

THE CHALLENGE OF MATURITY

THE URGENT NEED FOR HAPPINESS

Notes from the meeting with Davide Prospero, Francesco Barberis and Student Youth members finishing their last year of high school

in video conference from Milan, 29th May 2022

Songs: *Haja o que houver**
La strada

Francesco Barberis. This journey is beautiful because, “come what may,” as we have heard, “I am here,” we are here and we are expecting something great tonight as well. In the meantime, good evening to everyone, I especially thank that Davide is with us, I thank the Student Youth students finishing their last year of high school here in attendance and those online, those in their fourth year of high school and the adults present and remotely connected. It is clear that, after the announcement given to us months ago by Fr. Andrea of *The One Voice of the Ideal*, there continues to be—and in fact my wish for you is that there always be—a struggle, a battle that goes on between the “voice” of the ideal, the voice that pushes us to never settle, and the circumstances that (as I have read in so many of the interventions you have sent) sometimes seem, especially at the end of this year, to put pressure or even go against this voice. I was struck to read some of the words in your interventions: “ideal,” “destiny,” “significant presences,” but also “struggle” and “sacrifice.” Evidently during these months these words have taken on a new specific weight, and have put us back in front of Father Giussani’s words, all of us eager to understand and discover them anew. As he says, “Only in clarity and confidence can we find the energy to act” (“Traces of the Christian Experience” in L. Giussani, *The Journey to Truth is an Experience*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, p. 78). Clarity and confidence, these are in fact the words that reveal the reason for our being here tonight; we are grateful that Davide is here to respond to our questions.

What need is there for an assembly at this hectic time of the end of the year? It can be fruitless or a decisive point of departure or starting point. After all, each one of us made the effort to be here—even if online—because we are waiting for something from which to begin again. It all depends on you: ask yourself whether you are here because you did not know where to turn or because you are waiting for something. Why are you here? What are you looking for? What are you looking for in our friendship? What has happened to you during these months? What do you expect from the people sitting next to you? What path do you want to take to reach the ideal to which your life has been aspiring since you

* “I am here, / come what may. / I will wait for you. / Return on the wind, / Oh my love, / return quickly / if you please. / How long has it been? / I have forgotten / why I remained far from you. / Each moment is more painful. / Return on the wind / if you please. // I know, I know / who you are to me. / Come what may, / I will wait for you.” (“Haja o que houver”, by P.A. Magalhães Madreus).

got up this morning? To begin this dialogue, we chose some of the interventions that came in by identifying four themes. Let's start with the first theme that emerged in so many contributions; we could summarize it this way: the challenge of the present. Is it possible to live the circumstance, today's circumstance, the circumstance of these weeks, as protagonists and not burdened by a struggle?

Hi, I'm going into my fourth year of high school; I should premise that my high school is very demanding. Last summer I failed Physics, I didn't take it very well, I experienced it as a failure that I was a bit ashamed of and wanted to let as few people as possible know about it. Only later did I realize that I was wrong. It was actually nothing that serious, although sometimes I forget this. Anyway, I ended up telling someone in a moment of panic and a friend said to me, "Why don't you change school? If this environment makes you feel this way, why stay?" Without a moment's thought, I responded with an outright "no". I thought the issue had been resolved, but that question stayed in my head all year long, and this year was also quite challenging, and although I studied subjects I really enjoyed, I had to give up a lot of things and my emotional well-being didn't let up for a moment. All the while I would ask myself, "Is it worth making all these sacrifices?" A few months ago, during a week when I felt like my studying was suffocating me, I burst into tears in the school bathroom and a girl came up to me to keep me company. After talking for a while, I told her this was a very stressful time for me and in which I felt I was kind of drowning. She then told me that the fourth year of high school is a bit of a trap, in the sense that by this time it's too late to change, it's not worth the hassle, it would be better to stick it out and move on; and so new doubts presented themselves to me, "But is this how I see it? Am I in this school just because it's too late for me to change?". I don't think it is, or at least I don't want this to be the reason. I want to be in this school because I know it is an environment of people who want to study hard, because the teachers make me interested in the subjects they teach, and because my efforts are rewarded. At the same time, however, I know that living school with the angst I currently experience, that giving up the hours of sleep that I feel I need and coming to GS is not worth it. So, I recognize that in order to experience school, and consequently everything else, at its best, I have to change. And so I want to ask: how do I make this change happen? How can I free myself from this trap and ensure that my sacrifices, which should definitely become less, pay off? How can I avoid becoming crushed by my study also in light of the last and, I imagine, challenging year ahead?

