

2018 Summer School of Community

Fraternity Exercises - First Lesson



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*Life of Luigi Giussani

Introduction

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- ✦ Jesus wants to bring us to the same knowledge, to the same level of intimacy He has with His Father. The knowledge of the Father Jesus speaks of is not intellectual. “*Jesus speaks of a personal relationship, of predilection, of mutual tenderness, a reflection of the same intimate loving relationship between him and the Father*” (Pope Francis, *Regina Coeli*, April 2018).
- ✦ The Father makes Himself known through an event, through His unveiling in history, a precise, particular history, made up of facts, words. The same method continues now: God unveils Himself, continues to reach out to us within this “particular history” that is the movement.
- ✦ If we are not opened willing to be surprised by how He still happens, then truth will lose its radiance to our eyes, it will abate or be forgotten.

We too have to walk this journey in order to come to know Christ, as Fr. Giussani told us, in the biblical sense of the term, if we don't want to remain stuck by the hindrance caused by our heart's distance from Christ.

Let's immediately state the perspective that Jesus puts in front of our eyes, the goal he wants us to reach. We heard it last Sunday: “I know mine, and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father” (John 10:14-15). Commenting on these words during the Angelus, Pope Francis said, “Jesus does not speak of intellectual knowledge, no, but of a personal relationship, of predilection, of mutual tenderness, a reflection of the same intimate loving relationship between him and the Father” (Francis, *Regina Coeli*, April 22nd, 2018). Less than this is not knowledge of Christ. Jesus wants to bring us, his sheep, to the same knowledge, to the same level of intimacy that He, the Shepherd, has with His Father: this is the goal.

But which road did the Mystery use to bring us to this knowledge? Fr. Giussani has showed it to us since the beginning. Truth has been clear since the beginning, as it is now, “The Lord is everything”—this is the truth. He is everything “not on the strength of our sentiment, because ‘we feel’ that He is everything; not on the strength of an act of the will, because ‘we decide’ that He is everything; not moralistically, because ‘He has to be’ everything, but by nature” (L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, p. 22).

But if it was so clear, one would think that this should be enough. But today, after what we said yesterday, we are even more aware that it is not enough to know this for it to

penetrate into our hearts. And how can it penetrate into our hearts? Only by happening. Knowledge is an event. Indeed, truth has become evident to man not through reasoning or through a hammering insistence on truth, but through a very specific method: history. “That the Lord is Lord [...] appeared evident through His intervention in history, through His unveiling of Himself in history” (L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano* [*In Search of the Human Face*], p. 22). The biblical history—a precise, particular history, made up of precise facts, precise words—is the documentation of God’s unveiling. Therefore, historical authenticity becomes the fundamental dimension of the communication of God. And this is how it happened to us within this “particular history” that is the movement.

“I remember it like it was yesterday: the Berchet Classical High School at nine in the morning on the first day of school in October 1954. I remember the feeling I had as I climbed those few steps up to the entrance of the high school—I felt naively full of exuberance and boldness. [...] I see myself again in that moment with my heart brimming with the thought that Christ is everything for the life of man, He is the heart of man’s life. Those young people had to be told and had to learn that truth in order that they might be happy. [...] I am saying these things because they make up the only reason, the only purpose, and the only root from which our movement has arisen. And if our movement has passed through moments of confusion, superficiality, or distraction, it was due exclusively to the fact that the only reason for our effort and our initiative has abated or has been forgotten. A great enthusiasm, then” (L. Giussani, *Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [*An Event of Life, That Is a History*], pg.336-338).

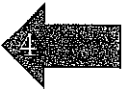
We can find in the beginning of this particular history the method for each next step of the path. But precisely because truth is made present according to this method (an historical unveiling), in history—as Fr. Giussani told us—truth may lose its evidence, its radiance; it may abate or be forgotten. Benedict XVI reiterated the reason for this in *Spe Salvi*, “Incremental progress is possible only in the material sphere.” Instead, “in the field of ethical awareness and moral decision-making, there is no similar possibility of accumulation for the simple reason that man’s freedom is always new [...] and must constantly be won over for the cause of good. Free assent to the good never exists simply by itself” (*Spe Salvi*, 24).

Who, faced with his own decline, in his most clear-headed moments, does not find himself full of a desire to be picked up again? How can this happen? In order to answer, nothing can be more helpful than our identification with God, with the trepidation of



God, who wants to attract us so that the life of each one of us is not lost; He used every circumstance in the history of His people to make Himself known more and more. Therefore, let's go back to the beginning in order to learn again what we thought we knew already.

