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Audience with members of Communion and Liberation

This morning, in Saint Peter's Square, the Holy Father Francis met with more than 60,000 members of the Communion and Liberation Movement, on the occasion of the centenary of the birth of the founder, Servant of God Don Luigi Giussani.

The following is the Pope's address to those present:

Address of the Holy Father

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning and welcome!

Many of you have come, from Italy and various countries. Your movement does not lose its capacity to bring together and to mobilize. I thank you for having manifested your communion with the Apostolic See and your affection for the Pope. I thank the President of the Fraternity, Professor Davide Prospero, as well as Hassina and Rose, who have shared their experiences. I greet the Cardinal Prefect, Cardinal Farrell and the cardinals and bishops present.

We are gathered to commemorate the centenary of the birth of Msgr. Luigi Giussani. And we do so with gratitude in our hearts, as we have heard from Rose and Hassina. I express my personal gratitude for the good it did for me, as a priest, to contemplate some of Don Giussani's books – as a young priest – and I do so as universal Pastor for all that he knew how to sow and spread everywhere for the good of the Church. And how could those who were his friends, children and disciples not remember him with heartfelt gratitude? Thanks to his impassioned priestly paternity in communicating Christ, they grew in faith as a gift that gives meaning, human breadth and hope to life. Don Giussani was a father and teacher, he was servant to all the human anxieties and situations that he encountered in his educational and missionary passion. The Church recognizes his pedagogical and theological genius, deployed from a charisma that was given to him by the Holy Spirit for the "common good". It is not mere nostalgia that leads us to celebrate this centenary, but the grateful memory of his presence: not only in our biographies and hearts, but in the communion of saints, from where he intercedes for

all his own.

I know, dear friends, brothers and sisters, that periods of transition are not at all easy, when the founder is no longer physically present. Many Catholic foundations have experienced this throughout history. We must thank Fr. Julian Carrón for his service in guiding the movement during this period and for having kept steady the rudder of communion with the pontificate. However, there has been no lack of serious problems, divisions, and certainly also an impoverishment of the presence of an ecclesial movement as important as Communion and Liberation, from which the Church, and I myself, I hope for more, much more. Times of crisis are times of recapitulation of your extraordinary history of charity, culture and mission; they are times of critical discernment and missionary relaunching in the light of the current ecclesial moment, as well as of the needs, sufferings and hopes of contemporary humanity. Crisis makes us grow. It should not be reduced to conflict, which annihilates. Crisis makes us grow.

Don Giussani is certainly praying for unity in all the structures of your movement; surely. You are well aware that unity does not mean uniformity. Do not be afraid of diverse sensibilities and of confrontation in the progress of the movement. It cannot be otherwise in a movement in which all the adherents are required to live personally and to share co-responsibly the charism they have received. Everyone lives it originally and also in community. This is important: that unity is stronger than dispersive forces or the dragging on of old oppositions. Unity with those who lead the movement, unity with the Pastors, unity in carefully following the indications of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, and unity with the Pope, who is the servant of communion in truth and charity.

Do not waste your valuable time in gossip, mistrust and opposition. Please! Do not waste your time.

Now I would like to recall various aspects of the rich personality of Don Giussani: his *charism*, his vocation as an *educator*, and his *love for the Church*.

1. Don Giussani was a *charismatic man*. He was certainly a man of great personal charisma, capable of attracting thousands of young people and of touching their hearts. We might ask ourselves: where did his charisma come from? It came from something that he had experienced first-hand: as a boy, at just fifteen years of age, he was thunderstruck by the discovery of the mystery of Christ. He had intuited – not only with the mind but with the heart – that Christ is the unifying centre of all reality, he is the answer to all human questions, he is the fulfilment of every desire for happiness, goodness, love and eternity present in the human heart. The wonder and fascination of this first encounter with Christ never abandoned him. As the then-Cardinal Ratzinger said at his funeral: “Don Giussani always kept the gaze of his life and his heart fixed towards Christ. He understood in this way that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a set of dogmas, moralism, but that Christianity is an encounter; a love story; an event”. Here lies the root of his charism. Don Giussani attracted, convinced, converted hearts because he transmitted to others what he carried within him after that fundamental experience of his: the passion for humanity and the passion for Christ as the fulfilment of man. Many young people followed him because the young have great intuition. What he said came from his lived experience and from his heart, and so he inspired trust, warmth and interest.