Hello everyone. I tried to plan everything to prepare for my final high school exams at the beginning of the year, as I usually do. But, at some point, things started to not go along with the timetable I had planned; moreover, I had people near me who had already chosen their college, and I felt behind everyone. From February onward I therefore entered a cycle of apathy and became very confused, the only certainty I had left was that after my final high school exams I was going to leave home as I wouldn't have stayed here under any condition. But I didn't feel that that was enough for me, I was studying a lot but with a great inner turmoil. At some point, however, I had to figure out what the best university choice for me would be, but when I tried to apply for the entrance test I found out that there were no available spaces in that university. Those days were very sad for me, I felt like everything was against me and that maybe I was making the wrong decisions. Then I got down to work, faced other entrance tests and got my driver's license. My only goal became to finish school

and get out of there as soon as possible. Then as I was thinking about what would happen after school, life, choices and difficulties, and seeing the end of this path getting closer and closer, for the first time I started to feel a huge sense of uneasiness. I felt like everything was too much for me, disproportionate. Then something happened: one evening I saw a report on TV about a Ukrainian girl whose legs had been amputated but who had nevertheless decided to get married. I saw the image of her boyfriend holding her and they were dancing together in the hospital with a huge smile, and this fact awakened me, it showed me that situations need not reduce me, crush me, and that maybe it is not all too much for me.

Davide Prosperi. Hello, everybody. I'll start to respond to what the first friend who intervened said. I believe that the time you are going through now is one of the best times in your life, at least that's what it was like for me, this is my memory of it. The moment when you finish high school and you are faced with the choice of what you are going to do next—whether it's going to college, to work or who knows—is a very intense time, as these first two speeches have already recalled, and as each of you knows well through your experience of it. It is very intense because two big things are happening at the same time: on the one hand, you have the deadlines of your final high school exams, which inevitably you see as a goal, of course, with justified concerns regarding how they will go and the struggle in preparing for them. And the beautiful thing is that no one can afford to not care: even though someone may have studied reluctantly for four years, five years, or always had full marks, no one can afford to take this moment lightly. Why do I say this is a beautiful thing? It is a beautiful thing because moments like this in life are a grace; when we go through circumstances that force us to be serious towards life, these are moments of grace because they mark a truer way of being towards everything. Because one realizes that reality cannot be governed to one's own liking, things are not what we want them to be, they don't go the way we want them to go; we have to accept a reality that is greater than us, but we also desire to engage with it. We feel somehow compelled, bound to strive to engage with it.

On the other hand, here is the second reason, all of this goes along with a decision (what to do next, what will happen?), an important issue, because we feel all of the urgency, not just of making the right choice, but an urgency for happiness. The fear we may feel at the thought of making the wrong choice is our fear that our happiness or unhappiness may depend on it; in short, we understand that something big is at stake. So it is a very important moment.

On the topic of failure mentioned by the first girl who spoke, I want to make two remarks: I understand what you are saying, however, we need to understand what is at the root of this feeling that you feel; when things go wrong, when you fail at something and feel uneasiness toward yourself, in addition to the disappointment with the thing itself, you perhaps also feel an uneasiness toward others. Why? Because you experiences it as a failure, but in itself failure is never a problem, that's not what scares us; what scares us, dear friend, is not the failure itself, but it is that the failure points to us as being failures, that having failed at something, in some way, casts a doubt on the greatness for which we feel we were made and shrinks the horizon of our human expectations—"I can't do it," "everybody will look at me this way"—. But the experience of failure is exactly the opposite, and we have so many testimonies of it, of people who have lost everything and yet start again. You were telling us earlier about that Ukrainian girl. How is such a thing possible? It is possible because even failure gives rise to a question, that is, it becomes a gaze of compassion toward oneself, we realize

that we are small, that it is not we by our own strength who make our greatness. Our greatness can only be given to us by someone else.

