

WORKSHEET 3 - SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

3. Not a precept, but a Presence to observe

Second question and answer of the Assembly of Julián Carrón with the Equipe of Gioventù Studentesca*

When I received this question to work on for the Equipe, I thought right away that I had to share what happened to me this summer. The whole month of July, in fact, I went to do a study vacation in Dublin with three friends, in order to learn English. Before leaving, I had no idea what I would encounter. I was also rather scared of this new adventure, because I didn't know these friends very well. The first days, in fact, were terrible. I didn't like the family I was with and I felt really alone. I couldn't wait to go back home to my friends, to my boyfriend, and to my family, and my only thoughts were about what I was missing back in my city. The reality, though, was different, because now I had to be there, and therefore the only thing I could do was to entrust myself to an Other and to accept what was given to me. I didn't really know how to do that. Entrusting myself is much easier to say than to do. But this month helped me to understand it better.

Julián Carrón. You see? Even this month has helped you understand, because you don't understand by thinking about far away places, but by going through the circumstances.

Everything, in fact, changed when I realized that I, in reality, don't have to do anything except be myself in front of everything I encounter. The result was truly beautiful. When you meet people from other countries, who have a life, thoughts, a religion different than yours, you are constrained to put yourself in front of them, to have a dialogue. And from the moment in which I put myself in front of those people, they recognized that there was something different in me that interested them. Without doing anything in particular, these people saw in me something true and interesting that they wanted to follow. An example of this is a beautiful friendship that was born with some Turkish kids that were in my class. Initially, they didn't speak with anyone, they were very closed and almost afraid of the others. One day my professor had me work on speaking English with two of these kids; at first I didn't know what to do, because they didn't want to talk to me. So I decided to go for it and I began to tell them about everything that had happened to me the day before. I talked for almost ten minutes without stopping when, at a certain point, it came out that, on the Sunday before, I had gone to Mass. These two Turkish kids, Muslims, suddenly raised their heads, and asked me a bunch of questions about my religion. I didn't think about what was happening, but out of this dialogue with them came a beautiful friendship. They really opened up to me and then with the rest of the class. We often spoke and compared our different religions. One day, when we were speaking about this, I saw something that really struck me. During the lesson, Omar, one of them, asked me how long I had been a Christian; without even thinking, I responded that I was a Christian from birth, even if I had encountered Christ thanks to the companionship with GS when I started high school. Those two kids were surprised by what I was saying and with eyes wide open they looked at me and said: "You see? It is this that we are missing: a true encounter, because our religion is very often imposed on us, while it is obvious that your religion is living inside »

* [Notes from the Assembly of Julián Carrón with the Equipe of Gioventù Studentesca, Cervinia, 3 September 2016.](#)

» you.” Who would have thought? Two Turkish guys made me remember the great thing I had encountered; they made me recognize even more what I had. The rest of the month was full of encounters with people who, seeing me, were impressed by my way of being in front of the circumstances. Another beautiful example was the friendship that was born with a Sicilian guy. After we had known each other for three days, he came to me with these words: “You know, I realize that in life there is a big difference between people who exist and people who live, and you have the eyes of someone who lives. Tell me how you do it. I need to learn from you.” Speaking with him, I realized how we have the same desire to live, the same need to be happy. During this month I also recognized the importance of School of Community. In fact, while being in another city, with different friends than my little group back home, we had the same need to do School of Community, even if there were only four of us. One day I invited that guy from Sicily to the School of Community, and he refused the invitation. Halfway through, he came into the room where we were, asking us if he could listen in. Right when he came in, I was telling them how much I felt loved in that time, a love that was so big that it defined the way I was facing things. At the end of School of Community, the Sicilian came to us full of desire and asked us: “But do you guys really feel loved? Because I want to feel like that. I want to be well like you.” These are simple example that marked my time in Dublin. I received one gift after another. Every day there was something or someone that made me realize more and more the greatness of what I have encountered. Every day was another confirmation, even when my professor looked at me one day in the middle of a lesson and asked how come I was always so happy in class. He had never had a student who smiled so much and he realized that my smile had changed the rest of the class. The last day, when he came to say bye to me, he told me that he would remember my smile for a long time. Another professor, who was a bit strange, liked to make us speak about controversial subjects in class, like religion, gays, or gender; very often in class I found myself alone defending my opinions and that which I believed. This professor was always the first to challenge me and tried in every way to provoke me and ask me questions that I couldn’t answer. In all these dialogues, I tried not to fight anyone, but simply to be true to that which I thought and to that which I have encountered. Even this professor, the last day, came to thank me and to tell me that while he had not changed his mind, he had never met a girl who was so true in front of the things that she believed. One day a girl that we had met came to me and thanked me because I had taught her a better way of facing other people. The Turkish friends asked me to write them every day, because they needed this friendship. When we had come home, every so often the guy from Sicily wrote me because he didn’t know what to do, because there was nobody like us in his city who could help him take all his questions seriously. Then, a few days ago, he wrote me a beautiful message, telling me that he had become a Christian. A girl came up to thank me and now she is coming with us on the summer vacation. But all this happened not only with the people I met in Dublin, but also with everyone that I left behind in Rimini. When I came back, I saw that even my way of being with my parents, with my boyfriend, and with other friends had changed, and this was another confirmation for me. When you are in another city you realize that the people around you, you will only see for one month out of your whole life, and so you must ask yourself what you really want; while sometimes, when you are in your own city, there is the risk of being flattened out by the routine. In reality, it wasn’t like that for me, because when I came back, I had a different awareness inside of me. I realized that the encounter with Christ had taken over everything. I can of course not think of Him, I can fall into every human sin, I can cry because things aren’t going my way, but now this encounter has defined everything: myself, my life, my way of being in front of things. This Friend will never leave me; it’s up to me »

