

**“WE HAVE NEVER SEEN ANYTHING LIKE THIS!” (Mk 2:12)**

## INTRODUCTION - 1

# “How necessary it is that the human ‘I’ be great, my friend” (Charles Péguy)

by Pierluigi Banna\*

“We have never seen anything like this!” How we too desire to be able to say this at the end of these days. But we have an even greater desire: that already tomorrow morning, when we look at ourselves in the mirror, and in fifty years looking back at the entirety of our life, we can say: “We have never seen anything like this!” A life that is unique, special, great.

A girl your same age, named Mary, had that same desire. From the moment she received the announcement of the angel, when she said: “Be it done unto me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), there wasn’t a day that went by when she didn’t say: “I have never seen anything like this!” We too have the same desire in these days. We just need to ask for the simple openness of that girl and God will do the rest in our life, because “nothing is impossible for Him” (Luke 1:37).

Let us say the *Angelus*, on page 76 of the [book you received](#).\*\*

*Angelus*

**“EVEN MY FRIEND IN WHOM I TRUSTED HAS RAISED HIS HEEL AGAINST ME.” (Psalm 41:9)**

Welcome everyone! Welcome, truly, I don’t say it just as a formality! Welcome, because we have waited for you here, in a place where finally we do not feel like slaves of the judgments of others, of those who call themselves “friends” and are not true friends, in a place where we don’t have to be at the mercy of a grade or the expectations of adults. Here we can finally be free of those slaveries—here we are embraced as we are—that always leave us more insecure and alone.

But are we sure we can do it? Are we sure that in the end life is not a deception? Are you sure that I’m not just messing with you? As one of you wrote dramatically: “How is it possible to turn the other cheek for a father who is absent from your life? How can I live the love that I saw, but which continues to be buried by hatred and insecurity?” »

\* Introduction to the Paschal Triduum of Gioventù Studentesca, Rimini, 13 April 2017.

\*\* The booklet “*We have never seen anything like this*” contains the quotes cited throughout the Triduum and is [downloadable in pdf format](#).

» Our friend's question is dramatic and radical, like so many of the questions that came up before this Triduum. This is the issue: are we sure that in the end, life awaits us, as Mannoia sings ("Che sia benedetta"), when we see our parents abandon us in order to build their futures, adults who are so cynical and who have so little hope for our desires, or friendships and loves that promise so much, so much, but suddenly make us sick, up and down, on the rollercoaster of emotions? Are we really sure that we are not kidding ourselves when we say that our life is special, that we can say about our life: "We have never seen anything like this"? Or isn't it rather true, as one of you wrote—this really moved me when I read it—, that our life is like a spare tire that sometimes can be useful to someone, exploited by someone, then abandoned?

This is, as Father Giussani says in page 4 of your booklet, "what characterizes man today: doubt about existence, fear of existence, the fragility of life, the inconsistency of the self, the terror of impossibility; horror at the disproportion between the self and the ideal." (*Corresponsabilità*)

Because of this slavery to the perception of others (friends, parents, professors), in front of a bad grade, in front of a test, in front of an unexpected message from a friend, as one of you says (in one of her poems, which you can find on page 6), "we are weak / at the mercy of uncontrollable events." Anything but freedom from the judgments of others! In fact, maybe what characterizes our time is this lack of tenderness for ourselves, as we are tossed about from one side to the other by the claims of others, by the expectations of others, worried lest we disappoint anyone. But in the end, do we desire at least a minimum of good for ourselves?

It seems that the one who must pay the price for all these expectations is our poor 'I.' Gaber describes it in an ironic and funny, but also tragic, way in the song that you'll find on page 5 (*L'odore*). He thinks he's realized his dream; he goes with his girlfriend to the lakeshore; it is a romantic scene, for which he has waited a long time. But, at a certain point, he smells something terrible: it must be that area. Then he dares to break that romantic moment and move to another area. He needs a little bit of time to recreate the atmosphere with his girlfriend. Again the smell! She is the one who stinks! And so he tries not to notice it, kissing her while plugging his nose! But there's nothing that can be done, and he has to let go of his dream. He returns home resigned, closes the door behind him and breathes a sigh of relief. But he can still smell it. He has it! He is the one who stinks! And he can't get it off of him. This is the most terrible aspect of our time: thinking that we are the ones who are wrong, not that others expect too much from us or don't understand us, but that we are inadequate, unable to show the least bit of tenderness toward ourselves. On page 5 of the booklet, Father Giussani says: if someone steps on our toes on the bus, we quickly yell at them, ready to take it up with that person, but if they tell us that we are not good, that we are not dressed well, that we said something wrong, we feel like we are going to die inside.

To think that our humanity is irremediably flawed, always inadequate, never up to the expectations of others, is the great inhumanity of our time: "It makes the 'I' disappear" (*In cammino. 1992-1998*), as Father Giussani says on page 5. When they tell you that you are wrong, you don't yell at them! We find ourselves in this nightmare in which fear assaults us and we want to scream, but our breath fails us, our voice can't get out. It is the greatest betrayal we can experience. This, in fact, is the greatest inhumanity of our time: not so much that we cannot do it, but the fact that we are in front of someone who tells us: "You are not capable."

Now the temptation comes, as one of you writes, to renounce these desires as too big, to stop seeking the "We have never seen anything like this!" because it demands too much from us, having desires like this only disappoints us and makes us suffer. So we are devoured by apathy in our daily life.

This great insecurity, this great fear of simply being ourselves, comes from the fact, as Hillesum writes on page 5, that nobody "will thank you for this struggle or, to say it better, who will care about it?" (*Diaries*). In fact, the fact that life is a deception can remain something theoretical, as a dear friend of mine from Rome said, because we can still talk about it; but when you sense that not only your father, not only your teacher—whom we can afford to lose—, not only your girlfriend—because you can always find another—, but even the friend in whom I trusted betrays me, that is, thinks that I am wrong, that my 'I,' just as it is, is uncomfortable for him (and then certain things are better not to talk about with him, certain topics shouldn't be touched, certain phrases shouldn't even be said), then I feel the greatest pain that a man can experience: the betrayal of a friend.

This evening we remember the moment in which Jesus realized that one of the twelve whom He loved most in the world, Judas, one of those to whom He had given everything, was about to betray Him. For Judas, the presence of Jesus was no longer fascinating, lovable, but had become uncomfortable. Jesus realizes that for this friend it would be better if He were dead.

Let us listen to the story of the moment in which Jesus becomes aware of the betrayal of Judas, as it is described in the words of John the Evangelist. And let us think about all those times when we too have felt betrayed, we discovered ourselves without a face, because we were without our friends, all those times when we felt our 'I' disappear, when we didn't even have an ounce of tenderness for ourselves because we felt betrayed.

"Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, 'Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me.' The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, 'Master, who is it?' Jesus answered, 'It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it.' So he dipped the morsel and took it and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After he took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, 'What you are going to do, do quickly.'" (John 13:21-27)

When we feel ourselves betrayed by a friend, we feel an abyss opening up within us and we find ourselves without a face. Let's listen to the song on page 6.

*Il mio volto*