

Saturday Lesson

Music:

Franz Schubert, Sonata for Arpeggione and piano D 821 - Spirto Gentil no. 18

“Each of us was made so that what God asks of our life — life as vocation — may reach a perfection of harmony and melody. Of what can joy be born if not from this obedience? Because harmony is an obedience. Whoever recognizes what he was made for, whoever desires perfection for his life, asks for it, follows it, obeys it.”

Fr. Michele Berchi

“We experience the whole people of God better the more we are faithful to our Charism, as it were, to our personality imbued by the Spirit, to the personal makeup that God has given us, inasmuch as it is completely taken up in His eternal plan. To draw back from the “form of teaching to which we have been entrusted” is the first step toward tiredness, boredom, confusion, distraction, and even despair.”¹

I wanted to begin with this fundamental passage of the School of Community because this experience of boredom, confusion, distraction, and sometimes even despair is very familiar to us. We know how much these feelings are within easy reach and sometimes determine our entire days. That is why we are here, so that our fidelity and obedience to the charity that the Lord has shown us, and continues to show to us — by having sent us His Spirit and having given us the gift to participate in the Charism of Fr. Giussani — may be renewed, may be resurrected, in us. Yet, all we can do is to ask for what the Lord gives to us by grace and mercy. To ask is to put oneself in that position of poverty and expectancy which allows the Lord to continue His work in us. Let us begin this gesture by asking the Holy Spirit, because without this gift — which took hold of Fr. Giussani and captivated his life, and our own lives with him and through him — we can do nothing.

Songs: *Non son sincera [I am not sincere]*
Liberazione n. 2 [Liberation no. 2]

¹ *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, p.82.

Fr. Michele: Dear friends, on the one hand, I am a little sad because having these exercises online, looking at each other on a screen instead of being together, is a sacrifice that is asked of us and that everyone is making. On the other hand, if I look at the number of participants, almost 500 people, it is beautiful to think that at this time the Fraternity of Saint Joseph around the world can be part of a single gesture, united and in communion. So, if it is a sacrifice on the one hand, maybe it is also worth it. In any case, it is what we were asked to do.

I tell you with great joy that these retreats will be preached to us by a dear friend, Monsignor Giovanni Mosciatti, Bishop of Imola. Nothing should be taken for granted. I remind you that a year ago we did not have the Lent Retreat, but this year we are here together. I am saying this to express again our gratitude to the Lord for this opportunity, and my gratitude to Bishop Giovanni. Actually, our friendship was born in the seminary where we shared the same room for three or four years. I truly thank you for accepting, because currently a Bishop has much to devote himself to. The fact that you are here with us, and for us, is a great gift.

Bishop Giovanni Mosciatti: Thank you so much for asking me to be here with you, because it is an opportunity for me.

1. Conversion — continually reclaiming Faith.

Let us begin the journey of Lent. There is an invitation that comes from the heart of God, who begs us, “*Return to Me with all your heart*” (Joel 2:12).

Come back to Me. Lent is truly the journey to return to God. *Come back to Me with all your heart.* Lent is truly the path that involves our whole life, our whole selves. It is time to verify the path we are on, to find the way that brings us home, to rediscover the fundamental bond with the Lord on which everything depends. The path of Lent is an exodus, it is an exodus from slavery to freedom. Its length of forty days commemorates the forty years in which God’s people traveled in the wilderness to return to their homeland. Along the way there was always the temptation of missing the onions they had in Egypt, of going back, of attaching oneself to the memories of the past, to some idol. It is the same for us. Yet, if we look at the prodigal son, we understand that it is time for us, too, to return to the Father. Like that son, we too forgot our home,

we squandered precious goods for trivial things, and were left empty-handed and heartbroken. At this point it is the forgiveness of the Father that welcomes us.

“Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” These words, which accompany the rite of the imposition of the ashes, with which Lent begins, are a realistic reference to who we are: the ashes on our heads remind us that we are dust, and we will return to dust. As human beings, we are destined to end up in nothingness. What saves us from nothingness then? God has breathed His Spirit of life on our nothingness, on our dust. Therefore, we cannot live by chasing dust, going after things that are here today and disappear tomorrow.

The answer to *“What saves us from nothingness?”* is given to us by the other formula proposed for the rite of ashes, *“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.”* Our only real possibility is to find our consistency in Christ, to look to Him, that is, to convert.

The essential content of the entire Lenten journey, indeed of our entire life, is conversion. But what does conversion mean? To convert is to continually reclaim Faith, and Faith is to recognize a fact, the fact that happened, the great event that remains among us. Who had Faith two thousand years ago? Those, few or many, who recognized in that man the presence of Something great, supernatural.

It was something that was not visible, like His person was, but that was evidently present in Him because — as Nicodemus said to Jesus — *“No one can speak and do the things that You say and do, if God is not with Him.”* To reclaim Faith, therefore, means to continually regain the awareness and adherence to the Mystery who is among us, to the event that is in us and among us: in each of us, due to Baptism; and among us, therefore, as part of the Church of God. If this conversion truly becomes the constant aim of our lives, then we will also be much more able to be ready, available, and capable in all the commitments that history will ask of us daily. To reclaim Faith continually means to recover Faith *as intelligence* and *as obedience*. We must pay close attention to these two dimensions of Faith — intelligence and obedience.

Let us begin with the first one. Intelligence is what perceives the event that is within me, among you, among us. Faith is, in fact, a gesture of intelligence, but of an intelligence deeper and greater even than the usual

intelligence of natural reason because it penetrates to the level at which things take on their substance and meaning. Reclaiming Faith as intelligence means a continual recognition of the fact that exists among us. This new self-awareness is really another way of perceiving ourselves, it is another way of perceiving the presence of the other person, who the other is and what my relationship with him or her is. We are all one, so you are members of each other and you bear each other's burdens. What are we doing in the world until this becomes the project of every morning, the project of every day? Our position in front of the world is immediately reduced to a discourse among many, to one ideology among others, and to the nth illusion thrown in people's face.

The second word used by Fr. Giussani to indicate conversion, to continuously reclaim Faith, is "obedience." So, Faith is not only intelligence as perception of the newness that exists within us and among us, but also obedience to this perceived and acknowledged reality in us and among us, to this unity with the mystery of Christ that I am and you are, to this unity between me and you.

Now let us ask ourselves: What is the verification that Faith as intelligence — the recognition and understanding of the newness that is in us and among us — and as obedience to this acknowledged reality, to our unity in that man, Christ, are real in you and in me? How do we verify conversion, then? This verification is a new humanity, a foretaste of the final happiness. A new, different, truer, more fulfilled, more desirable humanity is the only "council" that can open a breach in our consciousness as women and men, as contemporary women and men, the only one that can be felt as a fascinating and liberating invitation. This is true for your family life, with your wife, with your husband, with your children, it is true for the relationships with the people you work with, it holds true for the relationships you have with everyone you encounter, for every event that happens in good and bad times, so that in good times we are humble and in difficult times we continue to be certain. A new humanity is a foretaste of the final happiness, and therefore another way of conceiving things, a new knowledge, a true gaze on reality. This is the reward, to which the conversion we talked about leads us.²

² L. Giussani, qtd. in J. Carrón, *The Radiance In Your Eyes*, pp. 95-100.

