

HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES
16TH ANNIVERSARY MASS OF THE DEATH OF MSGR. LUIGI GIUSSANI
FEAST OF THE CHAIR OF SAINT PETER
OUR LADY OF LOURDES, BETHESDA, MARYLAND
FEBRUARY 22, 2021

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I am pleased to be with you and to express the spiritual closeness and heartfelt greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis as we gather for this Mass in commemoration of the sixteenth anniversary of the death of Monsignor Luigi Giussani. Luigi Giussani died on the Feast of the Chair of St. Peter, and from its origins, Communion and Liberation has always shared a strong bond with the Successor of Saint Peter.

This year on the Feast, we hear Saint Matthew's account of Peter's confession of faith: *You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*. This evening we can reflect upon the contribution of Luigi Giussani to our understanding of faith and what this can contribute to the Church in the United States.

Lent is season dedicated to conversion, but what does conversion mean? Father Giussani says, "To convert is to continually reclaim faith, and faith is recognition of a fact, a fact that happened, the great event that remains among us." (Giussani, *Beginning Day*, 14 September 1975) Ongoing conversion means to be continually reclaiming faith as both intelligence and obedience.

Reclaiming faith as intelligence means being intentional about recognizing the fact that He is among us, not only in the Eucharist, but where two or three are gathered in His name, in our common fraternity as members of the Body of Christ who support one another. We must recognize the divine reality among us, developing a self-awareness of our responsibility toward our brothers and sisters, thereby carrying each other's burdens. This recognition is an acknowledgement of the newness that Christ brings within and among us.

At the same time, reclaiming faith also demands obedience, not a slavish obedience, but an obedience rooted in love of Christ whom we have encountered and who has radically changed our lives and opened up new horizons for us. Christ gives Peter the keys of the kingdom, an authority to bind and loose, to teach and forgive in His name. Obedience must be understood in the context of authority rather than power. Without authority, there would be no companionship among us, no force holding together the "newness" to which Christ has called us to live.

Here I wish to quote Father Giussani at length. He said:

"The factor of authoritativeness is pedagogically crucial: if we neglect this factor we become dust that the last little breeze picks up and scatters all over the face of the earth; we return to being like children, as Saint Paul says in the second chapter of his letter to the Colossians, 'tossed by the waves and swept along by every wind and teaching arising from human trickery, from their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming.'" (Giussani, *Un avvenimento nella vita dell'uomo*, 229)

For Giussani, authority, and this is why obedience to such authority is critical, is a proposal in which the unity of the human and Christian experience is at stake, for it is a sign of the mystery of the Father's design, which remains among us in history and which must be used in a constructive manner – for the growth of the “I”. If we are to use authority in a constructive manner, that is, to build something, then we must build it upon the solid and firm ground of Christ whom we have encountered. We must submit everything to Him and to our experience of Him in the Church, in our companionship.

But this means actually having an authentic encounter with Him. Pope Benedict XVI wrote, “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which opens a new horizon and gives life a decisive direction.” (Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, 25 December 2005, 1).

Jesus is that event, that person, but have we had such an encounter with Him? I think many have not had such an encounter, because they do not yet have an awareness of their own humanity. Today, faith is often reduced. Sometimes it is reduced to the religious sense; that is, it is lived as a possible hypothesis by which we face daily situations and problems, as if Christ's breaking into history isn't certain for us. The “encounter” with Christ is not really life-changing; it's not experienced as something “real”. The starting point in the search for solutions to the problem is the unknown, rather than from a Presence of something real.

This becomes problematic because the event survives as a premise for achieving one of our own projects rather than one of His projects. Our actions do not begin from the Christian event, nor do we discover that which really corresponds to our hearts' desires; rather, we seek fulfillment in our own achievements and self-affirmation, expression of self rather than conversion of self.

Father Giussani's understanding of faith reminds us that conversion coincides with an awareness that our life depends upon the Other and exists in function of this Other. We belong to God in virtue of our baptism, but we also belong to each other because we have been baptized into Christ's body. Together, we have God as our Father, and faith in Jesus demands trying to see reality through our relationship with the Father and to live, as Jesus did, in obedience to the Father's will. Once more, we understand how faith involves both recognition and obedience.

Today faith is often reduced to ethics, morality or culture - to defending certain values from a previously Christian culture without reference to Christ, His Presence, or His profound love. Certainly, in the United States, the political polarization and the culture wars are a manifestation of this.

Furthermore, in this cultural context, faith is reduced to sentiment; it is not a recognition. Instead of recognizing the Presence whom we have encountered, faith is conceived as sentiment or feeling, an almost irrational act of the will. It is not something that can be verified. Young people fall into the trap of thinking that reason isn't involved in the journey of faith. Here again, Father Giussani's understanding of faith can be a corrective for our young people and for moral relativism.

Finally, we recognize the waning of faith, especially in the rise of the religiously unaffiliated. Although many are raised in a tradition, some no longer believe or believe without really believing, that is, they practice in a purely formalistic or ritualistic way or in an overly moralistic way. Faith is presented in a way that no longer attracts.

The faith seems more dead than alive, because many young people aren't living their own humanity or aren't sufficiently committed to their own humanity and to an awareness of their own humanity. It is precisely this that is the condition for being ready when Christ offers Himself to us through an Encounter. Simon Peter's confession was, "You are the Christ, the Son of the *living* God." His was not a dead faith but a living one.

Father Giussani has left us a legacy of faith, and now it is a time for us to continue to make his charism known for the life of the whole Church and for this country. As heirs of Father Giussani, may we accept our responsibility for the charism and for the gift of faith we have received.