

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS - 16. "TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE"

"When have you felt fulfilled and useful?" Fr. Giussani challenges our way of thinking, which so often seeks its own advantage, its own taste or its own convenience, with a new criterion that breaks open our measure: "How can I give myself as I am, serve all things, the Kingdom, and Christ evermore?" Existence acquires a meaning and a depth only if it is lived as a building up of the kingdom, as a service to Christ and to His design for reality.

But this energy to build is not the product of a generous human effort; instead, it is the fruit that Christ generates in the one who has discovered Him as the center of his life: "You alone, Lord, make me rest secure." (Traces of the Christian Experience—worksheet 16).

This is what Cilla, who works with Portofranco in Monza, shares with us.

Since November, the adventure of the study center Portofranco started also in Monza, and I am part of the staff of teachers who take care of the center.

"Take care of *what*?" My experience begins here, from this question. Because one thing is taking care of the fact that these kids need their report card more or less good, their homework ready for the next day, or that they recovered in that subjects about which they said: "Prof, I can study this for three days in a row, but I am continually 'behind'." Another thing, instead, is to take care of them, of their person, of their presence in the world, which is so close to mine that I find a great tenderness in myself every time they look at me and say: "Prof, has it ever happened to you that you think you have a ton of things to do, but that you are still missing the most important thing?" Yes, that happens to me, and how! I go to Portofranco today because of this need, because of this irrepressible nostalgia that not even a ton of things can fulfill.

So now, since I started going there, my attitude and my question has little by little been transformed and become: "Taking care of *whom*?" And the answer: "Of myself, of my need, of my begging heart. Taking care of that which I perceive to be my most urgent need: my encounter with Jesus."

Only after becoming aware of this urgency, which is so true and concrete that it makes me light up whenever I talk about it with my family, with Claudio and the kids ("Mama, you light up every time you talk about Portofranco!"), only then, when I understand how much it has to do with me, am I able to concentrate on the students. Even if they come simply to do their homework, they still arrive all worn out, or hungry, thirsty, tired, and sometimes they ask me: "Prof, can I go outside a little before starting? I have been inside all day." And you say yes because he's right. What's more, you go out with him: "Let's start in five minutes."

"Look at God's method," I tell myself. He manages to put together every spark of "good" that is in each of us, taking it even from the most banal circumstances. And He can even "write straight" with our crooked lines. And He takes care of me, making me think that I'm the one who is caring for the other.

Portofranco is a reality. It is made up by four walls, a door that takes ten minutes to open, a heater that takes another ten to turn on, on a good day... And with the cold that never seems to go away, even when we close all the shutters on the windows so that the tempe- »

» rature doesn't drop any more: "But, prof, why should we care about that?" Yes, because Portofranco is a living space of encounter, it is a living experience of a beauty that goes well beyond everything that we see and feel, well beyond the things that happen there. And not because any of us deserve it, but because it is the gift of an Other.

Last time, after finishing the scheduled lessons, I got together with Paola and Stefano. We had asked ourselves: "Why?" Because Jesus exists. This is the only plausible answer. Jesus exists. If I manage to realize this, I can see Him. I go back home, and light up again. I re-read the words of Wael Farouq from the February *Traces*: "Dialogue is no longer a form of negotiation to reach a compromise. It is no longer a search for points of contact or an overlooking of differences. It is no longer a formal dialogue, but rather a presence. In every form it takes, a presence generates hope. One does not have to be powerful nor an intellectual, but simply, as we are able, the best we can be." I thought about Bartimaeus, the blind man: He just managed to "be there", the best he could be. He heard Jesus pass by, perceiving the salvation which that Man carried with Him and shouted out to Him.

And this is what happens at Portofranco. Every Monday, we need to go there like Bartimaeus, seeking just to be there, as much as we are able, in order to recognize Jesus when He passes by.

I am moved by everything that happens by surprise, unexpectedly, truly and at the same time mysteriously. And I leave from there happy. "Prof, look! I haven't failed anything in a month," says a young man, so happy to show me all the good grades on his cell phone. I pretend not to see the only bad mark, in Italian class. "That's my subject..." I think. But I tell him: "How beautiful! Are you happy that you came to Portofranco?" And he responds: "Yes, prof. I am happy about the grades, but that is not the most beautiful thing that happens here." My heart starts beating faster. Nothing to add or ask, I give him a caress swallowing a tear. Even today, Jesus passed by Portofranco, and I was there, as I was able, the best I could be. And I was able to give Him a caress.

Cilla (Monza)

("If someone can write straight with our crooked lines", *clonline*, February 26, 2019)