With this I also respond to the second question you asked and also to what the second speaker said, and I do so by recounting an episode from the Gospel that is very familiar to everyone. How many of you have been to the Holy Land? Eh, some, a few, mostly adults. Well, I suggest you go, because you understand so much more, you understand the concreteness of the things that you read in the Gospels and that you hear about Jesus when you see them. For example, when I went to Cana, I remembered an episode from the Gospel (in fact, Jesus's first miracle took place at Cana) which I always wondered about—when I was your age, there was this Gospel and I always asked myself this question: “But why is it that Jesus, who opened the eyes of the man born blind, raised the crippled from their beds, raised a dead man to his feet, performed the most powerful miracles, and performs as the first miracle—it is the first one recounted in the Gospel—the transformation of water into wine?”. With all the things that were needed, with all the difficulties people had, he turns water into wine? It's a bit of a waste. All of God's energy concentrated into such a trivial thing, because at the wedding feast they had no more wine. However, if you go to Cana you understand, because when you see the houses of the Jews, especially the somewhat wealthy ones, they all had ablution rooms. You would go down, there was this kind of pool inside the house that was not for bathing, but for cleaning oneself. Why? Because one had to purify himself, for example, before eating you had to purify yourself because if you didn't you were impure, and water was kind of man's attempt to elevate himself towards God, precisely to purify himself. In other words, our goal is to reach that greatness for which we feel we were made, whereas wine, in ancient times—those of you who went to a Classical Lyceum know this better than I do—was considered the nectar of the gods, and even for the Jews it was a gift from God, a sign of God's love.

And so, what happens? What happens is that, at one point, the banquet runs out of wine, and then Jesus's mother says to him, “There is no more wine! They have run out of wine,” which also means: there is no more love, they no longer experience God's love, they are so caught up in their attempt to elevate themselves to God with their effort, with their ethics, with their own energy, with their attempt to purify themselves, to be better and better in the eyes of everyone, that they no longer recognize that God loves them and this makes their life empty of love. Life becomes the feeling of continuous failure, because we realize that this power to rise to God is limited, we do not have it. What does Jesus answer her? “Woman, how does your concern me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2). Have you ever wondered why he says this to her? Because it is clear that if He performs that gesture—turning water into wine—He declares to everyone who He is, because only God can accomplish what man cannot with his own strength: reach out to Him.

Man can tend towards Him, but he can reach Him only through a free gift, in the experience of a free, total love: “Just as you are, I love you. Just as you are, you are a value to me.” Then Jesus makes that gesture, and in making it He gives freely, He says, “What you are trying to do in your own strength, you who find yourselves so incapable of accomplishing, so insufficient, even with all the energy you put into it, I am bringing it to you, I am giving it to you, and I am giving it to you for free. It is Me.” And then one's experience of this limitation, of this struggle, of these constant failures, becomes infinite gratitude for this gratuitousness whereby Christ gives us His love, that is, He gives us what we want but cannot manage to obtain! The esteem we would like from others. The recognition we would like from others. The fact of feeling valued based on what we think of ourselves or what

we would like to be.

All this is given to us for free, and where do we experience it? Inside a company, that is, a place where we receive a gaze, we are esteemed, loved not for what we think we are worth, but for so much more! For who we are, for what we are made for. Our being here together is a promise that this love will be realized in our lives, that this judgment of greatness, this good for which we feel we were made will be realized in our lives.

Hello everyone. A sentence that has strongly marked my journey of faith recently and that the choice for the future makes even more burning is, "Cast your nets on the other side." As Giussani says in Is it Possible to Live this Way?, "Our words [...] first [...] penetrate the brain, and therefore they still mean almost nothing, but then they penetrate the heart and now they begin to mean something" (L. Giussani, Is it Possible to Live this Way?: An Unusual Approach to Christian Experience: Volume 2: Hope. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal & Kingston, London, Ithaca 2008, p. 25). I have increasingly perceived with my mind and heart the truth of what we say to each other, I have also felt the burning of a living and solid experience in Christ, but I still sense in me a certain resistance in entrusting myself to God, in giving my life. What is holding me back? This year I saw and heard several testimonies of people who gave their lives to Christ, and they were the happiest people. The desire, the need to be like them, to give every hour to Him is growing within me, but how? Why do I tend to reduce this infinite desire for greatness and holiness that I carry in my heart every day?