With regard to this, I could not re-read the pages from von Balthasar—from *L'impegno del Cristiano nel mondo* [*Engagement with God: The Drama of Christian Discipleship*], which has been recently published again—without feeling the urgency of this return to the origin. Perhaps the awareness—perceived on so many occasions—that knowing or having experienced something in a certain moment is not enough for it to remain present, will make us more open, perhaps willing to be surprised by how God made and still makes things.



1. *The Beginning: An Act of Preference*

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- ✎ God's initiative, His preference for a people He freely chooses, reveals who God is, and His purpose: man's liberation. Everyone can test and verify it. The verification that what He says is true is whether I experience freedom. I am certain that I know God because he frees me.
- ✎ The gift of His preference is not enough to free me, God needs my assent. Only if the people comply, will they be able to see Him. (Balthasar, *Engagement*, pg. 14). "Our freedom is inseparable from the fact that we have been made [constantly] free" (Balthasar, *Engagement*, pg. 3). The moment we forget that freedom is given in every instant, the moment we separate from the source of our freedom, the moment we take Him for granted, we return to slavery.
- ✎ God's pedagogical effort is directed to educate His people to the awareness that freedom is inseparable from being continuously freed.

"All ancient peoples have their own gods. The God of Israel, however, is distinguished from all other gods by the fact that he brings into being a people to worship him by his own free sovereign act of choosing [...]; before all this [...] there is a free act of the divine initiative [...]. 'It was not because you are the largest of all nations that the Lord set his heart on you and chose you, [...] but because the Lord loves you' (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)" (*Engagement*, pg. 13).

Through the experience of being chosen, one can know God, as is clearly revealed in the dialogue between Moses and God: "You said"—says Moses to God—"You are my intimate friend', and also, 'You have found favor with me.' Now, if I have found favor with you, let me know your ways so that, in knowing you, I may continue to find favor with you" (Exodus 33:12-13).

Knowing means finding favor with Him, being preferred. What makes it possible to know God and to know oneself is this preference, God's initiative, not man's capacity. Each one of us, the face of each one of us shows this preference, this absolutely unique gesture of preference. As von Balthasar says, "The love that God bestows on me makes me become what I truly am [...]. God is simply unique, and by the act of choosing me by a love which is unique, he makes me similarly unique in the light of his love" (*Engagement*, pg. 22). How amazing to be told these things.

“The free choice and initiative of God always constitutes the concrete form under which grace is manifested among men” (*Engagement*, pg. 14). And the purpose of this grace is not to make man a slave of a new power, but is liberation. “What God does effects my freedom. The fact that he has liberated me from the slavery of Egypt cannot mean that I am to be brought into a new slavery, [...] but rather that, through my following the God of liberty, I may enter upon a freedom that is truly my own. The foundation of my choosing, which is God’s innate freedom, must correspond with the ultimate purpose of my choosing, namely that I may participate in the liberty of God himself” (*Engagement*, pg. 15).

And man can verify immediately whether it is nonsense or true that the purpose is my liberation. The verification of God’s promise to free us is our participation in the liberty of God himself. I am certain that I know God because he makes me free. But this gift has a caveat: we must accept it. My answer is necessary, I need to accept this preference, the liberation is not possible without me. Therefore, in order to free me, God needs my freedom. “If this act of God in choosing is first and foremost an act of boundless love, then the response expected and indeed required is certainly a gentle obedient ‘yes’ of submission and willingness to comply. Only if the people comply, will they be able to see Him: God will bring his people out of Egypt, make them pass through the Red Sea, destroy their persecutors, give them food and drink in a wonderful manner in the wilderness, and God himself will go before them, and as a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, mark the places where they are to rest. Wherever the cloud descends, there must the people pitch their tents; when it rises again, the people must break camp and march on, always following the God who leads. It is inconceivable that Israel should ever take over the leadership and that God should follow behind his people” (*Engagement*, pg. 14). But then this implies—von Balthasar acutely observes—that the beginning can never become “past.” The beginning is “the living source from which we must never withdraw. These premises must never be forgotten when the inferences are being worked out. For our freedom is inseparable from the fact that we have been made [constantly] free” (*Engagement*, pg. 3). Yesterday as today.