The President said that you are committed to ensuring that the charism given to Don Giussani for the good of the entire Church always produces new fruit. This is the wise custody of the gift passed on to you, a custody that is not solely a matter of conserving the past but that, enlivened by the Holy Spirit, is able to recognize and welcome the new buds of this tree that is your movement, that lives in the good soil of ecclesial communion.

In this regard, you will ask: how can I respond to the needs for change of the present time, while preserving the charism? First and foremost, it is important to remember that it is not the charism that must change: this must always be newly received and made to bear fruit today. Charisms grow like the truths of dogma and morality grow; they grow in fullness. It is the ways of living it that can constitute a hindrance or even a betrayal of the purpose for which the charism was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Recognizing and correcting misguided ways, where necessary, is not possible other than with a humble attitude and under the wise guidance of the Church. And I would summarize this attitude of humility with two verbs: to *remember*, or rather to restore to the heart, to recall the encounter with the Mystery that led us up to here; and to *generate*, looking ahead with confidence,

listening to the cries that the Spirit expresses newly today. "Humble men or women are those who are concerned not simply with the past, but also with the future, since they know how to look ahead, to spread their branches, remembering the past with gratitude. The humble give life, attract others and push onwards towards the unknown that lies ahead. The proud, on the other hand, simply retreat, grow rigid ... and enclose themselves in that repetition, feeling certain about what they know and fearful of anything new because they cannot control it; they feel destabilized ... because they have lost their memory". [1] Look at the memory of the founder.

Dear friends, take to heart the precious gift of your charism and the Fraternity that preserves it, because it can still make many "vines" flourish, as testified to by Hassina and Rose. The potential of your charism is still largely to be discovered, it is still largely to be discovered; I therefore invite you to shy away from any withdrawal into yourself, out of fear – fear will never lead you to a good harbour – and from spiritual weariness, that will lead you to spiritual laziness. I encourage you to find suitable ways and language so that the charism that Don Giussani left you may reach new people and new environments, so that it may be able to speak to today's world, which has changed since the beginnings of your movement. There are many men and many women who have not yet had that encounter with the Lord that has changed your life and made it beautiful!

2. Second aspect: Don Giussani the *educator*. Ever since the first years of his priestly ministry, faced with the bewilderment and religious ignorance of many young people, Don Giussani felt the urgency of communicating to them the encounter with the figure of Jesus that he himself had experienced. Don Luigi had a unique capacity for sparking the sincere search for the meaning of life in the heart of young people, for reawakening their desire for the truth. As a true apostle, when he saw that thirst awaken in young people, he was not afraid of presenting the Christian faith to them. But without ever imposing anything. His approach generated many free personalities, that adhered to Christianity with conviction and passion; not out of habit, not out of conformism, but in a personal way and in a creative way. Don Giussani had great sensitivity in respecting the character of each person, respecting their history, their temperament, their gifts. He did not want people who were all the same, and neither did he want everyone to imitate him, but rather that each person was original, as God had created them. And indeed, those young people, as they grew, each one according to his or her own inclination, became significant presences in various fields, whether in journalism, in schools, in the economy, in charitable works and in social development.

This, friends, is a great spiritual legacy that Don Giussani left you. I urge you to nourish in yourselves his educational passion, his love for the young, his love for liberty and the personal responsibility of each person faced with his or her own destiny, his respect for the unrepeatable uniqueness of each man and woman.

And third: *Giussani son of the Church*. Don Giussani was a priest who loved the Church very much. Even in times of disorientation and strong contestation of the institutions, he always firmly maintained his fidelity to the Church, for which he had great affection, love!, almost tenderness, and at the same time a great reverence, because he believed that she is the continuation of Christ in history. He used to say: "You have encountered this company: this is the way in which the mystery of Jesus [...] has knocked at your door"[2]. He used this beautiful expression: "company". The groups of the movement were for him a "company" of people who had encountered Christ. And, ultimately, the Church itself is the "company" of the baptized that holds everything together, from which everything draws life, and that keeps us on the right path.