Prosperi. Look, let's put it this way, instead of starting from the end, let's start from the beginning. The beginning is not the fear of losing this desire that you have, the beginning is that you have this desire. And this is what makes the difference; in fact, why would you be afraid of losing something? Because you care about it. If you care about a girl, why are you afraid of losing her? Because you care about her. Then the first thing that this feeling is asking of you is to better understand what this desire that you feel burning inside is for.

This desire for greatness, this desire—you said—for sanctity, even holiness, that is, greatness—it's the same thing—, that you feel inside, comes from the experience you have lived so far. The experience you have had has led you to recognize what your heart is made of, because you could have had a completely different experience and not have this desire at all, and therefore not even the fear of losing this desire that you have.

Then the first issue is to be grateful for the experience that led you to recognize this, and in this way you have already indicated the way to figure out how not to lose it: to stay attached to this experience! You have to stay inside what began to manifest what you are made for during your day to day life.

In addition, we have the preoccupation of cutting the game short, that is, of finding out how it will end; the beauty however is in playing out the game, when the adventure still needs to be lived. So the issue in life is to not close this desire; it isn't knowing how it will end—this will become clear in time—because this is the beauty of life, that is the beauty of adventure. So do you want a suggestion? Don't detach yourself from the experience that led you to desire the things you said before, because these things are true. Life might challenge them, it will certainly challenge the things you are saying, one way or another, with the evidence it will give you, maybe it has already given you some, I don't know, but the way to deal with any crisis is marked in front of you. When we have an encounter which presents the emergence of a definitiveness, and which makes us feel like we are made for no less than this, the point is not to worry about what other things will happen. Things will happen

anyway. But everything that will happen will confirm, make more and more true, more deeply true what made you discover this truth about yourself, about your humanity.

You have the road ahead of you, and the trials will not be—how can I say this—the bar to see what level your faith is at, how holy you are and how great you are; the trials will be the way God will make you grow in faith, and through this you can understand more and more what you are attached to in life. And they will make you stronger and stronger, if you don't lose sight of the origin of that experience, if you don't detach yourself from it.

Barberis. Davide already started to touch on the second theme when he said, “The beginning is not the fear of losing this desire that you have, the beginning is that you have this desire,” from which springs the gratitude for this desire which cannot be crushed by anything. Now, the second theme is the unknown of the future, whether it is possible to face the risk of the future without fear.

Hello. I've been struggling a little bit these past few weeks, because I feel like the world I've lived in over the years, which feels like a home for me, is about to vanish in ten days and I will be left with nothing. I'm afraid that as circumstances change, the certainties I have gathered among my teachers, classmates, those in their first year of high school, will be lost. This year especially has been a wonderful discovery, between friendships born with classmates I had never considered, the “small group” which became a point of reference, the Saturdays we spent studying together with friends with one of our teachers, and the dinners at our priest friend's house. I have some fixed points that I would bet everything on, but this does not take away my fear. I realize more than ever these days that I am lacking, I have a giant desire first of all to live the end of school well, to study with my friends and then for next year at university, because I have the beauty that I saw here at school and in Dergano in mind and I cannot desire anything less than that. I have a great fear that I will not find this beauty again, and I cannot fully trust that what is to come is meant just for me.

Prosperi. Three years ago, where were you?

Here.

Prosperi. Would you have imagined that you would be saying the things you are saying today?

No.

Prosperi. Why?

At the beginning of high school, especially in my first year, it took me a while to settle in, even in terms of friendships. I hoped, I wished, although I couldn't expect what I later saw and experienced through my friendships; so no.

Prosperi. Exactly, you hoped—what she says is very true, she's being very honest—but you couldn't see at that point what would have happened, right?

Yes.

Prosperi. What does this mean? You didn't know how, but it happened. I mean, you are saying these things now, even though three years ago you wouldn't have imagined it because of the way you are, because of your temperament, because of the difficulties you had, and so on. You could not have imagined it, and yet it happened. This means, first of all, that we are not in charge of our life and destiny, but our desire is certainly like a compass that orients us when destiny appears within the horizon of our life. You were able to recognize what was made for you. You were able to attach yourself to the true friendships that you now don't want to let go of, you were able to bet, to take

risks, just as you are, with your temperament, with your personal traits, with your strengths, with your difficulties, with all that you are, you were able to bet on an experience that seemed attractive to you. Even to the point of going all the way to the other side of your town because of this attraction, and that makes you realize that your desire is capable of bringing you much further than the sum of your strengths would lead you. Be careful, though, because now something important needs to be said. What has changed since three years ago? Are you about to say it? Say it!