“Dear Carrón, I am coming from a complicated period of time. There was a moment when I thought that following Christ was no longer necessary and I went away thinking that in the end nothing would change. [But then everything] seemed unsatisfactory to me and I started to live badly. I wasn’t really unaware of the malaise and of my sadness, but I was afraid to admit it. In the end, I only need to feel Him present in my life, I

need Him in order to accept the circumstances that can only be accepted. I am not speaking about a resigned acceptance of reality. I am speaking of a new way to face new circumstances. And I started living again. If this companionship is missing, if Christ present is missing, it is impossible to live.” And apart from Him, we come to ruin.

Thus, in the moment when we take possession of our freedom, forgetting that it is given to us instant by instant, we lose it, because it is inseparable from the fact that we have been freed. All of God’s pedagogical effort is for educating His people to this awareness: our freedom is inseparable from being continuously freed. We can never move away from this source. How different everything would be if only we had this awareness.

If we don’t understand God’s method, if we don’t recognize the relationship between our experience of freedom and His initiative, inevitably we will move away from the origin, and we will believe that we can take this freedom for granted, treating it as something that we already know. And what do I do in front of circumstances if I already know? I already know, so I reduce everything to doctrine or ethics. Kant’s temptation is also ours: to move away from the source, reducing the Christian initiative to a crystallization into doctrine. But the Christian initiative is always a gratuitous, free gesture of God toward us; moving away from the source, reducing it to crystallization into doctrine or ethics means going back to our slavery, whether we like it or not. For this reason, as Fr. Giussani said yesterday, taking faith for granted, taking the source for granted is a fundamental mistake. And even the people of Israel continually yield to this temptation. For this reason, it is consoling to realize how even they had to learn God’s method, just as we have to. King Saul’s story is really enlightening: totally determined by his fear of the Philistines’ imminent victory, he decided not to wait for the prophet Samuel and offered the holocaust by himself. “It is urgent; our enemies are defeating our people!” When he arrives, Samuel scolds Saul: “You have been foolish! You should have kept the command the Lord your God gave you” (I Samuel 13:7-14). Because Samuel didn’t care about the holocaust—what would he need it for? He wanted the people to understand and trust in him.

Several occasions in the history of the people of Israel show how their presumption of being able to reach freedom by themselves brought them inexorably back to slavery (see *Engagement*). This is true also for us. It can be immediately confirmed, and we can learn it the hard way: the presumption that we can reach our freedom starting from our feelings and analyses—all of them right, of course!—leads us always to slavery.



2. "From this you may know that I am the Lord."

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- ✎ In preferring His people, The Lord frees them so that they may know Him: *"I will free you from the forced labor of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery.[...] I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God. You will know that I, the Lord, am your God"* (Exodus 6:6-8). Yet, after being freed, His people forget Him. The relationship with Him becomes formal, reduced to human precepts, and as a result they fall back into slavery.
- ✎ Man's forgetfulness doesn't stop the Lord. He doesn't give up and tirelessly takes the initiative, even when faced with rebellion. Every occasion is grounds to make Himself be known. God's purpose is to become familiar, *"to dwell among them,"* because only from the awareness of His presence, they will be able to face life without fear.
- ✎ One doesn't stop fearing just because another says: *"fear not,"* but because He is present. Without His presence in history, our trust in Him would be without foundation. All that God did and does is *"so that you know that I am the Lord"* (Isaiah 45:3) and so that you may trust Him.
- ✎ God's action must be judged, recognized, and kept alive in the memory, so that our action be determined by His preference towards us. *"all of ethics, the way one faces reality, originates necessarily from [...] God's action. [...] God's entering into a relationship with me. His act of making me free is the foundation of everything"* (Balthasar, *Engagement*, pg. 22).

How does the Lord allow Himself to be known so that He reaches the heart of the people, so that He becomes familiar? It is striking how the Bible relates the experience of the people of Israel to the knowledge of God. No abstraction, no crystallization into doctrine, but rather a promise that becomes historical reality. It is pure, verified experience, because it is not experience if it does not reach the acknowledgment of the origin that makes experience itself possible.

The Lord said to Moses, *"Say to the Israelites: I am the Lord. I will free you from the forced labor of the Egyptians and will deliver you from their slavery. I will rescue you by my outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and you shall have me as your God. You will know that I, the Lord, am your God"* (Exodus 6:6-8). And this experience is what you must remember. You must *"recount [...] what signs I wrought among them, so that you may know that I am the Lord!"* (Exodus 10:2).