2. The Temptation: to change the method

Once the encounter has taken place, after experiencing a different humanity in which we have recognized the presence of Christ here and now, having begun to see its fruits in our lives, we may feel that we have arrived, and therefore, that we can stop our journey. But this is not the case: the encounter is the continuous opening of a path which we cannot stop traveling. It becomes the starting point of a journey, of a search, of a work, that is not something acquired for good, but the labor of a desire that we will not cease to learn. As soon as we stop, because we think that we possess what has been given to us, heaviness and aridity invade our days and we find ourselves with a bunch of straw in our hands. We see nothingness again infiltrating the fabric of our time. We are surprised and disappointed. Conversion is the journey, the roadway that lasts a lifetime. That is why Faith is always development, it is the maturation of the soul to the truth [to God], who is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. The encounter with Christ opens a path, that we never cease to travel.³

The evidence that conversion is a path that lasts a lifetime, and Faith is always a development, can lead us to give in, almost without realizing it, to the temptation of changing the method. In facing life, its urgencies, its personal and social challenges, we are tempted to replace the encounter with something else. The temptation is to take the event for granted, to take Faith for granted, and to focus on something else: we do not seek the fulfillment of our lives in the event that attracted us, but elsewhere. That is why in the School of Community Fr. Giussani writes, *“‘Event’ is [...] the word that the modern mentality, and therefore each one of us, finds hardest to understand and to accept. The hardest thing to accept is that it is an event that awakens us to ourselves [...] The most difficult thing to accept is that it is an event what awakens us to ourselves, to the truth of our life, to our own destiny, to hope, to morality.”*⁴ We end up seeking refuge and support in something that is conceived and done by us, which, in our opinion, would be more capable of attacking the nothingness that surrounds us and creeps into us.

Why do we falter and, after the initial attraction, find ourselves caught up in a struggle that sometimes exhausts us? Why do we change the method? First

³ J. Ratzinger, qtd. In J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes*, p. 81.

⁴ *Generating Traces*, p.13

of all, we must recognize that we are immersed in a worldly reality that is contrary to what has happened to us, and so instead of focusing on the encounter, we often live what we think is easier to control and seems more able to fulfill us. How can we avoid succumbing to that? Only thanks to the concrete and continuous presence of the Mystery made flesh, who becomes experiential through a living Christian reality. If it is true that without a present connection with the constant company of Christ through the human faces He uses, it is difficult, if not impossible to avoid succumbing to the mentality that surrounds us, it is also true that all of that does not automatically guarantee against the risk of giving in and replacing the event we encountered with something else, of placing one's hope in something else, of returning to imagine the path to fulfillment starting from our own resources.

When we take the origin — that is, the event that happened — for granted, it becomes an *a priori* that we store away. We consider the event a given and then we face reality starting from our own projects and interpretations. The event survives as a category we know and even use, but not as vital source, as the root of knowledge and action. We do not start from the Christian event, nor do we expect satisfaction from it, that is, correspondence to the original needs of our heart. We look for satisfaction in our plans, in our ability to build, in self-affirmation, and so, the change of method we were talking about occurs. In short, what prevails is the search for self-expression at the expense of the event that entered into our life, even if it proved to be the origin of a human newness, of a new intelligence and capacity for affection.

What is the root of the problem? Fr. Giussani responds without hesitation, *“Self-affirmation as the ultimate goal and horizon of action, to the detriment of the event that has entered into our lives. The value we pursue going to church or struggling in a factory, school or university, when you are alone and when you are together, is self-affirmation, according to the aspect that interests us (maybe affectivity, maybe cultural gusto and curiosity, maybe an ability you want to express, maybe social and political passion).”*⁵ In short, the value we are pursuing is defined by the need, the presumption, the anxiety, to affirm ourselves according to what interests us, according to what we feel is interesting to us.

What are the consequences? We always see them in front of us:

⁵ *The Radiance in Your Eyes...*, p.87.

- we aim for a detail that, detached from the whole, we identify as the purpose of our life.
- then we realize that, even if we commit ourselves, dissatisfaction increases — a glaring sign.
- reality loses its mystery: there is no more surprise at what happens, being right is the only remaining source of enthusiasm, and so life turns into a suffocating bubble.

What is the alternative? “*Not expression of self, but conversion of self.*”⁶ It is the conversion to the event of Christ, not the claim of one’s own project, the frantic search for one’s own self-expression and self-affirmation, that assures us the prize, the hundredfold here below in every sense, including our impact on history.

But this is precisely the point where we slip up: Faith and the encounter seem too fragile to us and insufficient to provide the satisfaction and effect that we desire, to which we aspire, and as we imagine it. Therefore, we turn our back on the event and we focus on our own initiative. Now, if God, the meaning of everything, became man, and if this event remains in history and is contemporary with the life of each of us, for the person who recognizes this everything should revolve around it. Christ has to do with our whole life and all its concrete aspects. This means that the way you look at every detail of reality, at every fold of your existence is shaped by that encounter. You can live everything with an unexpected intensity and dignity, even when you are in a difficult situation.

Instead, the thought that dominates in us is a skepticism about the impact of the encounter and of Faith, about the effectiveness of the Mystery’s initiative in the world. Because of this skepticism, we prefer our projects and our own activity. We do not explicitly deny Christ, but we leave Him in the tabernacle, in the niche of some premises. That is why Fr. Giussani invites us to a personal and collective conversion. Conversion is to continually reclaim Faith, and Faith is the recognition of a fact, the fact that happened, the great event that remains among us. Who had Faith two thousand years ago? Those few or many who recognized in that man the presence of Something great and supernatural. Something that was not visible like his person was, but that was

⁶ *The Radiance in Your Eyes...*, p.87.

clearly in Him, because *“No one can speak and do the things that You say and do if God is not with Him,”* Nicodemus said to Jesus. Therefore, reclaiming Faith means to continually regain our awareness and adherence to the Mystery who is present among us, to the event that is in us and among us.

3. The Turning Point: our life depends on an Other

The first turning point that conversion entails, coincides with, *“the awareness that our life depends on an Other and exists in function of this Other!”* *“The awareness that we “belong to” something greater, that we “belong to the Father.”*⁷ When we get up in the morning and drink our coffee, when we roll up our sleeves to clean the house, when we go to work, whatever this work is, our life depends on and is a function of something Other and greater, unavoidably greater.

The key word is “Father.” The decisive importance of the Father was what the apostle Philip had confusedly intuited when, just an hour before Christ was arrested, he asked Him, *“You continue to speak to us of the Father, make us see this Father just for once and we will be happy!”* The Father is the horizon of everything, the root of everything. Our whole life exists in function of Him, it belongs to Him. *“Philip, have you been with Me so long, and still you don’t understand? Those who see Me, see the Father.”* This gives rise to endless tenderness and wonder because the mystery of the Father to whom we belong makes Himself familiar in the Son.

What path did the Father choose to introduce us to the deep and familiar relationship with Himself? He sent His Son, making Him a presence we can encounter and perceive, so that in the Son made man by the work of the Holy Spirit we might “see” the relationship of intimacy we are called to have with Him, and the newness this brings to our way of looking at and treating all things. For Christ, every gesture He made, every word He said, every gaze of His was filled with and shaped by His awareness of the Father and documented His awareness of the Father. It was so true for Him that He could say, *“The Father and I are one”* (Jn 10:30). We are called to look to this experience of Christ’s, compare ourselves and identify ourselves with it. If someone were to stop us while we were walking down the street and ask us, *“What is filling your consciousness in this moment?”* What would we answer? It is not a matter of

⁷ L. Giussani, quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 102 and 103.

repeating certain words, but of discovering what actually fills our consciousness as we go about our lives.

