

Notes and Comments

Funeral Homily for Msgr. Luigi Giussani

Dear brother bishops, my dear brother priests: “upon seeing Jesus, the disciples rejoiced.” These words from today’s Gospel show us the center of the personality and life of our dear Don Giussani.

Father Giussani grew up in a house that was—to use his words—poor in bread but rich in music, so that from the very beginning he was touched, or, better, wounded, by the desire for beauty. He was not satisfied, however, with just any ordinary beauty, with beauty however banal; he sought rather Beauty itself, infinite Beauty, and thus he found Christ. In Christ he found true beauty, the path of life, true joy.

Already as a boy, together with other youths, he started a community by the name of *Studium Christi*. Their plan was to speak of nothing but Christ, because everything else seemed to be a waste of time. Later, of course, he was to overcome this one-sidedness, but the substance for him would always remain the same: only Christ gives meaning to the rest of our life. Fr. Giussani kept the gaze of his life, of his heart, always fixed on Christ. It was in this way that he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a collection of dogmas, or moralism. Christianity is instead an encounter, a love story; it is an event.

This love affair with Christ, this love story that was the whole of

Giussani’s life, was at the same time quite far removed from any superficial enthusiasm or vague romanticism. Seeing Christ, Giussani truly knew that to encounter Christ means to follow him. This encounter is a road, a journey, a journey that also passes—as we heard in the psalm—through the “valley of darkness.” In the Gospel we heard of the final darkness of Christ’s suffering, of the seeming absence of God, of the eclipse of the Sun of the world. Giussani knew that to follow means to pass through a “valley of darkness,” to take the Way of the Cross, and all the while to live in true joy.

Why is this so? The Lord himself translated the mystery of the Cross, which is really the mystery of love, by means of a formula that expresses the reality of our life in its entirety. The Lord says, “Whoever seeks his own life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will find it.”

Father Giussani truly desired not to have life for his own sake: instead he gave life, and it is precisely in this that he found it not only for himself, but for so many others. He lived out what we heard in the Gospel. He did not wish to be served but to serve. He was a faithful servant of the Gospel. He gave away all the wealth of his heart, he gave away all the divine wealth of the Gospel that permeated him. By this service, by giving his life, this life of his has borne rich fruit, as we can see in this very moment. He has truly become the father of many and by guiding people not to himself but to Christ he has truly conquered hearts, he has helped to make the world better, he has helped to open up the doors of the world to heaven.

The centrality of Christ in his life also brought about in Father Giussani the gift of discernment, of deciphering correctly the signs of the times during an age that is, as we know, very difficult and filled with temptations and errors. Consider 1968 and the following years, when a first group of his followers went to Brazil and found itself face to face with extreme poverty and misery. What could be done? How to respond? And the temptation was great to say, “Just for the moment we will have to set Christ aside, set God aside, because there are more pressing needs. First we have to change structures, fix the external things; first we must improve the earth, and after that we will be able to find heaven again.” The great temptation of the moment was to transform Christianity into moralism and moralism into politics, that is, to substitute believing with doing. Because what does it mean to believe? Someone may say: we have to do something right now. By substituting faith with moralism, believing with doing, though, we retreat into particularism. Above all, we lose the criteria for judging and the guideposts that orient us in the right direction. The final result, instead of constructive growth, is division.

Monsignor 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 anything up but

rather, wastes human activity in false, ideological dogmatism, and so ultimately only destroys.

Don Giussani preserved the centrality of Christ and it was exactly in this way that he was able, by means of social works and needed services, to help mankind in this difficult world, where Christians bear an enormous and urgent responsibility for the poor.

The believer, too, must pass through the “valley of darkness,” the dark valley of discernment, and so also of adversity, opposition, and ideological hostility. He must face even the threat of physical elimination that, by doing away with his own, would be rid of this other voice that refuses to rest content merely with this or that action, but bears a greater message and thus also a greater light.

In the strength of faith Msgr. Giussani passed undaunted through these dark valleys and, given the novelty he brought, also encountered difficulties fitting in within the Church. It is always the case that if the Holy Spirit, in accord with the needs of the times, creates something new—which is in reality a return to the origins—it is difficult to find the right direction and to attain the peaceful unity of the great communion the universal Church. Fr. Giussani’s love for Christ was also love for the Church, and thus he always remained a faithful servant, faithful to the Holy Father and faithful to his bishops.

Through his foundations, he also interpreted the mystery of the Church in a new way.

“Communion and Liberation”

immediately brings to mind the modern era's particular discovery, freedom, while also recalling St. Ambrose's phrase, "*Ubi fides est libertas*" [where there is faith, there is freedom]. Cardinal Biffi drew our attention to the close accord between this phrase of St. Ambrose and the foundation of Communion and Liberation. Focusing on freedom as a gift proper to faith, he also told us that if it is to be a true, human freedom, that is, freedom in truth, then freedom needs communion. An isolated freedom, a freedom solely for the sake of the "I," would be a lie, and would necessarily destroy human communion. To be true, and, therefore, efficacious, freedom needs communion, and not just any communion but ultimately communion with truth itself, with love itself, with Christ, with the trinitarian God. This is the path to communion that creates freedom and brings joy.

The other foundation, *Memores Domini*, brings to mind once more the second Gospel from today:¹ the memory that the Lord gave us in the Holy Eucharist, a memory that is not merely the remembrance of the past, but a memory that creates in the present, a memory in which He gives Himself into our hands and into our hearts, and thereby makes us live.

Through valleys of darkness. In the last period of his life, Fr. Giussani had to pass through the dark valley of sickness, of infirmity, of pain, of suffering, but

here, too, his eyes were fixed on Jesus and so he remained true in the midst of all the suffering. Seeing Jesus, he was able to rejoice; he knew the presence of the joy of the Risen One, who even in the Passion is the Risen One and gives us true light and joy. He knew, too, that, as the psalm says, even passing through this valley, "I fear no evil because I know that You are with me, and I will dwell in the Father's house." This was his great strength, to know that "You are with me."

My dear faithful, above all, my dear young people, let us take this message to heart, let us not lose sight of Christ, let us not forget that without God nothing good can be built up, and that God remains an enigma to us when he is not recognized in the face of Christ.

Now your dear friend Fr. Giussani has reached the other world. We are convinced that the doors of the Father's house have opened, we are sure that now these words have fully come to pass: upon seeing Jesus they rejoiced. He is rejoicing with a joy that no one can take from him. In this moment we wish to thank the Lord for the great gift of this priest, this faithful servant of the Gospel, this father. We entrust his soul to the goodness of his Lord and ours.—
Translation provided by Communion and Liberation. □

Obituary for Louis Bouyer

Gruff, and sometimes hot-tempered, Louis Bouyer was a hard man to get to know. He was more comfortable

¹[The Ambrosian rite of Milan includes several Gospel readings.]