Only if the action of God is judged, recognized, and kept alive in the memory, will it determine the action of each person and of the people, as the source of everything, because “all of ethics, the way one faces reality, originates necessarily from a religious foundation, that is, from God’s action. Because it does not concern my behaviour towards God, but God’s entering into a relationship with me. His act of making me free is the foundation of everything, and this everything includes both me and my people at the same time” (*Engagement*, pg. 22).

Therefore the people’s freedom is expressed in a reply that always originates from God’s initiative: “Since I am the Lord.” How do you know it? “Because I brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God; you shall be holy, because I am holy” (Leviticus 11:45); this means, “Be free as I am free.” Since God has shown Himself to be so true and real, so affecting as to bring to completion His promise of liberation, the Israelites were freed even from idolatry: “Do not turn aside to idols, nor make molten gods for yourselves. I, the Lord, am your God” (Leviticus 19:4).

But this knowledge does not take place despite the people’s rebellion, but rather through it: the Lord allows Himself to be known in response to rebellion or forgetfulness, as happened with the grumbling of the people of Israel. God uses these things to challenge them with a new initiative: “I have heard the grumbling of the Israelites. Tell them [he says to Moses]: ‘In the evening twilight you shall eat flesh, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread, so that you may know that **I, the Lord, am your God**’” (Exodus 16:12). And so “they shall know that I, the Lord, am their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt”— to what purpose? “So that I, the Lord, their God, might dwell among them” (Exodus 29:46); indeed, the purpose is that His presence become familiar. “To dwell among them,” because only from this, from this ever greater certainty of His presence will they be able to face circumstances fearlessly. “For I am the Lord, and I say to you, ‘Fear not.’” But one shouldn’t stop fearing because another says, “Fear not,” but because He has entered into the depth of his “I.” Only a lived history can be an adequate foundation for trust. All that God did and does is “so that you know that I am the Lord” (Isaiah 45:3) and so that you may trust Him. If this message does not penetrate into our hearts, it is like words scrawled onto a wall. This is something that unfortunately happened to the people of Israel who did not understand, many times, and led to the use of some surprising similes: “An ox knows its owner, and an ass, its master’s manger; But Israel does not know, my people has not understood” (Isaiah 1:3). The people of Israel did not understand and therefore

surrendered to the temptation to do things their way. But God knows the people so well that he realizes that if His action, His initiative, does not reach the heart, it will remain outside them; if this does not happen, the people will not be able to know Him through experience—an intimate, personal, profound experience that cannot be omitted and that can be recognized in their way of living reality. The Lord proposes a new initiative: “I will give them a heart with which to know me, because I am the Lord.” God will establish with the people a new covenant that reaches their hearts: “I will put my law inside them, I will write it on their heart. I will give them a new heart and a new spirit,” a spirit bound up with the heart, a heart that is able to be determined by His Presence; only in this way can He defeat the formalism to which the people so many times yielded. “The Lord said, ‘Since this people draws near with words only and honors me with their lips alone, though their hearts are far from me, and their reverence for me has become a routine observance of the precepts of men, therefore I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion: the wisdom of its wise men shall perish and the understanding of its prudent men be hid’ (Isaiah 29:13-14).

If their relationship with God is formal (only with words), the people do not know the Lord, because, “his heart [an organ for knowledge and adhesion] is far from me,” and thus their relationship with Him is reduced to human precepts. This is striking! But this doesn’t stop the Lord, who takes the initiative again, “Here I am, I will again deal with this people in surprising and wondrous fashion,” so that astonishment may become possible again and Israel may come to truly know and trust the Lord. It will not be the road of the “wise” and the “intelligent”: “The wisdom of its wise men shall perish and the understanding of its prudent men be hid.” In this way, we are at the dawn of a new day.