No, maybe, if before...

Prosperi. An ice-cream if you guess; just kidding!

Maybe I used to pay less attention to the fact that I wasn't really happy, whereas now I know what real friendship is for me, and I notice when I don't experience it.

Prosperi. Well done! Of course, you have experienced it! That's the difference; so, if you've had this experience—attention—you say, "I'm afraid of losing it," but before you even say, "I'm afraid of losing it," you have the certainty that you've had this experience! You have the certainty that what your heart desires exists! Before it was something you felt as desirable, something you hazily hoped for; now you know it exists! It has a human shape, faces, there are companions, friends, an experience of study, successes, failures. You are on a path. So, this journey that has begun, is made up of faces, it is an environment, a companionship, which we call the "movement," it is relationships, within which you see that you can experience the toil of your study, the toil of difficult relationships, but you are helped in everything. This thing exists, leaving your school will not make it disappear. This thing exists, first of all, because of these relationships, so the first thing I say to you is, "Start from there," because you must always start from a point of certainty; from there much more will surely spring forth and grow, because this is a beginning. And you will see that this will make you even more certain and happy.

I am a college professor. When I chose my college, I found myself doing Chemistry, but I never, ever thought I would become a university professor, because after the second year I wanted to quit, I couldn't take it anymore. Chemistry is very difficult (there's a friend here who would recall this well), I was going through a very rough time and I wanted to be a mountain guide. I hung in there—some friends helped me—but, at one point, I was almost determined (I didn't tell my friends, because I didn't want them to convince me otherwise) to quit. But right then, it was 1994, I went to the CLU Exercises and I saw Don Giussani for the first time up close, I heard him speak; it was really an event: that day I realized that I wanted to live for no less than what that man had spoken about. From there I started to attempt to meet him; it took me a year because he was so difficult to reach, he was starting to feel unwell, and from there a relationship started. The extraordinary thing is that from that encounter I started to feel enthusiasm towards my study again as well. Before, the enthusiasm was simply directed towards wherever it was possible to be with him and those who were with him, in other words towards the experience that surrounded him, which I found so attractive. Then I started to become more enthusiastic about my study as well, so much so that I did a PhD, and now I am a university professor; all this was not because I chose it from the beginning but because of the unfolding of the circumstances of life.

All this is to say that when an encounter happens in your life you understand that something has changed; something is triggered—in a Christian sense it is called an "event," the event is something that happens—that you had not foreseen and it changes you, it changes you permanently; and even if you leave, it has changed you anyway. When this happens, life takes on a new orientation, as was the

case for me, life took on a new orientation for you too, therefore you shouldn't be afraid.

Thank you.

I'm in my final year of high school and I wanted to talk about these last few months that have been very special for me. I have been surrounded by friends who are completely engaged in finding out their calling in their choice of college. I saw them all tending towards their aim to find out through everything, every class, every study afternoon, every meeting, what they felt was right for them for the coming year. It really struck me to see them slowly grow in their awareness, so much so that I almost envied them, whilst I felt I was on a totally different path, as I was "lucky" enough—I don't know how lucky, really—that my initial idea to do Medicine became clearer and more certain, until it became a deeply rooted final choice thanks to encounters and experiences directly regarding this field. However, the issue that I have felt most urgent to my heart in these months emerged later, immediately after having made my decision: it is well known to all that the entrance test for Medicine is very tough and it is even more difficult to pass in Milan. With regards to this, I experience a constant dichotomy because my head is super rational and concrete and knows that if I were to be rejected, hypothetically, it wouldn't be a tragedy, and that therefore it would be illogical and senseless to think of this as a failure and subsequently turn it into a critical judgment towards myself. On the other hand, inevitably this thought is triggered, always, when there is a hiccup in my path, whether it be linked to a friendship, school, but often also to my family: I immediately feel a crushing weight on me and am not tormented (tormented is perhaps a bit too much), however, very much caught up in questions about myself—"did this happen because I wasn't up to it or perhaps because there is something wrong with me?"—. It is extremely difficult to get out of this pit I dig for myself, because I feel overwhelmed by a thousand questions, even more so because I know that it is actually not the right way to look at things. While I know this mechanism is wrong, this judgment starts to grow and it becomes a vicious cycle that is suffocating. Having said that, I am very grateful, extremely grateful to my friends, and not because they take me out of the situation, but because I see their attention, I see how they look at me; on the other hand, I tell myself, I will have to live with myself my whole life and I would like to learn to see myself this way first of all, however, I just can't manage to.