What does it mean to be aware of the Father? The Father is the origin of all things. The consciousness that our life depends on an Other coincides with living reality recognizing that it is coming from the Mystery. It means to recognize all of reality as an event: *“Everything can be lived as event, inasmuch as, in final analysis, in this moment, it originates from the Mystery.”*⁸

How does the way Christ lived His life as a man in relation to the Father interest us? The way of relating to Being that corresponds to the heart, that satisfies and does not delude, was made familiar in Christ. We were made for this. Recognizing reality as deriving from the Mystery should be familiar to reason, because precisely in recognizing what is real — just as it is, as God wanted it to be, rather than reduced, flattened, without depth — we find a correspondence with the needs of our heart and our innate capacity for reason and affectivity is fully realized. Recognizing that reality comes from the Mystery is not an illusion or something you have convinced yourself about, but rather, the culmination of a true use of reason and affection. Recognizing reality as a sign of the Mystery is within everyone’s reach, as St. Paul always reminds us. Yet, it is not a habitual experience for us. In fact, another way of relating to reality is habitual for us, one that considers its existence obvious. It is difficult not to be surprised at and attracted by Jesus’s gaze on reality, as is described in the Gospels. For Him everything is an event. He documents a way of living reality that does not flatten it, does not reduce it, but rather incarnates and testifies to a true and whole relationship with every aspect of reality. What enabled Him to live reality with this intensity? His relationship with the Father. This enabled Him to live everything with incomparable substance, depth, and intensity. Nothing seized Him as the Father did: *“The Father and I are one.”* Not even the evil He suffered could separate Him from the Father. Rather, it is precisely there that we see all the substance of His relationship with the Father which led Him to entrust Himself beyond all measure. Here is the root of Christ’s victory over nothingness. The Son’s way of living is the victory over nothingness.

It is worthwhile to learn Christ’s gaze on reality, because if we do not look at the world as something “given”, as an event, starting from the gesture of God

⁸ J. Carrón, *The Radiance* ..., p. 108.

who gives it to us now, the world loses all its attraction, its surprise, and its moral appeal; in other words, it loses its appeal to help us adhere to the order and destiny of things. Instead, when reality is recognized as event, as originated by the Mystery, this produces an incomparable intensity in our own life. It is the relationship with the Father that makes every single moment, even the most ephemeral, full of meaning and positivity. Otherwise, everything crumbles and the void of meaning wins.

That is why there is nothing more worthwhile for us than following Jesus. *“Whoever follows Me will have a hundredfold here below.”* In the company of Jesus, a true relationship with reality can become a stable experience in us. With Christ nothing is lost, because He enables us to enter into a relationship of familiarity with the Father. Every circumstance can carry that newness that Christ brought into the world. But for this to happen, our effort is not enough. It is not our effort that makes it happen, but our being daughters and sons. Jesus teaches us what it means to be children of the Father by witnessing how He is a son. The path of living with fullness that He documents is not that of being capable, but of being sons and daughters. Our mistake is to think that Jesus is different because of His superior capacity, which would enable Him to do what we cannot do, that is, to live without yielding to nothingness. Instead, Jesus does not falter and does not become arid, is not a victim of nothingness, because He lives for the Father. This is His one strength. His difference is in His being a Son. Here is Christ’s whole qualitative difference. For example, when this new awareness is in action in your relationship with your children, what tranquility, what security, what peace there is! You are also free from your child’s response. On the contrary, when it is our opinion that matters, we want it to be accepted at all costs and we want to dominate.

These are very concrete signs that verify whether the new consciousness generated by Christ has begun to penetrate our innermost being. The point, then, is that the awareness of the Father becomes more and more familiar so that each of us can say like Jesus, *“The One who sent Me is with Me.”* This experience matures over time. Such an awareness shapes every moment, every gesture, every gaze, our way of facing everything, step by step. I come from God; I do not come from myself! Jesus reveals the Mystery to us as Father. He is the one who taught us to say, “Our Father.” To perceive, moment by moment, the relation of everything to the origin means to grasp the relation of everything to

the Father. The relationship with the Father fills all things with meaning, it is a gaze that is finally true. Everything then takes on a unique density and intensity. Finally, the value of the moment, of our relationships, of work, of reality, of circumstances and suffering, your own and that of others, is affirmed. Anxiety no longer wins out in us, we are no longer determined by the success of our self-expression, no longer dominated by fear and uncertainty.

The experience of sin is literally the failing of this awareness of the Father, or in other words, it is our failing to strive to have this awareness happen. The true problem is not primarily a lack of energy, of willpower, of coherence, but rather forgetfulness, the lack of familiarity with the Father. Without this familiarity everything becomes ephemeral because it lacks depth and meaning. Our actions, the things we must do, lack an adequate goal. Life is reduced to appearances and it flattens out: eating, drinking, family life, working, free time, everything. In fact, the value of things depends on the meaning they have and on the intensity of awareness with which we live them.

4. The Condition that Makes it Possible: through the Charism.

Jesus introduced the disciples to the awareness of the relationship with the Father. Who introduces us to this relationship today?

Christ's encounter with our life, in which He began to be a real event for us, His impact with our life when He moved towards us, is called Baptism. Normally, however, in the hierarchy of values and interests that governs our life, nothing is stranger than Baptism. Yet, nothing is more radically decisive than this fact: a fact so real that it has a precise date, in a specific moment. With Baptism something irreducibly new began in us. It entered our life and changed it, determining it in a different way. You begin to understand what Baptism implies in the encounter with a living Christian companionship. What does Baptism make happen in me? My person is incorporated into the mystery of Christ's person. The assimilation to Christ brought about by Baptism is the Resurrection of Christ that penetrates history, it is the Body of the Risen Christ that grows ever more according to the times of the mystery of the Father. Within the sign of matter, what the sign indicates really happens — Christ becomes one with me. Therefore, Baptism is the beginning of a new personality, of a new creature in the world.⁹

⁹ cf. L. Giussani, *Generating Traces ...*, pp. 46-48 and 70.

Christ takes hold of man in Baptism. He makes him grow and become an adult. Then, in an encounter He causes man to experience the fact that a new human reality is close to him, one that corresponds, convinces, educates, and is creative, and that strikes him in some way. Even in a whisper, even just for a moment, man notices a kind of attraction, a suggestion; he has the intuition of something more beautiful, more correspondent, something better. And he says “yes.” He met a particular companionship and perceived the new whisper of a promise of life; he sensed a Presence that corresponded to the original expectation of his heart. So, this is the companionship — not another one — in which Christ has become a companion for his life and draws close to him on the journey. In this companionship he can repeat the greatest, the most wonderful words, “*My soul clings to You, Your right hand holds me fast.*” (Psalm 62) Cardinal Ratzinger has observed that “*the Faith is a heartfelt obedience to that form of teaching to which we have been entrusted.*” In His infinite imagination, in His infinite freedom and mobility, the Spirit of God can bring into being a thousand Charisms, a thousand ways for man to partake in Christ. A Charism is precisely the mode of time, of space, of character, of temperament, and the psychological, affective, intellectual way with which the Lord becomes event for me, and for others in this same way. So, a Charism vivifies the Church and is at the service of the whole life of the Church. By its nature, every Charism, in virtue of its specific identity, is open to recognize all other Charisms. Each of the historical modes with which the Spirit puts men in relationship with the Event of Christ is always a “particular,” a particular mode of time and space, of temperament, of character. But it is a particular that renders one capable of the whole. The proof of a true Charism is that it opens you to everything, it does not close you in. Each Charism is at the service of the whole life of the Church, it is a particular that opens to the whole, it is like a window through which you see the whole horizon.

The question of the Charism is crucial because it is the factor that makes belonging to Christ easier existentially; in other words, it is the evidence of the Event present today, because it sets us in motion.

Yet, in this great companionship in which God has placed us with His Event, the best among men are not found. We are not better than others. St. Paul recalled it well in his first letter to the Corinthians, “*Consider your own call, brothers. There are not many of you who were wise according to the flesh, not many*

were powerful, not many of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise. He chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world to bring to nothing the things that are, so that no human being might boast in God's presence. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, whoever boasts, let him boast of the Lord."

Everyone bears responsibility for the Charism he has encountered. Everyone is the cause of the decline or increase of the Charism, is the soil upon which the Charism is wasted or bears fruit. To obscure or diminish this responsibility means to obscure and diminish the intensity of the effect that the history of our Charism has on the Church of God and on society.

