

WORKSHEET 4 - SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

4. More important than coherence is the relationship with a Presence

These three letters recount very simple things that show how the way you live school, holidays or studies changes, not so much because of some amazing abilities, but because, as happened to Peter with Jesus, the relationship with His presence, through the concrete reality of the GS community, raises your gaze.

At the beginning of this fourth year of Classics high school I had the great opportunity of forming a new and might I say particular friendship, a correspondence over a distance of 2000 years, with a long-dead elderly man of letters of ancient Rome, Lucretius.

Initially I wasn't inspired to any particular fondness for this strange fellow, but one day in class we read a text in which he recounted how the Roman nobility, and people in general, lived their lives in boredom, and sought to alleviate it with continual motion and change, always pursuing the latest new thing to fill their days, without finding any solution.

"If men, in that same way as on the mind they feel the load that wearies with its weight, could also know the cause whence it come, and why so great the heap of ill on heart, O not in this sort would they live their life, as now so much we see them, knowing not what 'tis they want, and seeking ever and ever a change of place, as if to drop the burden.

The man who sickens of his home goes out, forth from his splendid halls, and straight returns, feeling i'faith no better off abroad. He races, driving his Gallic ponies along, down to his villa, madly, as in haste to hurry help to a house afire. At once he yawns, as soon as foot has touched the threshold, or drowsily goes off in sleep and seeks forgetfulness, or maybe bustles about and makes for town again.

In such a way each human flees himself, a self in sooth, as happens, he by no means can escape; and willy-nilly he cleaves to it and loathes, sick, sick, and guessing not the cause of ail. Yet should he see but that, O chiefly then, leaving all else, he'd study to divine the nature of things, since here is in debate eternal time and not the single hour, mortal's estate in whatsoever remains after great death."

(Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III, verses 1053-1075. Transl. William Ellery Leonard. E.P. Dutton, 1916)

Lucretius wrote this to demonstrate how Epicurean philosophy could resolve the problem of living; he proposed the nullification of suffering and restlessness, in order to enable man to be sufficient unto himself. I was very struck by this. A man who lived centuries ago experienced my same situation, and he, too, realized that life is missing something, that everything can be boredom and restlessness that forces us to flee from ourselves.

However, I don't want to nullify this restlessness. I want to take it seriously, and work to keep this desire alive, because it means paying attention during lessons, studying at home, exploring more deeply what we are studying in school, but it also brings greater joy, because it shows how reality is a continual discovery and how it's made expressly for us. »

» When I went home after that lesson, I sat down to study with more passion. I no longer considered Lucretius as an old man who had nothing better to do than to write books to spite us poor students, but as a friend, a friend whose diversity can be a richness for me.

Caterina, Desio

This year has been full of changes. The first happened at school when I learned that we would have a different philosophy and history teacher. Initially the idea terrorized me a bit, but then I thought it could be an opportunity for a fresh start, and I could be rid of the label the teacher had stuck me with our first year. At School of Community I often saw that my friends were able to live their studies not as a weight, but with passion. They managed to really live what was put in front of them, starting with school. I had never understood how they could see the teacher in the front of the class as a person. I never understood until this year, when we met our new philosophy and history teacher. The first day of school she called on us one by one to ask about us and then she told us a bit about herself. For homework she had us write an essay on "Who I am" or "The Search for Happiness," and I chose the essay on "Who I am," but I didn't do it honestly, and I produced something fake and forced.

Even so, I turned it in the next day. When she brought back our corrected essays, I saw that she'd written personal comments on all of them but mine. I understood that she'd written a judgment to my classmates because they'd been able to say who they were, while I didn't know. I felt jealous of them, and ardently wanted to be in their place. I desired to understand who I truly was. The next Wednesday I spoke about it at School of Community and my friends and the leader weren't scandalized at all by my jealousy of my classmates, but instead were happy about the desire that they saw emerging in me. They encouraged me to talk about it with my teacher and to thank her for having provoked me and awakened this desire. So I followed their advice. We spoke and she thanked me, and for the first time I felt that I was really myself, without any mask. About a week later, when she examined me and I only got a C, I was amazed that instead of complaining as I usually do that I should've gotten a B, I felt free.

Elisabetta, Palermo

Over the recent 3-day-weekend, I stayed at a friend's house in Parma. She had invited me somewhat at the last minute, and I didn't know any of the younger girls, but I decided to go anyway. What surprised me was what happened Monday morning. All nine of us were studying around the table in silence. I was very absorbed in what I was studying, but I raised my eyes a moment and looked at each of them, intent on what they were doing. Simply looking at those faces of people I hadn't even met before the previous day, caused me to resume studying with a love for what I was reading, a love for the fact that it had been given to me and had something to do with my life. I've always seen my studies as an anxiety-provoking burden that occupied my afternoons. I don't know what changed in that moment, but I know that the condition I was in enabled me to appreciate the book I had in front of me. I think that when friendships make you desire to love things such as your studies, then they are the truest ones and help you the most. At times you don't»

» need to sit around talking and telling each other about this and that. In that moment, I discovered that it was useful for me to be silent and simply to be near friends who were doing the same thing as me, and to help each other in this journey. I'm grateful for what happened to me. I know that from now on it won't always be this way with my homework, and it'll still be hard, but now I'm certain where to return to study in a certain way; I have a point from which to start fresh. I thanked the friend who invited me, because she gave me the opportunity to spend those days with her rather than staying in Milan and allowing the things I studied to slip away. Without her I wouldn't have made this discovery that has enabled me to grow in a setting that I often underappreciated.

Sofia, Milan