Prosperi. Not only that, think that maybe you will find a guy who will have to live with you all his life, too!

Poor guy, I'm sorry...

Prosperi. Aside from the joke, the issue is complex, so you have to figure out how to deal with it. Honestly, you don't seem in that bad shape at all, it seems to me that the things you say in some ways are what anyone would say. It's good, it's normal for you to be afraid of not passing the test, because of what we were saying before, that is, because you care. Fear—this thing we have to clarify—is not a primary feeling, it's a secondary feeling that comes as a consequence of desire, from the fact that you desire something and then you're afraid that you can't get it, or you're afraid of losing it if you already have it. Why? Because it is a sign of how much something is worth to you. A man, a woman, a girl is one in itself, so you can't detach the primary feelings from the secondary feelings; we are a unified whole, and so it isn't wrong for you to feel this fear. What is the point? The point is that you have to decide what to bet on. And betting—that is the only word you can use here—means that you cannot know what the true outcome will be. Betting implies taking a risk.

The problem then becomes why is it worth the risk, you see? In this specific case, what does it mean

to risk? It means that you have to devote some of your time, which you could spend on other things, to study, to prepare for the test, to ask other friends to help you, to get out the exam papers, to go to pre-courses; and then you take the test, which could go well or not. It might go well in Syracuse (you would have to be willing to go all the way to Syracuse, for example), and there, depending on how things go and the signs that are given to you, you might be called back and maybe not just once; maybe you get it the first time in Bicocca University—I wish you all the best that you would, you would then enroll in Bicocca—or maybe not, maybe you will have to decide between various options and each time you will be faced with the same question. But this is something good, because all of the most important things in life which are capable of giving us more, which make us more certain and provide us with more certainty, imply the risk of our freedom.

A mechanism doesn't make us certain of a good decision we have made. Do you have a boyfriend?
No.

Prosperi. Should you find him or should you decide anything else in life, whatever you decide, whatever your path, there will come a time when you will experience this question dramatically. Whatever your path is! Be it even the most handsome guy that everyone wanted and he chooses you! Just think a little bit, if with what you have said, you were to say, “No, I wouldn't dare take the risk”; risking is essential in order to be able to acquire more certainty, because the most important certainties in life are affective certainties, that is, they involve an attachment, a betting of oneself. This is part of the method by which we become certain, otherwise we would never become certain and at the first turn we would change our minds. So this a great opportunity: you jump in, try it, then we'll see, depending on how it goes, and you'll decide how to orient the matter.

I'll let you know.

Barberis. Let's move onto the third topic, which is about the drama regarding choice, how to choose between two things that attract us.

Hi, I'm in my fourth year of carpentry school. I recently finished an internship in which I had a very good time and where I realized that I really liked the job I was studying for. Before this internship I had a very clear idea about what I was going to do in the future, which was to continue studying and specialize in my field, but after this internship and a future job offer my clear idea split into two, either to continue my studies or start working. So my question is, how do I choose since I would like to do both?

Prosperi. Beautiful! First of all, congratulations on your choice; I know a carpenter who did wonders—and I wish you the same!

Barberis. I just got it now, because I actually have a friend who's a carpenter and I thought, “What miracles has he ever done?” Ha, ha...