Each person gives a personal identification, a personal version of the Charism to which we have been called and to which we belong. Inevitably the more one becomes responsible, the more the Charism passes through one's temperament, through that vocation irreducible to any other, that is, one's person. Everyone, in his every action, every one of his days, in all his imaginings, in all his resolutions, in everything he does, must be concerned with comparing his criteria with the Charism, just as it emerged at the origins of our common history. This comparison must therefore be our greatest concern. Otherwise, the Charism becomes a pretext and a cue for what we want; it covers up and justifies what we want. Giving one's life for the work of an Other, not abstractly, is to say something that has a precise historical reference. For us it means that all that we do, our whole life, is for the increase of the Charism we have been given to participate in, which has its chronology and a face that can be described; it indicates names and surnames and, at the origin, has one name and one surname.

There is therefore the urgency of a continuous comparison as a way to be recalled to the ideal and as possible correction so that the Charism doesn't become a pretext to do what we want.

The comparison is with the historical form that the Charism takes on: texts and people indicated as the reference point.¹⁰

What a great grace it is to belong to this Charism in which the love for Christ reawakens in us and allows us to be in this world — so complicated at

¹⁰ cf. L. Giussani, *Generating Traces ...*, p. 84.

times, which dramatically, sometimes lives immersed in nothingness — to bear witness to an unimaginable greatness and beauty.

Thank you. It would be great if you had questions at tomorrow's assembly.

Fr. Michele Thank you. There will definitely be questions tomorrow.

Bp. Mosciatti: You can find all the things we spoke about in the reference texts that were given to us for this retreat. You can find all the words that can help us in "*The Radiance in Your Eyes*," or the text of School of Community, "*Generating Traces*"...

Fr. Michele: The assembly tomorrow is definitely for questions and comments. This new way of having the retreats online asks of us an even greater personal responsibility. One thing is when silence is suggested and somehow safeguarded by living together during the days of the retreat. Now, however, everyone is responsible for it in their own home, and therefore the way we live these hours depends on each of us. Fr. Giussani always told us — and it is one of the most precious things of our Charism and also of the Fraternity of Saint Joseph — that to observe silence it isn't enough to be at home alone, rather silence is letting His Presence dominate, letting what began through the words of Bp. Mosciatti continue to accompany us and become a point of constant comparison during these hours. The personal work to prepare for the assembly is expected to become a question or a witness for everyone. Each of us is asked to prepare for the assembly as if they were to give a contribution. In fact, we are not spectators, the assembly is not something that we watch while others take on an active role, but it is sharing what the Lord inspires in each of us.

References

J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes. What saves us from nothingness?*, Human Adventure Books, Tampa-Denver 2020, pp. 79-149; L. Giussani - S. Alberto - J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's, Montreal 2010, pp. 46-48, pp. 78-85.

Sunday Afternoon Assembly

Music:

W. Amadeus Mozart, *Vesperae solemnest de Confessore* in C, K. 339, no.1 and no. 5 (*Laudate Dominum*)

“The cosmos and the whole of reality, of man and of human history, are like a huge building, a great work of art, a great masterpiece of God in which we are the living stones. So it is awareness, consciousness that opens the dimensions of being, of truth, of the beauty of the world, which is Christ, of which the Solemn Vespers de Confessore, are an echo so immediately absorbing and fascinating. For it is wonder that makes Mozart’s heart sing, and our heart along with his; wonder and gratitude before Being who is the truth and the consistency of all things.”

Songs: *L’Assenza* [Absence]

Quando uno ha il cuore buono [When one has a good heart]

Fr. Michele: We begin today’s work by thanking Bp. Mosciatti for being with us.

We received many questions. We tried to collect the questions and contributions by topic because, each in a different way, begins from individual experiences but often focuses on the same points of the lesson.

Witness: *With respect to the lesson — which was wonderful — I focused on the point “The condition that makes it possible: through the Charism,” where we are told that each person gives a personal identification, a personal version of the Charism to which we have been called and to which we belong. A little later I read, “Everyone, in his every action, every one of his days, in all his imaginings, in all his resolutions, in everything he does, must be concerned with comparing his criteria with the Charism, just as it emerged at the origins of our common history.”*

When I read this, I thought about my situation with my job and with the charitable work I participate in. I work for a family comprised of mother and son, and my job is to care for the mother. I take care of her; I clean and do the cooking. As charitable work, I help a person who is alone and I accompany her concretely in all the needs she expresses. Here is my question: what does it mean to compare my criteria with the image of the Charism? I felt a jolt and realized that to compare myself means to return to the elementary experience, that is, to the heart, to the fact that I am need

of beauty, justice, goodness and love. I was wondering if this is correct. Giving life for the work of an Other means that everything we do, our whole life is for the increase of the Charism we have been given to participate in.

The School of Community also says that this comparison is the greatest concern that we must have methodologically, morally, and pedagogically. Could you help me out on this point? Thank you.

Bp. Mosciatti: The Charism, as we have said, is what came to encounter us. We have encountered the event of Christ through a Charism, a story, a face. This is clear to us. What is the drama of our life? That after having encountered the Charism we carry on our life according to our own criteria, according to our own opinions, according to whatever goes through our minds, according to the urgency we perceive each time. This is crucial because the comparison with the Charism is something natural: the point is whether I, after encountering something great and powerful, want to follow it and constantly compare this experience with myself, with my own heart. How many times did Fr. Giussani say this: *You must always compare everything, even the things I tell you, with your heart, compare them with the most elementary needs you have.* This comparison is constant because the comparison makes us see the truth of things immediately. This comparison is interesting: what is this Charism, ultimately? Fr. Giussani says it to us in the School of Community, p.83,

“The essence of the Charism of Communion and Liberation can be summed up in the announcement — full of enthusiasm and awe — that God has become man and that this Man is present in a “sign” of single-heartedness, of communion, of community, of people in unity. Only in God made man, only in His presence and, therefore, only in some way through the form of His presence, can man be man and mankind be human. This is the source of morality and mission.”

Thus, if it is only in the presence, or in some way, in this sign of unity, communion, community, if I detach myself from it, then I will easily lose the Charism, I will easily become autonomous and I will no longer be able to receive this gift that came to me in an absolutely gratuitous and unexpected way. Is that clear?

Fr. Michele: The passage you quoted is on p. 83 in the new book.

Witness: *This morning I woke up with the thought that conversion is very concrete and I thank Bp. Mosciatti for this — who yesterday repeated it to us in every possible way — and also because he is the Bishop of Imola, a city that I love very much. I remember a friar who, when I was hospitalized there, struck me deeply and still influences me with his way of living with the sick.*

It has been a month since I have been isolated at home due to COVID-19. In the house of the parish where I live there are four of us, and one after the other, we got sick. For a week, I was the only one still negative and I was angry at the superficial behavior of the others. One morning I woke up with a runny nose and my COVID-19 test was positive. Then everything changed regarding my fear, thanks to the help of friends, the comfort I received from others via WhatsApp, [and] the support of the school cooks who prepared our meals. Thus, at some point, my rejection evaporated.

I am a physiotherapist and I wanted to deal with it on my own, then when Fr. Stefano recovered and tested negative, I thought he would be busy and he would leave me there alone... My surprise in all of this was to see what was happening. First of all, my friend the priest was very ill, but he was calm. Then, even when he recovered, he did not abandon me, but actually took care of me in every way, even though he had a lot to do. Even a dear friend in the FSJ, who is a doctor, helped me step by step and supported me, and then other friends... I mean to say that the Lord kept me company and keeps me company even now, because it is not over yet. In any case, thanks to these friends I also accepted treatments that I am absolutely opposed to.