Don Giussani taught respect and filial love for the Church and, with great balance, knew how to keep together charism and authority, which are complementary, both necessary. In your meetings you often sing the hymn "The road". Giussani, using precisely this metaphor of the road, said, "Authority assures the right road, charism makes the road beautiful"[3] .

Without authority, one risks going off-road, going in the wrong direction. But without charism, the journey risks becoming boring, no longer attractive to the people of that particular historical moment.

Among you too, some are entrusted with a task of authority and governance, to serve all the others and to indicate the right road. In practice, this consists of guiding and representing the movement, fostering its development, carrying out specific apostolic projects, assuring fidelity to the charism, protecting the members of

the movement, promoting their Christian journey and their human and spiritual formation. But alongside the service of authority it is fundamental, in all the members of the Fraternity, that the charism remain alive, so that Christian life may always conserve the appeal of the first encounter. Never forget that Galilee of the call, that first Galilee of the encounter. Always return there, to that first Galilee that each one of us has lived. This will give us the strength always to go in obedience in the Church. This is what “makes the road beautiful”. In this way, ecclesial movements contribute, with their charisms, to showing the attractive nature and the newness of Christianity; and it is up to the authority of the Church to indicate wisely and prudently the road on which the movements must walk, to remain faithful to themselves and to the mission God has entrusted to them. In the words of Don Giussani, we can affirm that “this continuous exchange between institution and charism is an inalienable requirement of the Incarnation. In no way can this relationship between grace and freedom be thought of as a dialectical alternative, as if the institution were not the charism and that the charism did not need the institution. A charism must be institutionalized. And an institution must maintain the charismatic dimension. They are ultimately the Church's *only* reality. Could one possibly think of the human organism without the skeleton that supports it? So, it is unthinkable for the Church to live without an institution”[4].

You are well aware that the discovery of a charism always passes via the encounter with real people. These people are witnesses who enable us to approach a greater reality, which is the Christian community. And in the Church, the encounter with Christ remains living. The Church is the place where all charisms are safeguarded, nurtured and deepened. Think, in the Acts of the Apostles, of the episode of Philip and the eunuch, an official of the queen of Ethiopia. Philip was instrumental in his conversion; he was the mediator of the encounter with Christ for that man in search of the truth. And so, how did this episode end? Philip baptized the eunuch and the text says: “When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more” (Acts 8:39). He “saw him no more”! After leading him to Christ, Philip disappears from the life of the eunuch! But the joy of the encounter with Christ remains – that joy of the encounter always remains! Indeed, the account continues: “But [he] continued on his way rejoicing”. We are all called to this: to be mediators for others in the encounter with Christ, and then to leave them to take their own path, without binding them to us.

And, to conclude, I would like to ask you for some practical help for today, for this time. I invite you to accompany me in the prophecy for peace – Christ, Lord of peace! The increasingly violent and belligerent world frightens me, I tell you truly, it frightens me; in the prophecy that indicates the presence of God in the poor, in those who are abandoned and vulnerable, condemned or set aside in the social construction; in the prophecy that announces the presence of God in every nation and culture, meeting the aspirations for love and truth, for justice and happiness that belong to the human heart and that stir the lives of peoples. Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts. Do not stand still.

Dear friends, love the Church always. Love and preserve the unity of your “company”. Do not let your Fraternity be harmed by divisions and oppositions, which play into the hands of the evil one; that is his craft: to divide, always. Even difficult moments can be moments of grace, and they can be moments of rebirth. Communion and Liberation was born precisely in such a time of crisis, in '68. And later, Fr. Giussani was not frightened by the moments of passage and growth of the Fraternity, but faced them with evangelical courage, trust in Christ and in communion with the Mother Church.

Let us thank the Lord together today for the gift of Fr. Giussani. We invoke the Holy Spirit and the intercession of the Virgin Mary, so that all of you may continue, united and joyful, on the path that he showed you with freedom, creativity and courage. From my heart, I bless you. And please, I ask you to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] *Address to the College of Cardinals and the Roman Curia*, 23 December 2021.

[2] L. Giussani, *Dal temperamento un metodo. I libri dello spirito cristiano: quasi Tischreden*, 6, Milan 2002, p. 7.

[3] Id., *Un avvenimento nella vita dell'uomo*, Milano 2020, p. 249.

[4] Id., Supplement to *Litterae Communionis-LC*, n. 11/1985.
