No, we came for another reason: to leave a mark. It is very sad to pass through life without leaving a mark [in fact, our journal is called *Traces*, leaving a Trace]! But when we opt for ease and convenience, for confusing happiness with consumption, then we end up paying a high price indeed: we lose our freedom. We are not free to leave a mark. We lose our freedom. This is the high price we pay. There are so many people [the powers we mentioned earlier, which acts even in us: we seal up this retreat in the tomb of memories, we file it in the filing cabinet of remembrances, we do not let it explode our life!] who do not want the young to be free; there are so many people who do not wish you well, who want you to be drowsy and dull, and never free! No, this must not be so! We must defend our freedom! This is itself a great form of paralysis, whenever we start thinking that happiness is the same as comfort and convenience, that being happy means going through life asleep or on tranquilizers [perhaps some among us have already passed through the darkness of drugs and weed to anesthetize themselves from reality, not finding that the key to our problems is life, there they fell, getting even more mixed up!], that the only way to be happy is to live in a haze in the club, drinking and taking drugs. Certainly, drugs are bad, but there are plenty of other socially acceptable drugs that can end up enslaving us just the same. One way or the other, they rob us of our greatest treasure: our freedom. They strip us of our freedom.”²⁵ »

²⁴ *A Lesson of Holiness from Remote Pakistan*, “Tempi”, January, 2, 2012.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Address during the Prayer Vigil with Young People at World Youth Day*, Krakow, July 30, 2016.

» As he said to us on the 15th of last October in St. Peter's Square, "Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts."²⁶ This people that surrounds you, this companionship has one task: to sustain you in your vocation, to sustain you in your prayer, to sustain you in your judgment, to sustain you in your testimony! And so, at this point, I ask you to grab your Booklet and turn to page 82 so we can recite together this prayer of Blessed Newman that can become the content of our prayers not just for the next three days, but for the next 80 years! Let's pray together:

"Dear Jesus, help us to spread your fragrance everywhere we go. Flood our souls with your spirit and life. Penetrate and possess our whole being, so utterly, that our lives may only be a radiance of yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that every soul we come in contact with may feel your presence in our soul. Let them look up and see no longer us but only Jesus! Stay with us, and then we shall begin to shine as you shine; so to shine as to be a light to others. The light, O Jesus, will be all from you. None of it will be ours; it will be you shining on others through us. Let us thus praise you in the way that you love best by shining on those around us. Let us preach you with preaching: not by words but by our example, by the catching force, by sympathetic influence of what we do, the evident fullness of the love our hearts bear to you. Amen."

And I'll end with the phrase of the Easter Poster of 2023: each of us, after these three days, can begin again!

"Recommencing is a word very close to the most Christian word, the ultimate Christian word, 'Resurrecting,' 'resurrection.' How many times have we been reminded that this is precisely why Easter is the main mystery, the great mystery of the Christian life! It is thanks to Him who is among us that each one of us restarts, each one of us recommences, each one of us is reborn, each one of us is resurrected." As you all know, from the day of Easter until the day of Pentecost, we do not recite the *Angelus*, but the song of joy, *Regina Coeli*, explodes, a prayer in which we turn to the Virgin Mary, saying to her to "rejoice" because Her Son is risen, He did not remain in the tomb: and so, praying, we can think to Mary, to what she lived Herself, whose face was marked and furrowed by tears seeing her Son processed, beaten, condemned and then on the cross; let's imagine Her face when she saw Him risen, now that we see Him risen.

²⁶ Pope Francis, *Address to the Members of Communion and Liberation*, Rome, October 15, 2022.