3. The “Radicalization” of God’s Commitment to Man

2018 Fraternity Exercises – First Lesson

- ✎ To overcome formalism, to overcome the forgetful heart, God became man. Through Jesus, God became “an affectively attractive presence.” His presence was felt by those who were struck by his claim as the sign of another reality: it referred to someone else, it led them to the Father. His testimony reached its culmination when He gave Himself for the world: “*When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am,*” that “*I am the Lord.*” Through the gift of Himself, God’s extreme task for the world reaches its culmination, which will allow God to be known (in the biblical sense of the term).
- ✎ The radical nature of His task is clearly visible through the completely new kind of freedom it delivers. Yet, this liberation is only possible if He continues to happen, for “*God’s task is not an external communication, unknown to us or just supplementary, of forgiveness of sins, as some conceive the event of justification. Rather this task touches us deeply in our personal core.*” (Balthasar, *Engagement*, pg. 14) It makes us new! Our freedom from alienation and the ephemeral continues in time if we are remained glued to the source.
- ✎ We delude ourselves when we think that we can do without His presence. Just as Jesus cannot separate Himself from the Father, in the same way we cannot separate ourselves from Jesus present and alive, here and now, and through Him, from the Father: “*a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also*” (John 5:19-23). God’s method persists. This is not a sacred story to be learned, something we think we know, but the road to familiarity with Christ and with the Father.
- ✎ “*The change in our being is the presence of an Other.*” (Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*) The change in us is not due to coherence, but rather due to the increased awareness of a presence, due to a lived familiarity, as it was between Jesus and the Father. Lacking familiarity, we remain stuck with our feelings and ideas.

What does God do to help us overcome formalism, this distance from the heart to which we so often surrender, to make it easier for us to know Him? He became so much involved with man that He Himself became man. Through Jesus, God became “an affectively attractive presence,” to the point that it would challenge our hearts like nothing else. Man simply needs to surrender to the fascinating attraction of His person. As happens with a lover, the fascinating presence of the loved one rouses in us all the affective energy needed: we just need to surrender to our fascination. That’s why His disciples became immediately attached to Him, and the more they stayed with Him, the more they became attached. But theirs “was not a sentimental attachment [Fr. Giussani

used to tell us], nor an emotional phenomenon [...]: it was a judgment of esteem, a marvelous esteem that makes you grow attached” (*L’attrattiva Gesù [The Allure of Jesus]*, pg. IX).

“Jesus was a man like all the rest; He was a man who could not but be defined as man; but that man said of Himself things that others would not say, He spoke and acted in a way that was different from anybody else. Sign of all signs. His reality, once known, was felt, looked at, and treated, by those who were struck by his claim, as the sign of another reality: it referred to someone else. As clearly appears in John’s Gospel, Jesus did not conceive the attraction that he held for others as an ultimate reference to Himself, but to the Father: to Himself as long as He could lead them to the Father (*L’uomo e il suo destino [Man and His Destiny]*, pg. 127). This is the way God made Himself known and still makes Himself known. Jesus states this in brief: “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.” (John 14:11). The great exegete Schlier reiterates this with these words, “Through His words and miracles, ultimately Christ shows Himself. [...] ‘The works I do in my Father’s name testify to me’ (John 10:25) [...] Christ bears testimony to Himself and, through Himself, to the Father” (Schlier, *Riflessioni sul Nuovo Testamento [The Relevance of the New Testament]*, pgs. 335-336).

And this testimony reaches its culmination when He gives Himself for the world. “When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am.” And that “I am the Lord” is now stated by the One on the cross: “I do nothing on my own, but I say only what the Father taught me” (John 8:28). This will be the supreme manifestation of the Lord, which will allow God to be known, in the biblical sense of the term.

As we can see after the resurrection. While they were living together, Jesus became so familiar to His disciples that they recognize Him when He sits and eats with them on the shore of the lake after His resurrection. “And none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they realized it was the Lord” (John 21:12).

Through the gift of Himself till death, God’s extreme task for the world reaches its culmination. The radical nature of this task is clearly visible through the completely new kind of freedom it gives. “The definitive liberation is the consequence of God’s definitive task for man through Jesus, about which John and Paul tell us, ‘Freedom not only comes from the political powers, but also from all cosmic powers of destiny, from the constraint of sin, from alienation from God, from our obligation to defend ourselves, from aggression and killing, from the vain and ephemeral works of decadence

and, finally, from death’.” This freedom is our only liberation from the banality of living. “All these powers are [kind of] ‘paralyzed,’ ‘off course,’ and ‘powerless’” because of the fascinating attraction of Another. And only if this continues to happen will we be free. This will be possible only if those powers are overcome not from outside or from above, but from inside, because God emptied Himself into His Son, becoming obedient to death” (*Engagement*, pg. 40). For this reason, says von Balthasar, “God’s task is not an external communication, unknown to us or just supplementary, of forgiveness of sins, as some conceive the event of justification. Rather this task touches us deeply in our personal core.” It makes us new! “It bestows upon us a unique, personal dignity in the eyes of God” (*Engagement*, pg. 14).