My illness was an opportunity to see Jesus at work and my friends at work with Him. I see in them Jesus who bends over me and I am very moved. I am normally rebellious, hardheaded, I do not understand, sometimes I do not take people seriously. Conversion is truly a simple path of belonging, because I now realize that these people are present and they help me.

Bp. Mosciatti: Your testimony is great because the problem is not that you are rebellious — you are everything you are, we are more rebellious than you — but that you are moved in front of Christ's company that you feel close to you. It is your being moved that tells you: *It is You who are close to me, it is You who continually forgive me, it is You who embrace me for what I am, who are not focusing on my difficulties, my mistakes, or my fixations; it is You who continually*

regenerate me with Your mercy. This is very important. Conversion is precisely looking away from myself, from my limit, from my evil, to look at You who are here before me.

Thank you. I hope you will feel better soon.

Witness: *I work as a special education teacher. For me, comparing myself with the Charism is the attempt to look at those in front of me, and therefore at my students and my colleagues, for their destiny, trying to love them for who they are, even my student who suffers from autism. Yet, I wanted to ask for a clarification: is this enough? How can I grow in this comparison? How can it become more and more a daily habit?*

Fr. Michele: It seems to me that the point of comparison, as Bp. Giovanni said earlier, is with the heart, that is, with the experiences we have within ourselves, with that desire, with the evidences with which the Lord has made us — of justice, truth and beauty — that have been moved within a story, that have been moved by an encounter. That is, the point of comparison is not how I imagine the Charism, how I remember it, how what Fr. Giussani said... because in the end everyone has one's own opinion and interpretation on these things. We become, as Fr. Carrón often says, like rabbinical schools where everyone reads the texts in their own way.

Who among us, on the other hand, does not have a clear recollection of correspondence in their own experience? We are here for this. The comparison is made with my heart moved by someone, moved by a presence, by an encounter. That is why the Charism is either evident or not. Right now, I am moved by someone in my life. The contribution we just heard is really beautiful: I live an experience of correspondence with what I couldn't do or invent on my own, with what finally responds to my heart and continues to take initiative towards me. I think we are really the spoiled children of a rich family living in a luxury mansion. The Movement is like that for us, it gives us everything. There are pages in the last *Traces* that are spectacular. The Schools of Community are always a witness. Each of us can recount facts and now, paradoxically, with this virtual method we have so many encounters, with witnesses from Africa to Latin America! It is a continuous initiative that the Movement, the Charism takes towards me.

I think we all live this correspondence. The comparison is made with this correspondence. When I enter my school, when I am in front of my students, or when I face the matters of the Sanctuary, it is with this experience that I make the comparison. When I detach myself from this comparison, that is, when I do not live this memory and do not keep this and the fullness that I am living as a criterion, inevitably I start to notice it because I begin to lay claims and demand from reality a fullness that it cannot provide. Then I get upset about this and that ... always with reason... but that anger is a sign that the experience of being moved and the fullness of the heart with which I can compare everything are faltering. That is why we need conversion, as Bp. Giovanni said, we need to continue to turn our gaze from ourselves to what moves us deeply, to Him who comes to meet me.

Bp. Mosciatti: The verification is that I am happier. The way I was moved in the encounter is renewed, even as the years go by, because it is like reliving what happened at the beginning.

Witness: *It seems to me that yesterday's lesson once again put before our eyes how life lived in virginity is a great promise and convenience. In fact, it responds very deeply to our living life pursuing our work and giving to God — who gifted us everything — what belongs to Him, with the desire not to possess or manipulate what is offered to us. The lively and dizzying position of continuous openness and trusting expectation that the Event — we already lived and verified how it gives dignity to our life — may rehappen in us and in others, this continuous expectation of which we sometimes enjoy the power, is a true possibility for us.*

I was surprised by the proposal to live the same life experience that Christ had, focused on His experience, not on the image I have of Him. Sin understood as a decrease of our awareness of belonging to the Father is what makes Jesus's experience and mine profoundly different. Being a Son ran through His veins, while we must continually regain that awareness. I know where and with whom I need to be to help a criterion greater than the expression of myself enter into me. I see how my life is more powerful, free, true, and amazing the more I let go of my small or big idols, and I rely on the experience of greatness and freedom lived in the encounter with the Charism of the Movement. I would like to understand what Baptism is as an experience. I see that for me it remains a concept learned from someone I trust, but I do not experience

existentially the difference that occurs in a person's nature when we are baptized, or I am not aware of it. Thank you because I am beginning to see that the scandal of my forgetfulness affects me less and less, since I can continually regain Faith with intelligence and obedience, as you said yesterday. I try to fix my heart and my gaze on the promise and the possibility of life that is offered to me here, and that I have already begun to experience, instead of beating myself up morally for my inability to recover (if my attempts are based on my own effort) and live my life having already lost from the beginning.

Bp. Mosciatti: Baptism, the great gift God gave us. First of all, this is the great word: gift. Baptism tells us that it is not something we have done, but rather One who has come to meet us. Were you baptized as a child or as an adult?

Witness: *Two days after birth.*

Bp. Mosciatti: So, it is a gift desired by your parents who wished that you could immediately be embraced by Christ, made new by Him. This is the interesting thing: it is a gift. It is not something you searched for. It is a free gift. But when do you realize what Baptism has done in you? In the encounter with a living reality, with a companionship, with a communion in which you rediscover the gift that was given to you and say: but this has already happened! What does that companionship do? It highlights even more the gift, all the dignity of what happened to you. Even a person who receives Baptism when he is twenty-five years old — after a great experience of conversion — always rediscovers the greatness of that sacrament, of that beginning, in an encounter. It is precisely the resurrected body of Christ that seizes you, that takes hold of you and never lets you go. It is not a gift that the Lord takes back, that He withdraws. It is the risen Lord who comes to you through a companionship! You put away the old self and put on the new self. This is Baptism: the white robe that is given to you, that lit candle. It is a newness that lights up in your life, but you need an encounter that allows you to see and enjoy the beauty of this event.

Fr. Michele: It is striking how you have repeated that it is a gift, a sacrament, that it does not depend on me. It means that it is an initiative of Jesus just for me. I am called to see its fruits thanks to the Charism, thanks to

another initiative God takes to make my awareness grow even more. I am called to become aware and to contribute so that this seed becomes a plant. I am called by the Charism to become aware of it: we all know very well what our Christian life would have been like had we not encountered the Charism of the Movement. Better, we do not even know it, so great has been the grace we have received. I would not be a priest. I do not think Giovanni would be a Bishop. We would not be here. We are certainly involved in this great gift, but at the origin there is a gratuitous gift. You did not have to do anything, you did nothing. He came to meet you. Baptism always strikes me because, like every sacrament, it has this characteristic: it is His initiative toward me. He did not ask my permission. He said: *you are Mine*.

Then He had the charity, the grace, the beauty to get me involved in making grow what He planted so that it could become mine. It is this initial gratuitousness that makes it objective. He looked down and said, “you.” He did it with Giovanni and with me. I insist, all of this would have remained written in the air, or it would be something we learned in religious education, but the grace of the Charism made it become experience. It is an experience that moves us deeply and is possible every day. This is amazing.

Witness: *I have a question about the passage when Bp. Mosciatti said, “not expression of self, but conversion of self.” It is a suggestion that addresses the temptation [that] we must change the method. In fact, in us the search for one’s own expressiveness prevails at the expense of the event that entered into our life. I would like to understand this point better, because, to some extent, I wonder what can be wrong with self-expression, while in other ways, it seems to me that good desires like that of being loved, or wishing that in the hotel where I work we could go back to work as we did before the pandemic, are an expression of my own project on reality. Then, since these desires are not fulfilled as I wish, sometimes they seem to become an obstacle to my conversion, because, even if they are things that matter, I do not want to live just for some particulars of my life. Thank you. In short: on the one hand the situation at the hotel is not great, and on the other, because of COVID-19, I realize that the social distancing rules we are asked to follow hinder my relationships with others. Sometimes it also affects the realm of our affections.*

Bp. Mosciatti: The expression of self is not wrong, certainly not! We are not robots, we are not remote-controlled, you are yourself. The problem arises when you, when we, live things according to our own frame of mind. Sometimes we find it difficult to step out of it.

