

Audience of Holy Father Francis with Communion and Liberation
on the occasion of the centenary of Luigi Giussani's birth

October 15, 2022, Saint Peter's Square



**"LET THIS HOLY PROPHETIC
AND MISSIONARY
RESTLESSNESS
BURN IN YOUR HEARTS"**

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and teacher, he was
a servant to all
the human anxieties
and situations
that he encountered
in his educational
and missionary passion

Franciscus



Introductory greeting by Davide Prospero

President of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation

Holy Father, we are infinitely grateful to you for agreeing to receive our people in this beautiful square that takes us back to so many encounters with the Popes, from Saint Paul VI to Saint John Paul II to Benedict XVI and you, Pope Francis.

In the audience you granted us on March 7, 2015, after thanking Fr. Giussani for the good you had received by meditating on his writings, you recommended that we not be “worshippers of ashes but pass on his flame.” Fr. Giussani truly ignited a flame in the lives of thousands of men and women; he transmitted the flame that is the Holy Spirit, a fire of knowledge of Christ and man. This fire remains alive even 17 years after his death, as two experiences we have chosen among many will recount at the end of this greeting.

Holy Father, you have not limited yourself to a recommendation, but you have helped us in recent years, especially through the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life—whom we thank for accompanying us patiently and paternally—to imagine and undertake a new missionary impetus, a new page in the life of our history. As President of the Fraternity, I would like to assure you, Holy Father, that together with the other leaders and the whole movement we are following the indications of the Holy See very carefully, so that the charism that the Holy Spirit gave to Fr. Giussani for the good of the whole Church may continue to bear new fruit. Today, full of gratitude and joy for your invitation, we are here to ask you how we can contribute even more to the renewal that the Church is carrying out under your paternal guidance.



We are in the year of the centenary of Fr. Giussani's birth. This occasion has prompted many initiatives, promoted with the intention of broadening our focus toward those peripheries of the world and of the soul to which You have directed us. It is true, there is so much desolation, so much drama in the hearts of men, and at the same time an infinite expectation for Christ, conscious or not, which reveals the profound reason why the Lord wanted to give the whole Church, in Fr Giussani, a witness to Christ's thirst for man and man's thirst for Christ. In this very square on the occasion of the first world meeting of the ecclesial movements on Pentecost 1998, Fr. Giussani concluded his speech before John Paul II thus, "The real protagonist of history is the beggar: Christ who begs for man's heart, and man's heart that begs for Christ."

The two testimonies that now follow are meant to be a sign of the vitality of what Fr. Giussani generated with his total yes to Christ.

Thank you Holy Father, once again, for your paternity, your welcome, for the words you wish to address to us and for your blessing.

Testimony of **Rose Busingye**

Your Holiness, I am here because I am a daughter and therefore I cannot address you except as a father who guides me. Paternity in faith is what won me over to Christ, and therefore to the Church.

I, too, from Africa, encountered the great ecclesial family through the gaze of Fr. Giussani, who educated me to discover myself through the recognition of a mysterious Presence. It is a Presence that with time has increasingly assumed the unique features of the face of Christ, within the companionship of Communion and Liberation. Christ is the content of me. "I am You who makes me now."

Before, I loved a Jesus who had nothing to do with me, who had nothing to do with my smallness, but in meeting Fr. Giussani I discovered that I was worthy of Christ's loving embrace. I am nothing, loved to the core.

I am a nurse and work with women with AIDS, in the slums of Kampala, where there is enormous poverty. I have always wished that they too, in their condition, might discover that they are loved and wanted by Christ. Thus I rediscover myself communicating God's eternal love even by giving a patient a simple injection. Thus in all these years, my brothers and sisters who are poor, sick, miserable in the eyes of most, have discovered that by belonging to Christ everything belonged to them: their children, their husbands, their stone breaking from morning to night, which is their job, the schools they desired and built for their children. Our mothers desire that no one should feel alone or abandoned.

That is why, in 2005, when they heard about so many people who were in a bad situation because of the catastrophe caused in the United States by Hurricane Katrina, they wanted to donate all the fruit of their weeks' stone-breaking to help American families. These very poor Ugandan sisters of ours want-



ed to help support America: charity does not make calculations. For the same reason, when they heard about the war in Ukraine they immediately began to give what little they had. They described the money they collected as a few poor tears offered to the heart of God so that He could convert their hearts and the hearts of those who are waging war. They looked to the Pope, their father, with whom they feel free to weep in the face of this evil.

As Fr. Giussani once told me, “In the very form of your vocation, as a *Memor Domini*, you cry out in the crowd, to everyone, that Christ is the meaning of everything. That it is Christ who saves.”

I am not ashamed to speak to you like this, because throughout your pontificate you have always spoken and speak about Christ in a way that coincides with my life, and that is why I feel like your daughter. Thank you.

Testimony of **Hassina Houari**

Your Holiness, The first time I went to Portofranco, a free study aid center for students—established in Milan and now spread to 40 cities throughout Italy—, I was 15 years old and needed help in English.

The first thing that struck me was doing the interview alone, having to tell strangers who I was. But what put me at peace, though, was to see the picture of John Paul II hanging there, kissing an old man. I even said to myself, "How good these people are who have a picture of the Pope kissing an old man on the head!" This image relaxed me, because I was fond of the Pope who had been to Morocco, my mother's country of origin, and who was a person who represented peace to me.