The novelty of this freedom from various kinds of powers, from alienation, sin, and the ephemeral, becomes evident for those who follow Him through a human journey, on which the origin of this novelty becomes ever clearer.

“I started RCIA last year. I attended the Sacro Cuore high school, where I ended up by mere chance. I was struck by the first Easter Triduum I attended. It was then that I started to perceive the greatness of the encounter that I had had; I struggled to identify it with Christ, but it began to fascinate me greatly. During high school, Jesus gave me as His human face a great friend, Lucia. Her gaze on me became ever more intriguing. When I started college, initially I looked for someone from the Movement, but then I gave this up. I thought that what I had met was not completely true, or at least it was not enough for my life, and that I could live fine without it. In February, after a vacation in Amsterdam with a group of friends, I returned home very sad; I felt completely empty, so much so that I cried for a whole week. It was then that I returned to School of Community and, even having a great emptiness within, I found people with whom I could share my needs, and slowly I started to see again the difference of that thing I had met in the past. During these years together with this group of friends, I slowly started to grasp what is at the origin of this companionship, what it means that these friends are the memory of Christ. Baptism [which she received during Easter Vigil] was a ‘yes’ to Christ, and all my desire was completely seized by Him, because He is the only one who responds to my infinite desire to be loved. This is dramatic, because I am human and free; every day is a struggle, but my feelings of nostalgia and, at the same time this beauty, are so powerful that He is the only one who could have generated them. I am surprised by my different and new way of living. It is incredible what Jesus can generate if we live with Him. When I am struggling a lot, I think that this encounter

is a ripoff, that I'd rather live 'carefree and content' like my classmates... but then, **if I seriously think about it**, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. How could I and where would I go?" The facts of today, like those given to the people of Israel, are given for us so that we can know, "I am the Lord." They are not "meaningless facts." It is the same history now—just as the Israelites didn't care about the past, in the same way we don't care about the facts in front of us.

How can we maintain our freedom from various kinds of powers and from alienation and the ephemeral?

Only by remaining at the origin. Let's hear more from von Balthasar: "Under no circumstances may we turn our back on the source [as this girl said, too, 'I thought I could live without it,' that is, turning her back on the source,] of God's grace, treating it like a piece of knowledge we learned in the past, but with which by now we are all too familiar, or like a valuable object which long ago came into our possession and of which we are now able to make practical use by exchanging for ready money." This is our illusion: to think that we already know it and can possess it. This is why we feel the temptation to go away thinking that we already know it and can do without it. "For the source [which is always God's initiative], is God's mouth and we must never take our mouths away from it. So too the source is the ever-present Christ event through which we are channeled into the way of being our true selves and are enabled to remain in the way of truth" (pg. 31).

"I have a great expectation for these Exercises. Reading Page One ('A Leap of Self-Awareness'), I identify myself a lot with what you describe, that is, with the fact that we think we already know and we start standing 'on our feet'; as you say, it is an ever-lurking temptation. At the same time it is clear to me how different it is when I start my day and face difficult situations or pleasant circumstances with an Event in my eyes, hand in hand with a Presence, or on the contrary when I only look at myself. This is precisely the experience that persuades me more and more of how convenient Christianity is for my life and for everyone's life." Only this can persuade us. "I believe that I have never been as certain about this as I am now."

For this reason, "staying means remaining to receive the grace and the engagement of God. The source contains riches sufficient to bless all our activities in this world with fruitfulness, if we keep it alive and never wander away. For here alone is true fruitfulness, therefore our life will be greater to the degree that we stay close to it: a spring that flows within our personal spring [...]." This requires time to enter our inner

being. “We must absorb evermore this dimension of Christian life in order not to abandon the origin in every temporal action. We can absorb this only if we consciously put it into practice, which means our constantly pulling back from our worldly distractions to reflect on the source. [...] The source continues to flow through us, even when we are absorbed in our daily affairs,” otherwise how can we live them? (*Engagement*, pg. 45).