» *to recognize Him. Taking up again the question that was given to us for the Equipe: I am aware that I met this Friend the whole summer long; in my friends that were put at my side, whether in Dublin or in Rimini, I was not abandoned for a moment. And this is because in the people I encountered, there was a reflection of Him whom I have met.*

So what did you learn from all this? What made you think of this Friend? What did you learn from the question that we asked about “a friend at the height of his desire”? What has all this you have encountered helped you to understand?

It made me understand that often I am very paranoid.

Perfect. Paranoid! Underline it: paranoid! We worry so much about reality and then we go with these worries as if they were reality; instead they are only worries!

In the end, I shouldn't make so much of these worries, because that which I have encountered is truly greater and, as we said earlier, I have already been taken hold of by Him.

Yes, but you didn't meet one person this summer who fell under the concept of “friend” that we have. Many would have spent the whole summer in Dublin lamenting because there weren't friends like they have back home. Instead, what did you discover in what you told us?

I discovered that first of all the friend is inside of me.

How so?

That I have Him.

That you have Him! What does it mean to have Him? Is it something you imagine?

No.

What does it mean to have Him? Where was He?

In me.

“In me.” You need to explain it to me, because I don't know if I've understood.

It came out of me in the moment when...

“It came out of me.” Did you invent it, did you create it, did you generate it?

No. It was a fact.

Explain to me how this happens.

Simply, in the friend who says: “You have the eyes of someone who lives, in those eyes...”

In those eyes?

“...there is something.”

And how did you get eyes like that?

From an encounter with Christ.

Let's not lose track of how these things happen. Where have you seen Christ? What has generated these eyes that you have?

A love that I felt...

A love?! If you say this in public, people think that you are out of your mind. If you say it to me, you pass, but if you say it to another, he will respond: “This confirms for me that it is not worth it to be a Christian.” Therefore explain well what has happened to you, without departing for a moment from your experience. Tell me how you came to have that look in your eyes. Because this is what is missing. What road did you walk to arrive at the look in your eyes that you have now? Why is what you are saying true, that you have it on your face and inside of you, but how did it come to be inside of you? Do you have it by nature? Was it in you “by default”? And why do the others not have it? If it is present by nature, the Turkish guys, the Sicilian, the professor, all those with whom you have spoken would have it like you, but they can't even dream of such things. So, how did it come to be in you? Did you have a vision?

No, no.

An apparition?

»

» *No.*

What happened?

I have in mind the faces of friends and of adults...

Before they were in your mind, what must have happened? Originally they were not in your mind, you didn't even know they existed. You guys always jump over the steps. Before you knew this gaze existed, did you know it from birth?

No.

Not even being educated—you said it earlier—because you guys do not realize the things you said. What is the difference that your Turkish friend observed in you? It is something that he does not have and that instead you have. You just said it. What word did you use? One word!

An encounter.

Perfect! An encounter with what? With something you imagined? With a feeling? With a love that gave you wings? What was it? A list of rules? An instruction manual? What was it? An encounter with flesh, with faces, with people in whom you discovered this gaze. It is so true that even the Turkish guy grasped more than you the importance of an encounter, because he asked the question: "What is the great difference between you and me? That I am always stuck in routine," —he actually said: an imposition, something even worse—"instead what my religion lacks is an encounter." First step. And what happened next? You came across a different gaze, and as soon as it happened to you, you put it on. And what happened after the encounter?