I believe you said that sometimes you have your own project on reality, like the way you wish the hotel where you work could return to be as it was before... maybe you complain, which is typical of those who have a project on things, but then reality says otherwise. This shows why we need conversion, not just expressing ourselves. If I push the gas pedal only on the expression of myself, I keep complaining, because things do not go as I want... What happens instead? Conversion is like facing what is happening and asking: *what does this tell me? What step is it asking of me? What is it asking me?*

Now, either this blessed pandemic is asking us something and is making us shift from how we normally live, or otherwise — as Pope Francis says — it is almost useless that it happened. In the famous speech that he gave on March 27 last year, in that empty Saint Peter's Square, he said just that: the pandemic makes us move away from our usual way of thinking. He said, *"The storm exposes our vulnerability and uncovers those false and superfluous certainties around which we have constructed our daily schedules, our projects, our habits and priorities."* What is this storm doing? It puts us in a position of welcoming something greater. Stereotypes have fallen, we were all worried and the Lord is constantly telling us, *"Why are you afraid? Do you not yet have Faith?"* The Lord at that moment tells us: but I am here, you must not be afraid of this. There is a change, there is a conversion. It asks us to look at things differently. It is a way of looking that makes me compare myself with that reality, because reality is Christ. St. Paul tells us the same, and it is true. Reality provokes me. If I do not let myself be provoked, I go ahead with my own ideas. If I allow myself to be provoked, a journey of conversion begins. Indeed, everything becomes interesting and what comes our way is never against us, but rather it is an opportunity to change, an opportunity to become more and more aware of Him, that is, of Christ.

Fr. Michele: The problem is that without this provocation that you, Giovanni, spoke about, we are not ourselves. We shrink inside our fixations. Conversion and being yourself are not two different alternatives. It is the opposite. Without the provocation of reality, without Christ provoking me from

outside myself, I am less and less myself. I become more and more stuck inside an image that I have of myself and of reality. This is, after all, our daily experience.

What frees us from our fixations? What is the tell-tale sign that something is not working? That I no longer live unless I solve that problem, that I am anxious. Maybe it is a good problem that needs to be solved, maybe you have the solution in mind, but the fact is that you no longer live, you are no longer yourself. Instead, it is the provocation from outside myself that allows me to look to a fullness that frees me, even from the solution. In fact, normally it makes me even more intelligent because I become myself, I am no longer a slave to that particular problem, to that fixation, to my frame of mind. It is precisely to be ourselves that the Lord must convert us, kicking us, sending us pandemics, kicking us with pandemics.

Witness: *I would like to hear you talk a little more about the change of method, what it means for adults with a responsibility at work or in the face of lack of work, in the face of problems with children, etc. We in Brazil are poor, we face this pandemic in an absurd way with a President who does not care if we die or not, in short, the political leaders do not care if we reach 250,000 deaths over the weekend. I understand that Faith is the exaltation of reason. Maybe this is a heresy, but I have a feeling that we will not solve this problem of the pandemic by praying. I am sorry, I know it is harsh, and that is not what you, Bishop, spoke to us about. But there are so many injustices, so much pain! Obviously for me the pandemic is almost a gift because it allowed this closeness between us, but at what price? Does this method apply to everyone? The Charism as you explained it to us is clear to me. In the face of so much pain, there is the desire to help, to do something, of course we cannot eliminate the suffering, but here lies the greatest challenge. How can we avoid abandoning the method in the face of hunger and suffering? Thank you.*

Bp. Mosciatti: You should know that I always wished to go on mission and they never sent me. In the seminary I kept asking Michele: don't you want to go? He used to answer that he wanted to be a diocesan priest, that he was in the seminary for that purpose. Well, I never went on mission and he was in Peru for 10 years. I still remember — and here I get to answer your question — that when he returned, he told me what a great friend of ours had told him after

taking him to the highest point in Lima where there is a great view of the whole city. Now Fr. Michele will repeat to us what his great friend told him, because I think that it is the point that answers your question. The suffering you speak about is very real. It is very clear not only in Brazil, but also in our country. The problem is that the issue is difficult, especially when there is a very strong political power that does not understand, that is oppressive... this has always been present in life, also Christ faced it. If Fr. Michele tells us what his friend told him and made him understand, I think that it contains the answer to your question.

Fr. Michele: There were two moments. The first when, looking at the whole extent of the city of Lima — and the majority were shacks, favelas — he told me, *“Everything you will do there during the entire time you stay here will not change anything of what we see from where we are standing now.”* We worked at a university and from that hill it was hard to even identify where that university was, it was a little speck. *“What you will do there cannot be seen from here.”* It felt like a punch in the stomach. It was true, the need, the suffering, the things to do, the deprivation present there are so enormous that what one can do is laughable. There was a huge disproportion between the suffering, the need, what I saw in front of me and the limited energy one could offer during a lifetime. He left me there for a while to reflect and then, as we walked down (it was Andrea Aziani, who many of you know of and who now is already in Heaven with the Lord) he said to me: But remember that Christ has already won. I remember what I thought tongue-in-cheek: thank goodness He won, imagine if He had lost! Actually, my response was a sarcastic retort and I paid for it, in the sense that I had to discover in my own experience how he was right. If we start from Jesus’ victory, even in all the evil of this world, in all the suffering, the beauty of life right there where He begins to win is to be able to give your own life to contribute to that victory that already exists, that is already present there. The opposite is to continue to despair looking at what is still missing.

Bp. Mosciatti: Think about Christ: He died alone. There were only a few people with Him: two — His Mother and John — who were under the cross, and four or five women a bit distant, who were looking at where they would lay His body. There was no one else. They had all fled, yet we still talk about that Man,

He still makes us live, now. Do you understand? The problem is not the question of praying, but rather of not stopping at our sense of bewilderment and anxiety caused by the circumstance we face, because otherwise we are done. As our other great friend Enzo Piccinini used to say, we must always look at what is present, not at what is missing. This is what Christ makes us look at. Christ also allows us to organize ourselves, to be able to do something, even to create a work that is beautiful and meaningful and that can produce a change. However, the problem is not the purpose, is not the work, it is not that specific thing. Many have tried to start revolutions, to overthrow governments, but that is not the way to change the world, unless I change.

Witness: *Dear Bp. Giovanni, first of all, thank you, and from the bottom of my heart, for the clarity and affection with which you preached the Retreat. It was very helpful. Thank you also to our dear Fr. Michele who invited you! When you reminded us of the words that accompany the rite of the imposition of the ashes, I recognized once again how true it is, with that intelligence of which you spoke to us. I remembered when two years ago my father returned to Heaven, and in a few days, I went from caring for that dear and beloved body to placing an urn with his ashes into his grave, next to the remains of my mother. I love life fervently and with each passing day I realize that I am happier, even in tribulation, because Christ really is a vir pugnator. I grow in awareness that You Jesus are the Life of my life, really, carnally, and I have an indescribable gratitude for being immersed in a companionship like this, in which the words of Fr. Giussani, "Christ is the only One who takes to heart your whole self" becomes flesh continuously and tirelessly, loving and cherishing my freedom and my whole person, without ever failing me. Since I wholeheartedly wish for my true conversion, I would like to ask you to help me with the second word used by Fr. Giussani to indicate conversion, that is, obedience. It has been more than 20 years that every time I have been given the opportunity to look at the experience of obedience in the end I say "I understand, it is true ... it means to absorb, to let become mine the criteria of another, His criteria..." I say this sincerely, but yesterday my heart was pierced by a question that is perhaps trivial: What does it really mean for me today to obey this recognized reality, our unity in that Man. Could you help me with this?*

Bp. Mosciatti: I was very impressed by what you said about your father's ashes. On Ash Wednesday, Pope Francis in his Homily at one point said:

“Once again, the word of God asks us to return to the Father, to return to Jesus. It also calls us to return to the Holy Spirit. The ashes on our head remind us that we are dust and to dust we will return. Yet upon this dust of ours, God blew His Spirit of life. So we should no longer live our lives chasing dust, chasing things that are here today and gone tomorrow. Let us return to the Spirit, the Giver of Life; let us return to the Fire that resurrects our ashes, to the Fire who teaches us to love. We will always be dust, but as a liturgical hymn says, “dust in love”. Let us pray once more to the Holy Spirit and rediscover the fire of praise, which consumes the ashes of lamentation and resignation.”