Just as Jesus (this is Balthasar’s point) cannot separate Himself from the Father, in the same way we cannot separate ourselves from Jesus present and alive and, through Him, from the Father. “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, a son cannot do anything on his own, but only what he sees his father doing; for what he does, his son will do also’” (John 5:19-23). That’s why this method persists. This is not a sacred story to be learned, something we think we know... no, it is useful to learn the method Jesus proposes for all of history: “Amen, amen I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” This is not just about the past. He shows us the road for the future, for today, for otherwise how can we gain this familiarity? Thus we understand why Giussani is sad that our belonging to the Movement does not lead to a familiarity with Christ. Indeed a true change in our life depends on this familiarity: “The change in our being is the presence of an Other” (L. Giussani, *La familiarità con Cristo [Familiarity with Christ]*, pg. 27), he repeated. What is astonishing is that this change does not coincide with coherence, but rather with a presence, with a lived familiarity, as between Jesus and the Father. Without it, the change would be theoretical and wouldn’t last. Lacking familiarity, we wouldn’t have a standpoint from which to live, to face circumstances, but we would remain stuck with our feelings, and the event of Christ wouldn’t determine our way of being in reality, as we proposed at the beginning of the year. This is something that each of us finds out for himself, through his own experience, every day, facing any challenge, in any circumstance. Knowing already is not enough.

4. Certainty

2018 Fraternity Exercises – First Lesson

- ✦ “Our certainty rests on ‘Someone who has happened to us,’ someone who has given Himself to us, so much so as to insert Himself into our flesh and blood. ‘I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me’” (Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*). Thus, when we are truly “taken,” like Mary or the shepherds or the Magi, “Their identity, their consistency coincides with what has happened” (Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*). This is the ultimate purpose of all of God’s acts – we can never be as fully ourselves as when He prevails.
- ✦ We need to accept it so that like Mary, the shepherds, and the Magi, what had happened dominate our eyes and heart, dominate our self-awareness.
- ✦ The proof that our life is determined by what has happened is that “gladness and joy” dominate in our life. “Gladness and joy” are unequivocal signs in someone who is taken hold by His love “like when a child opens his eyes wide and is all filled up with what he sees. [...] This tenderness is a million times greater, more acute, more penetrating than a man’s embrace of his woman, or the embrace of a brother.” (Giussani, *Familiarity with Christ*)

For this reason, only this familiarity—fourth step and I conclude—can give us the certainty we need. Because without this familiarity, where do we normally look for this consistency, Fr. Giussani asks: “In what we ourselves do, or in what we have, which is the same. [Thus] our life never has that feeling of full certainty [...]. At the most, we are gratified by what we do, or pleased with ourselves.” How long does this last? “And these fragments of gratification in what we do or in what we are bring no delight and no joy, no sense of secure fullness, no certainty and no fullness” (*La familiarità con Cristo* [*Familiarity with Christ*], pg. 25-26).

For certainty can only rest on “something that happened to us, ‘Someone who has happened to us.’ [...] Someone who has happened to us has given Himself to us, so much so as to insert Himself into our flesh and blood. ‘I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me’” (pg. 26). Thus, when we are truly “taken,” like Mary or the shepherds or the Magi, “Their identity, their consistency coincides with what has happened” (pg. 28).

“This implies abandoning your actual position and letting oneself be determined by the presence of an Other, who preferred us even before our response.” This kind of love “posits an irreversible fact” and “defines our value in the world” (pg. 28). But we need to accept it.

Let’s imagine the reaction that Mary’s heart must have felt every time she “became aware of what had happened, how she must have pondered in her heart what had

happened” (pg. 30). For Mary, the shepherds, and the Magi, “what had happened dominated their eyes and heart, dominated their self-awareness” (pg. 31). That’s how they met Christ; they came to know Him through experience.

And proof that our life is determined by the certainty of what has happened is that “gladness and joy” dominate in it; at the root of these unequivocal signs lies tenderness. But, be careful: “Tenderness is not gratification in the feeling we have, but abandonment, feeling oneself taken over by the love that has taken hold of us, by Him who has taken hold of us. [...] It is like when a child opens his eyes wide and is all filled up with what he sees and has no room to give to the feeling he has, or the awareness of a feeling he has; before what he sees, he is filled up with what he sees. [...]” This is the ultimate purpose of all of God’s acts—we can never be as fully ourselves as when He prevails. This tenderness is a million times greater, more acute, more penetrating than a man’s embrace of his woman, or the embrace of a brother” (pg. 33)!

Because he knew how easily we slip into intellectualism, Fr. Giussani warned us, “We do not understand these things by reasoning, but by looking at [...] experience [...], letting ourselves being taken hold of, attracted, fascinated” (pg. 33). Silence is the space given to this looking, to this YOU that is me.