This gaze defined my way of being in front of things.

How? Magically?

No, no.

Did it happen in a flash and then everything was perfect?

No, the awareness...

No! Tell me everything, because you guys take everything for granted and then someone says: "A love." I don't do this to make you waste your time on things you already know, but because when I ask you a question, you talk to me about love in the abstract. Do you understand? Instead of talking to me about an encounter with concrete faces, with people in whom you have found this look etc., etc. But how did it become yours?

My gaze became like that.

How did it become yours? The first day...

I lived.

You followed those people.

Yes.

And, at a certain point, you were surprised to find that you had this gaze and you weren't aware of it. It was those others, outside of you, that made you understand the difference that you carried within you. So who were your friends this summer? Those whom you left behind in Rimini or those whom you found in Dublin, who made you aware of that which the community in your city had given you?

Those who gave me that awareness.

And where were the ones from your city, if they were not there with you? Why did the people you met in Dublin know that something had happened to you? Because the gaze of the people from your city was in you. You said: "I" with a "we" inside. Why? Because the we had already become yours, it had become your gaze, it had become your difference, it had become your way of being different, your smile, the look in your eyes, your way of being yourself; we were inside of you, we were with you in Dublin. And you realized this because the others were surprised by you: "But why are you like this? Why are you living »

» like this and not just existing?», to use the words that you used. Who makes you live like this? Who makes you live like this?! So, in everything you have said, you used one word: how was this summer helpful for your path? What word did you use? What does all this that you told us mean for you? You said it with one word!

A confirmation.

“A confirmation.” A confirmation. Without having gone to Dublin, without having clashed with everyone, with having met those different people—no one thought like you—you would not have become aware of the difference that you carry, of the newness that the encounter introduces into your life, and so you would not be as certain as you are now. If you had spared yourself this, saying: “No, I’m scared, I’m not going,” this confirmation would not have happened. So when Pope Francis says that it is useful for us to go out, he is not giving instructions to the all-stars to go on mission; no, he invites us to go out in order to see the confirmation in us, in our experience, of what has happened to us. Because if one doesn’t go out of her backyard, she will not have the confirmation that you’ve had. If you would have said: “It is not possible, without my friends I cannot go anywhere,” you would have never had this confirmation. Right? So was doing this something more or something less for your life?

Something more.

And this does not mean that you always have to walk alone, because you have your friends within you. And you realize what they mean to you, what it means to belong to Christ in the Christian community, precisely because of this experience: you can go to the ends of the earth. Just like what happened to the disciples: they didn’t stay holed up in the cenacle; at first yes, before the invasion of the Holy Spirit they were all afraid, alone, full of fear about what was outside, but after there was an explosion: they went around the world, they didn’t stay licking their wounds and saying: “We are poor, Christ has left us, we are here alone.” He had already entered down to their marrow and therefore they went to the ends of the earth, but not only to proclaim what they had seen, but also to live. You go to Dublin to study English, and studying English, without worrying about it, you are a missionary. Mission is not something added to life, something that we “must” do. Without making any proposition, you are a missionary by living your life. And the first one to be helped by this is you yourself. Imagine if everything we lived, if all the challenges we faced were in order to make this confirmation. This is the beautiful situation we live in, you guys: we are in a pluralistic world, as soon as we leave home we find ourselves in a globalized world where everyone thinks differently. Thank God, because finally we can be “freely” Christian, without having to rely on particular conditions; the only condition we have is what has happened to us. Just like what happened to the first ones who met Him: the whole Roman Empire was different, there was a Pantheon of gods with all the religions, and did this scare the disciples? On the contrary: they went to show, to live, the difference that they were, that they carried within them. And everyone saw it, just like with you. It wasn’t because they were great, or important, or because they had a certain position of power, some level of Roman administration, because this difference of life passed through slaves, merchants, soldiers, normal people like you, who go to study English. And never again has the Church been as missionary as at the beginning. The problem is when we “must” go on mission, because this means that we have to be an “expert” on missionary work. No. The mission is for everyone who has encountered Christ. The day we “must” do it, means that we have lost something along the way. You didn’t take a course on missionary work in order to go study English, you were a missionary because it is part of you Christian DNA, because of the encounter you’ve had. And everything acquires a new meaning. This is fascinating first of all for us, and imagine how it is for the others, »

» who in fact cannot but desire to stay in contact with us after having met us. Imagine, after a summer like our friend has had, what a whole life lived like this could be! Decide for yourselves, friends! If you have something more interesting to do, you can leave! When you get tired of that, you can come back and we will be here—at least her and me—to live this. We'll keep the door open for you. Thank you.