Prosperi. My daughter is sinking in her chair, because these are the kind of jokes I make at the dinner table! Basically, the answer to your question is actually quite simple, however forgive me if I say something first that I think may also help those of you who are panicking because you haven't yet decided what to do next. Unlike you, I didn't know what to do at all, or rather, I did, in the sense that my choice was supported by very weak reasons. I wanted to do Engineering and I wanted to do Engineering for a very material reason. Since I lost my dad when I was a little boy, I lived my whole childhood and youth always kind of trudging along; I also have a brother who is a literary man of the

highest order, it was clear that he was going to do Literature and be penniless, then he even went on to be a priest—of all things—and so I said, “I’m going to do something where at least you earn money, at least one of us in the family will.” In those days an engineer made good money, and I felt I was quite good at it. But I also had a great passion for extreme mountaineering, I used to go and do some crazy things: on Saturdays after school (I used to go to school with a rope in my backpack) with some friends I would take the train and we would go off. In my final year of high school I had trained all winter to tackle the variant of a new route on the South Face of the Matterhorn; have you ever been to Cervinia?

No.

Prosperi. You know what the Matterhorn is, though, don’t you? Anyway, it was a very difficult side to climb and so I had been training hard all summer. I actually didn’t know if I wanted to do Engineering. I too, like my friend before, was worried about the entrance test, but I told myself, “Whatever, I’ll study for the test.” After my final high school exams, I went with my classmates to the Pilgrimage to Czestochowa to ask Our Lady to clarify my thoughts on what I should do. When I came back from the Pilgrimage, the test date came out—it was already mid-August; the test was scheduled on one of the only three days when the weather forecast gave stable weather, after which autumn would come and the year would be gone. So I was faced with this tremendous doubt: “What do I do? Do I go and tackle the South Face of the Matterhorn (which was my passion) or the Engineering test (which was the right thing to do)?” What would you have done? The Matterhorn? That’s exactly what I did, I went to the Matterhorn and so I didn’t take the Engineering test. You already knew the answer, because as I mentioned before I studied Chemistry. After the Matterhorn trip I had to decide, I didn’t really know what to do; in the end, I did Chemistry and that became the path for my life. And I am very happy that I made that choice.

All of this is to say two things: first, you must not think that your happiness or unhappiness is played out solely on the basis of your choices, because if that were the case, it would mean that our fate totally depends on us, when in fact everything we have said this evening documents exactly the opposite, that is, that there is Someone who loves us, loves us every moment and therefore every moment is an opportunity for us to say to ourselves, “This is your place”. I am not saying that this should not make us take the decisions we have to make seriously; on the contrary, we should take them even more seriously, because they are the way we ask destiny to show us the way and to fulfill itself. And the more you are engaged with your own desire, your passions, your own questions, the more you are engaged with them, the more you will be attentive to the signs that are given to you in order to understand what the most appropriate path is.

The second thing is not to underestimate your passions, good passions, obviously not meant in the sense of impulse or whim. By passions I mean what really moves you, what you see as a possibility of fulfillment for you. Always remember that your effort is an attempt; it will always be an attempt. If it goes wrong, it will still have been an attempt and having tried it will clarify for you what is most appropriate for you and this way you can move forward. Your situation seems simple to me because you have two passions—you have realized that you want to study, however, you like the idea of being a carpenter: you can do carpentry later on, if at some point, going forward in your studies you realize that you don’t feel like it anymore; or, you finish your studies and then you pursue carpentry after having studied some more, which would surely enable to do things that maybe you wouldn’t be able to do without having studied. So, you have nothing to lose by going ahead and studying some more,

unless you have an objective necessity which compels you to start working.

If you have an objective necessity, you have to come to terms with it, because the criteria for making a decision are the three recalled in *The One Voice of the Ideal*: the series of inclinations or natural gifts, which we have called our passions; the unavoidable circumstance, whereby one is obliged to go to work because of, for example, a family disaster; the needs of the Church and the world (cf. J. Carrón, “The One Voice of the Ideal,” *Traces*, May 2010. <https://english.clonline.org/cm-files/2019/06/17/jc-web10-89.pdf>). These are the objective criteria—objective!—, including natural inclinations, which is an objective criterion because you don’t give it to yourself, you find it within yourself.

Barberis. Let’s conclude with this last theme, which is precisely the third criterion Davide just mentioned: the need of the Church and the world, thus life as a task. What does it mean to be useful to the world?

