

**HOMILY OF HIS EXCELLENCY ARCHBISHOP CHRISTOPHE PIERRE**  
**APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**  
**HOLY MASS ON THE OCCASION OF THE 15<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE DEATH OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, MSGR. LUIGI**  
**GIUSSANI**  
**CATHEDRAL OF SAINT MATTHEW, WASHINGTON, D.C.**  
**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2020**

My Dear Friends in Christ,

As the Apostolic Nuncio, I am pleased to be with you once again and to express the spiritual closeness and heartfelt greetings of His Holiness Pope Francis as we gather for this Mass in commemoration of the fifteenth 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. It is fitting then, that we have this Gospel, from the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Mark, set in Caesarea Philippi. Jesus asks the disciples who people say He is. Some say that He is John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets, but when Jesus asks them directly, "*But who do you say that I am?*" it is Peter who answers, "*You are the Christ!*"

Some scripture scholars believe that the last chapter of Mark's Gospel, the shortest of the Synoptics, was added later and that the Gospel concluded with the death of Jesus, making the original length about 1600 lines in Greek. The opening line of Mark's Gospel is: *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.* If scripture scholars are to be believed, the Gospel concluded with the words of the centurion: *Truly, this man was the Son of God.* Between those verses, exactly in the center of the Gospel, is Peter's confession of faith: *You are the Christ!*

The proclamation of the person of Jesus Christ is central to the Gospel and central to our faith. It is Christ who was at the center of the life and ministry of Luigi Giussani, who proposed and continues, even from beyond the grave, to propose to us, the idea of a living faith.

Today, the idea of 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 starting point in the search for solutions to the problem is the unknown, rather than from a Presence of something real.

Just as common is the reduction of faith to ethics, morality or culture. Faith is reduced to defending certain values from a previously Christian culture that has disappeared or is rapidly disappearing. We defend values, but often without reference to Him, His Presence, or His profound love. In a politically-charged and highly-polarized environment, we easily see how religious practice is manipulated for political ends.

Frequently, faith is reduced to sentiment. 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. Feelings become the measure of everything, leading to relativism, or an unwillingness to make judgments about anything.

Sometimes people 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. The faith seems more dead than alive, because they aren't living their own humanity or 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.

This certainly was the situation when don Giussani was teaching high school religion in public schools in Italy. He realized that, although Italy was a very Catholic country, with beautiful churches and many saints, a country where public piety and religion were still supported by the state, Catholicism wasn't impacting young people's lives. They could scarcely define faith or reason. They practiced Catholicism, but in a purely formal manner.

Giussani set his mind to developing a method of education for the young. He recognized that young people need a Tradition; they need some rules and structure from their parents, teachers, and clergy. At the same time, he observed that young people, especially once they reach their teenage years, often become critical and start asking questions. They ask: Is what I am being told true? Does it correspond to my heart's deepest desires, especially for the true, the good, and the beautiful?

There can be a tendency to simply assert that it does or that it should, but that attitude is precisely what leads to a formalism in the practice of the faith. Giussani proposed taking the risk of developing young people's minds to think critically – to educate them to ask the right questions rather than providing them with the right answers, so that they could discover for themselves whether the Tradition corresponded with their desires for the true, good, and beautiful. Only in this way would a young person appropriate the faith.

Giussani believed that these questions would lead to a rediscovery of man's "religious sense", the fundamentally religious character of the questions and desires inscribed on his heart. The person can only realize the truth of himself and find happiness by recognizing God and adhering to Him. Seeking to guide young people to appreciate the fact that God has made this adherence to Himself concretely possible, attractive, and beautiful by becoming man and perpetuating His incarnate presence in the world through His Church, Giussani made a fresh proposal to young people – a proposal which was almost derailed in 1968 with the sexual and cultural revolution.

As things seemed to be slipping away, Giussani showed his true fatherly concern. He posed a simple question: What is that we want? He answered his question this way:

"What we want, giving all our time, energy, heart, and concern to the Movement, in whatever way, if we want Christ or if we're searching for ourselves, comes to surface during our trials. I keep insisting on this because, from secretarial functions or the simplest manual labor to the highest functions, this is really the point we must always keep in mind. If we don't keep it in mind, first of all, we won't manage to be the least bit contrite and, secondly, when we have difficulties, we'll decide ourselves whether this difficulty is sufficient to make us leave or if it's insufficient, and we continue to stay. Do you understand? We keep in our hands the ultimate criterion for deciding if what we do is right or not! If what we are after is Christ, or if it is our own self-love, the affirmation of ourselves, under any inflection, according to any point of view – this, comes to the surface in the exact moment of the trial and the difficulty, when we don't see clearly anymore, or

when we no longer enjoy what we're doing. And that is the moment when the attraction of the world, and thus of the diabolical, of deceit, according to its attractive mask, sets itself before us and creates alternatives."

It was the centrality of Christ that re-vitalized the Movement. Giussani had the wisdom (and today, we give thanks to God for it) to understand the importance of Peter's profession of faith: *You are the Christ!* Today, we need to rediscover or reawaken this faith – the faith which Peter professed. Without this, everything falls apart or descends into ideology. Fifteen years ago, at Msgr. Giussani's funeral, then-Cardinal Ratzinger said:

"Msgr. Giussani, with his fearless and unfailing faith, knew that even in this situation it is Christ, the encounter with Christ, that remains central. Whoever does not give God gives too little; and whoever does not give God, whoever does not enable people to see God in the face of Christ, does not build up anything but rather, wastes human activity in false, ideological dogmatism, and so ultimately only destroys."

We are the heirs to the legacy of faith of Luigi Giussani, but it is a living faith. I conclude with the words of Luigi Giussani:

"Jesus of Nazareth is the Reality on which depends all the positivity of every person's existence. Every earthly experience, lived in the Spirit of Jesus, flowers in Eternity. This flowering does not only bloom at the end of time; it had already begun at the sunset of the day of Easter. The Spirit of Jesus, of the Word made flesh, becomes tangible for ordinary people in the radical change it produces in whoever bumps into Him ... and follows Him."

Is this true for us? Each of us asked in a personal way a question: *But who do **you** say that I am?*" With Simon Peter may we respond with our lips and with the witness of our lives: ***You are the Christ!***

My friends, don Giussani's earthly experience and his faith in Christ is flowering not only in eternity, but it is flowering in you – the People of God who reveal Christ to the world. May you continue to be his joyful witnesses!