After the interview, I started going to Portofranco and before long I was spending every afternoon there. I had found friends to talk to about everything and who had the same questions that I had about life. Then one day they invited me to a vacation in the mountains.

On that vacation, I realized for the first time in my life that I had not been abandoned, despite the fact that my father had left us when I was 7 years old.

After a hike, Fr. Giorgio Pontiggia, who was leading the vacation, asked us, "How was the hike?" and we replied, "Beautiful!"; and he asked, "Why was it beautiful?" No one could answer. At certain point, Fr. Giorgio said, "Not even if you all joined together would you be able to make a single pebble out of that mountain, not even a little flower growing out of the rock... the only one who can do that is God." When he said "God" like that, I thought, "So does he really exist?" At that moment I felt my heart burst, and I said "God" with all my heart. It seemed logical to me that it was Him. As if what I had been waiting for in my life existed; He seemed so fatherly and so present! Not someone to be afraid of, judging my evil and my limitations, but Someone who had made that flower growing out of the rock for me too.



I will never forget that day; it was June 2009. Since then a journey to get to know God, that is, the Father, and to get to know myself has begun.

In college, I enrolled in Languages and International Relations. I majored in English and Arabic. English was the very subject I had gone to Portofranco for; and I did not speak Arabic even though I was Arab. As a friend told me, it is really true that “when you encounter God He makes you embrace your story.”

My mom is also very grateful to this place. When invited to a meeting she spoke thus of Portofranco, “For me it was like a husband, because it helped me raise my daughter.”

As I grew up, I discovered that that little old man whom John Paul II had kissed on the forehead was Fr. Giussani. His charisma has accompanied me and is accompanying me on the journey of life. It is a great gift; although I never met him in person, he has been God’s instrument in my life because he is allowing me to flourish! Thank you.

Address of His Holiness Pope **Francis**

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 [people] 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 Proserpi, 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 Fr Giussani's books—as a young priest—and I do so also 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. Fr Giussani was a father and teacher, he was a 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 charism 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 our hearts, but in the communion of saints, from where he intercedes for all his own.



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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 Julián 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 in the presence of an ecclesial movement as important as Communion and Liberation, from which the Church—and I myself—expects 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 of what has limited the fruitful potential of Fr Giussani's charism; they are times of missionary renewal and 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.

Fr 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 debates in the progress of the movement. It cannot be otherwise in a movement in which all the adherents are called 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 time!

Now I would like to recall some aspects of Fr Giussani's rich personality: his *charism*, his vocation as an *educator*, his *love for the Church*.

1

Fr 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 15 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: “Fr Giussani always kept the eyes of his life and of his heart fixed on Christ. In this way, he understood that Christianity is not an intellectual system, a packet of dogmas, a moralism; Christianity is rather an encounter, a love story; it is an event”. Here lies the root of his charisma.

Fr 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 intu-

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ition. What he said came from his lived experience and from his heart, and so he inspired trust, fondness and appeal.

The President said that you are committed to ensuring that the charism given to Fr 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 yourselves: how can we 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: it 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*, that is, 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 repeat, 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". (*Address to the College of Cardinals and the Roman Curia*, 23 December 2021). Look to the memory of the founder.

I encourage you to find suitable ways and language so that the charism may reach new people and new environments, so that it may be able to speak to today's world

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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 Hassina and Rose testified. 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 yourselves out of fear—fear will never lead you to a good harbour—and from spiritual weariness, which leads you to spiritual laziness. I encourage you to find suitable ways and language so that the charism that Fr 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: Fr Giussani the *educator*. Ever since the first years of his priestly ministry, faced with the bewilderment and religious ignorance of many young people, Fr Giussani felt the urgency of communicating to them the encounter with the figure of Jesus that he himself had experienced. Fr

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. Fr 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 be 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 Fr Giussani left you. I urge you to nourish in yourselves his educational passion, his love for the young, his love for the personal freedom and responsibility of each person faced with his or her own destiny, his respect for the unrepeatable uniqueness of each man and woman.

3

And third: *Giussani son of the Church*. Fr Giussani was a priest who loved the Church very much. Even in times of disorientation and strong disputes 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” (L. Giussani, *Dal*

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temperamento un metodo, Bur, Milan 2002, p. 7. He would use 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.

Fr 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 “La strada” [“The road”]. Giussani, using precisely this metaphor of the road, said that authority assures the right road, charism makes the road beautiful (Cf. *Un avvenimento nella vita dell'uomo*, Bur, Milan 2020, p. 249). 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 in 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 that, in all the members of the Fraternity, the charism remain alive, so that Christian life may always preserve the appeal of the first encounter. Never forget that first 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 Fr 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 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" ("The Movements in the Mission Of the Church", Supplement to *Litterae Communionis-CL*, n. 11/1985.

You know 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, the Church. It is in the Church that the encounter with Christ remains alive. The Church is the place where all charisms are safeguarded, nurtured and deepened. Let us 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 does this episode end? Philip baptizes the eunuch and the text says: "And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught

up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more” (*Acts* 8:39). He “saw him no more”! After leading him to Christ, Philip disappears from the eunuch’s life!

But the joy of the encounter with Christ remains—that joy of the encounter always remains! Indeed, the account adds: “And [he] went 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 really 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 beat in the lives of peoples. Let this holy prophetic and missionary restlessness burn in your hearts. Do not stand still.

Dear ones, 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 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.

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