I have two questions. Regarding The One Voice of the Ideal which we read this year, I don’t understand the third criterion: the need of the world. How should I respond to the world’s need? The world does not need me, it goes on just the same without me, in fact maybe it would be better off. Certainly I cannot help solve the world’s needs, the issues that it is affected by, the world will always remain the same and I certainly will not change it. The second question actually has nothing to do with this topic. For various reasons I am happy with this recent period, with how this year is going. Alongside this happiness, however, there is a question, a persistent worry: in everything I experience I am afraid, afraid that of all the good I am experiencing nothing will remain, and that with time or at the first mishap everything will vanish. So I constantly ask myself, “What remains of the things that happen to me? Of the beauty I see, that I see in the people I meet and they in me? What stands the test of time?” Being at the end of my final year of high school, I also wonder about school: “What remains of these five years? What withstands the impact of time? What withstands the finiteness of things and me?” Nothing remains, so then where can I find a solid landing point forever?

Hello, to take the problem of life and its usefulness for me seriously is to ask, to question. I can no longer find the strength to go on with my life. How can I go on with my daily life while there are people dying under the weight of bombs in Ukraine? How can I face this war? Everything perhaps has meaning, I’m no longer able to study like before, I’m no longer able to look at a plane in the sky serenely, everything has become dull, distant, tiring. How does one deal with a pandemic and a war at the same time? How can one stand in front of these two great wars that claim victims as if in a video game? How can I find myself and my happiness? What is my place in this chaos? To what do I serve? What can I serve? What can I do? What is my path? These are all questions I have been carrying for months; they themselves are my obstacle in the face of choosing my vocation, sending my mind into a tailspin and driving my heart crazy. The biggest help? God; every time there is something around me that awakens me; every time I catch a gaze that is different and alive. Every time my life presents me with challenges that seem impossible to overcome and then I overcome them calmly, every time I see Him, I feel Him, I feel His love, I feel that God is with me and that He never leaves me. I feel His love, a love so great, so infinite that it is impossible not to reciprocate with as much infinite strength and to see Him around me, in people, in actions, in my experience; it gives me

the strength and the will to stand before these questions, before reality, before my life.

Prosperi. Beautiful. I will respond briefly. Many times, many of our friends have already answered these questions: for example a great friend of mine, not only mine, but of many others and of many here, whom you did not get to know directly because you are too young, but who you know through what is told about him and the books regarding his story; Enzo Piccinini. He said two things, first, “Put your heart into what you do”; second, “You must not be alone.” And this—I think—is a law of life. It is good that you feel that what we do is useful, is useful for the world, does not end up only in our own benefit, but is for something great, that our life is for building something great, that it serves someone, that it leaves a mark! We do not feel worthy of this, we feel we are too small for it, yet we would like it to be possible. The point is not to leave a mark in history books, but to leave a mark in people’s hearts, a mark in what we do, in who we are, in our friends, so that our lives are useful, have meaning, and we are in the world for something.

So how to respond to the world’s need? You don’t know, even I don’t know what the need of the world is, and this implies that, first, we learn to judge what is happening to realize where it is more useful to commit one’s resources, since we have been given them. More useful with respect to what? With respect to God’s plan, because when one has encountered the secret of life, and the secret of life is called Jesus Christ, the purpose of life becomes to cooperate in having God’s glory increased in the world. Then where are we most useful? Do you guys already know? No. So we must not be alone, and starting from our own inclinations, within the circumstances that we find ourselves living, we ask; if we have an intuition, an idea, a desire, let us compare, let us ask someone older to help us see, so that everything is taken into account, so that everything is looked at in the totality of its factors, so that our life is—at least as an ideal from which to start—lived from the beginning with a sense of usefulness. So that we do not have to start something with the doubt that it may not be useful.

Barberis. Let us conclude here. I wanted to thank you so much, Davide, for what you told us, and I wanted to recall something that you emphasized to us at the beginning when talking about this stage of the journey: “It is a beautiful thing because moments like this in life are a grace; when we go through circumstances that force us to be serious towards life, these are moments of grace because they mark a truer way of being towards everything. Because one realizes that reality cannot be governed to one’s own liking, things are not what we want them to be, they don’t go the way we want them to go.” This we not only felt, but sensed and experienced in our dialogue with you this evening, so thank you.

Prosperi. Thank you to you.

Barberis. Goodbye to everyone, present and online. Good evening to all.