This passage is very interesting, because this is obedience, otherwise, if only the ashes prevail, what should we do? There is something that has come into our lives and has given us life. It gave life to our dust. To obey this something wholeheartedly is an inescapable factor, it is not something extra that is added to life, it is what makes life true life. In fact, if we do not obey this, whom do we obey? Do we want to obey this dust of ours that is destined to remain dust?

Fr. Michele: From dust we became a particular kind of dust, of powder like gun powder. A powder that explodes, otherwise, if it were not so, obedience is a loss of ourselves, it is like relinquishing one's life to others, to those who are more knowledgeable than us, to those who are more fascinating than us, to those who are older than us, to those who are younger than us... Instead, we become this dust that is deeply moved, this heart that is moved. Someone needs to come so that our heart is moved. Someone had to come. I obey to this heart that is deeply moved.

Why do we follow Fr. Carrón? Because he is the boss? No, we follow him because he is the only one who makes me experience Christ and therefore reality in a way that my heart recognizes as corresponding. I want to follow that. Obedience is asking someone to help me live this correspondence, to put his experience in front of me so that I can live his own experience and be as fascinated as he is. Thus, we always obey a heart that is deeply moved. Without someone who moves it, it is not enough to obey the heart, as many say. If the heart is not moved, if it does not experience this correspondence, it makes

mistakes and goes after what it seems to be the heart and instead are our own fixations, our own ideas.

Bp. Mosciatti: I will add only one thing. The things that I live, even what seem to make me suffer and which I endure, are opportunities to learn obedience. That phrase they say about Jesus is beautiful: Christ learned obedience from the things He suffered. It is interesting. Not even what was against Him blocked His obedience to the Father, His relationship with the Father, that relationship for which He was the Son because the Father existed and anything that happened... up to death on the cross. Everything was part of the great Mystery of the Father. So, either we live like that, or we are reduced to dust.

Fr. Michele: The paradox is that, on the one hand, we want to do things on our own, and on the other, it is what scares us the most. It is impressive. We want to do things our way, but the thing that scares us the most is to think: maybe it is a figment of my imagination...and this is what draws us away from this relationship.

Witness: *I would like to better understand the link between the temptation to change the method and the awareness that my life depends on an Other. I live in Houston, Texas, USA, which suffered an atypical and severe winter storm last week. During the storm I experienced how exhausting life is when you are just trying to survive. For example, all your energy and strength are focused on staying warm, nourished, and hydrated. There seems to be no room for much else. Yet, during these days I have also experienced that the Father cares for me, and in a concrete way. I have experienced again how my life is really in His hands. In particular, I saw it in my mother and sister with whom I was during the storm, in my friends from the School of Community who sent daily Whats App messages checking how we were and offering to bring water, to host people, or deliver food. Although it seemed ironic to spend Ash Wednesday like that, fasting seemed drastically different without electricity, heat, water, plumbing, or the Internet (as if God had chosen for us the sacrifice we needed to make) and there was a real desire to surrender to His mercy — because in these circumstances you see clearly how your life depends on Him. These days have made me think of how often I live like that — just trying to get to the end of the day — when*

there is no storm and I have all the comforts and the things I need to live. This is how I recognize the temptation to change the method living according to my resources or my tasks. So, how is it possible to accept every “routine event” in daily life, if the “event” does not present itself as extraordinary but is nevertheless given by the Mystery. Thank you.

Bp. Mosciatti: As I read your question I thought of Our Lady. For thirty years she did not see a Miracle performed by her Son. [She] Had only an extraordinary event happened! The Gospel reports the Marriage at Cana as His first Miracle, where the Lord transformed hundreds of liters of water into wine. As an aside, a great discovery was made during the new translation of the Bible. It was formerly said that there were six stone jars containing two or three barrels of water which Jesus transformed into wine. How much are two or three barrels? The new translation says that there were six stone jars containing 80 to 120 liters of water each. Let us average 100 liters per jar. Jesus transformed 600 liters of water into wine! Our Lady did not experience any of this in the first thirty years. Where was the event of this newness during that time? It was the vivid memory of what had happened to her that always kept her hope alive. Therefore, the newness is truly inside our daily life, inside your circumstances. Then there is also the extraordinary event, which obviously strikes us. Further on in *The Radiance in Your Eyes*, p. 90, Fr. Carrón says, “*Those who are centered on themselves, on their own goodness or intelligence, on the anxiety to be right or the persuasion that they are, end up no longer perceiving reality in its inexhaustible and mysterious otherness. Thus, the only enthusiasm they can feel in life is that of being right, of satisfying themselves, certainly not surprise at what happens, at reality that speaks to them, at the grace of being.*”

For those who live the openness that you described, every day is a surprise, every moment is truly a surprise, the great surprise of recognizing Jesus present.

Fr. Michele: Without crossing the Atlantic again, we go back to Brazil. I will read the contribution. Then if you want to, we can talk about it.

Witness: *Could you please give us some examples of what you said at the end of the lesson about the need for correction “so that the Charism does not become a pretext to do what you want”?*

I want to live obedience and fidelity to the Charism and in point 9 of “Generating Traces” I discovered that only after almost twenty-five years of encounter with the Movement, I have begun “to obey” somehow “naturally.” Until recently, it was always an inner struggle, even in simple things like the commitments planned by the community and the way I wanted to plan my free time.

It was almost as if the Movement wanted to “trap” me and invade my free time, and I resisted and followed, but inwardly grumbling, I did not live freely. On the contrary, in recent years, especially during the pandemic, I have lived an experience for which every proposal, made by the texts or by those who lead the local community or the Fraternity of Saint Joseph itself, is a help for me to live my whole life, including my work and my free time, in a truer way. I have clearly understood that it is the Lord who helps my journey to God through all of this. Now I feel free to follow the proposals.

On the other hand, I feel a certain need, for me and for my friends, regarding the way in which the meetings take place, to the point of feeling uncomfortable, for example, if there is a delay in the beginning of the meeting, if the time of the School of Community and of the meetings of the FSJ goes on beyond the scheduled time on topics that have nothing to do with the work of the text ... I wonder then, if this need that I have has to do with “the comparison ... with the historical form of the Charism” (I think of the method of the meetings of CL) or if it is more a “pretext to do what I want.”

I also thought about what the Pope told us, “not to worship the ashes” but to keep alive the Charism of Fr. Giussani — which might suggest some flexibility with respect to the method. So, I ask for some examples to help us live this point on comparison. The reference in the lesson was:

“There is therefore the urgency of a continuous comparison as a way to be recalled to the ideal and as possible correction so that the Charism doesn’t become a pretext to do what we want.

*The comparison is with the historical form that the Charism takes on: texts and people indicated as the reference point” (cf. L. Giussani, *Generating Traces ...*, p. 84).*

Bp. Mosciatti: I have a beautiful example here in Imola of a holy priest who met the Movement many years ago and then chose to move away, broke away from it and began his own path, and many people went with him. I was very impressed because, after so many years, these people are asking the Church to recognize their path officially, they are asking that the way in which they have lived their Charism be recognized, perhaps because that priest feels

that his life is failing and so he wants to communicate the continuity of their path to those who will come afterward. It is a striking story. We received the tremendous and powerful grace of not detaching ourselves from this shoot that was first a bud and then grew, became a tree, then the Church recognized it up to the Pope who acknowledged its validity. It is a Charism recognized by the Church, which has become a great tree that has produced flowers and fruits — many beautiful things. The most interesting thing is that, if you stay attached to it, it is like drawing from a living sap, you do not have to start over: the Charism brings you a new sap and you produce new shoots, beautiful things on the same trunk, grounded with the same root.

That is why the pretext of doing what one wants is like one who detaches himself and replants the tree. Then maybe, if God wills, He will make it grow too, but it is a great effort. It is easier to remain attached to what already exists, to what has come to you as a flower: we have seen its flowers, its fruits, we have seen what this meant, for example knowing the holiness of the people who lived it to the fullest. It is amazing to see all of the great, beautiful, and precious things born of this Charism. When I read your question, I thought of this example, because that poor priest is working very hard to find out what happened to their lives. I have always wanted to stay attached to this incredible trunk that moved me deeply and changed me, a Charism that made me grow... I cannot imagine what I would have been without this life that has reached me.

Therefore, obedience is truly obedience of the heart, it is simple and from our heart. It is definitely not worshipping ashes, because these ashes have been permeated by the vital breath of the Holy Spirit. It would be great if you, Michele, could also give an example.

Fr. Michele: My example is about myself: I was struck by this description of simple things done by our companionship, such as starting late the beginning of School of Community or... What does it mean that it should not become a pretext for doing what I want to, but, at the same time, that you should obey your own heart that is moved? Fr. Carrón always amazes me because with me he always starts — and I see him doing the same with others — with a look of esteem towards my heart. It is as if each time he told us, *“Look, you are not dumb, so if something doesn’t make sense to you, if something is jarring or seems inadequate to you — instead of giving battle saying, “I am right” and*

dismissing everything else, or on the other hand, thinking you are wrong and saying, “I am the one who doesn’t understand, it is my fault” — I believe that it is an interesting sign of our attachment to the Charism to trust the passage of time.

If, as it is true, this is what God is doing, in time we will see the truth emerge. In recent years it has been nice to see that it is true and not just some strategic advice. I have always said of certain things, *“I don’t think this is right.”* So, without the pretense of changing things right away — but also not saying *“Let’s drop it, it is not true”* — gradually it turned out that I was right. How beautiful, though, to be able to find out later together, without having broken the relationship and without fighting to be right... because if you do that you end up feeling right, but you have destroyed the “plant”. On the other hand, how many times one thinks to be right and then instead, as you said, at a certain point the situation, the pandemic, makes us more humble and needy, and what we used to feel as violence toward our autonomy becomes something that now we need, and we say, *“Thank goodness this exists!”* Belonging to the Charism happens over time, it also happens in the trust and certainty that what has happened to me is that God Himself has come to meet me, and this Charism is what He uses to lead me. This is a judgment that, if we remember it and we return to it, corrects us from the claim of always being right and from the depression of always being wrong.

The last one, let us go back to Italy.

Witness: *What provokes me most is well summarized in this point of the retreat, “In the company of Jesus, a true relationship with reality can become a stable experience in us. With Christ nothing is lost, because He enables us to enter into a relationship of familiarity with the Father.” In particular, the words “stable experience” strike and provoke me. It is what I find most desirable, but in my experience, I cannot say that it is stable, and it seems impossible that it is. I say desirable because sometimes, by grace (it seems to me that I do not contribute anything of my own) I live the particular as a “gift,” as “given” by the Lord for me, even in a difficult, burdensome or exhausting circumstance. (My parents live with me and my mother has a degenerative disease, and this involves a radical change in the sense of freedom about the things I can do and how I use my time). When all this happens, when I receive this particular of reality, when I welcome it, everything becomes not only “embracing”, but also full of peace and irony.*

However, what I live is more often a sacrifice without being able to see, without understanding, rather than a gift of self, moved. Even if I know that the Lord is always present and without this companionship I would be literally lost — and I say this truthfully — it seems like an illusion to live everything, but truly everything — and here I quote again yesterday words — “with an unexpected intensity and dignity, even when you are in a difficult situation.” The other passage I want to quote is, “Christ documents a way of living reality that doesn’t flatten it, doesn’t reduce it, but rather incarnates and testifies to a true and whole relationship with every aspect of reality.”

It seems to me that being always ready for anything is a gift that comes from the Lord. If the Lord makes me live certain moments like that, it is just a gift. I cannot stop desiring it, though. I would like to be helped to better understand this aspect, so as not to have demands on the one hand, and not to be discouraged on the other.

Bp. Mosciatti: I believe that in your experience you can recognize when something new happens to you and that newness makes you embrace again, and forgive, weeks of darkness. Is that clear? Something happens that makes you say, “Beautiful!” and everything that happened before seems forgivable, can be embraced, it seems new. Because something happened. This is how it works out in life: there is not absolute clarity about everything, as you said it would really be a pretense on our part, but there are events — and they are called events precisely because they happen in a time and a space — that offer a clarification, bring peace about the past and give hope in the future.

That event is like the tip of an iceberg that happens, and it is awesome. You say, “*How beautiful!*” and you realize that sometimes it forgives you for having lived weeks of darkness and gives you hope about the future. Hope is something that happens, in short, hope is the certainty in the future by virtue of a something that happens in the present. Sometimes we have the claim that everything is clear, transparent, but if that were the case we would already be in Heaven. Nevertheless, there are events that when looked at retrospectively are points of incredible clarity, they shed light on your entire life. Try to think of the first time it occurred to you that offering your life to Christ could be interesting. It is a light that illuminates everything, years and years of effort. Do you understand?

Fr. Michele: I want to add something to what you said. The idea of the iceberg is beautiful because what is underneath is huge and allows you to see what emerges. We never think that our neighbor, who has the same problem we have, lives in a world that is different from ours. That is to say, what happened to your life, even if you aren't always fully aware of it, puts you in another world because as soon as you begin to live like your neighbor — that is, living reality without meaning, without depth, as pure reaction to be able to bear it — you cannot stand it. You cannot stand it because, by now, you have experienced what it means that reality is Christ, that is, that it has a meaning and that meaning is Him and that this meaning — which is Him — wants to embrace you.

It is true that we do not live constantly with this awareness, but we can no longer go back. You live without that awareness half a day, even less and less — once months could pass, then it was weeks, then a day, now not even a day — and you can no longer live without telling yourself, *“Why this? Where are You?”* The same lack you experience brings you back to look, to seek, to look at reality with that depth that is something ‘Other’, that is the Mystery. This does not happen to your neighbor. We need to become aware of what happened in our lives. So much more than an iceberg! The whole North Pole came down to us! We must receive the grace, because then at least a yearning is born from the gratitude we feel when we realize what happened to us. We see so many people who live the illness of their loved ones without depth, almost desperate, because they think that the people they love will disappear, will go away and there will be nothing left. Yesterday someone called me saying, *“I am putting you through to someone who wants to commit suicide.”* This person wanted to end his life and kept saying, *“I am useless, this is enough, I can't take it anymore.”* He was drunk and it was not so easy to speak with him. I thought, *“Think about what happened to my life! I cannot even say something like that.”* I think that the image of the iceberg is very appropriate, very true.