

We love life more than they want death

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After the November 13th Paris massacre that horrified the world, the shocking affirmation contained in Bin Laden's spokesperson's statement regarding the Madrid train bombings of March 11, 2004 echoes again: "We love death more than you love life." Already after the apocalyptic tragedy of the attack on the Twin Towers, the West was appalled by the ideological anger of fundamentalist Islam. More recently, the attacks in Madrid, London, and Paris have made it harder to understand the just and reassuring idea of a Europe that is at the center of dialogue with all peoples, an opening on the Mediterranean and a connection to the Middle East.

This idea is challenged by fear, which is precisely the goal of terrorism. Terrorism seeks to fill the urgency of looking for an answer that will protect us, our cities, and our world with uncertainty and confusion. The fact that we feel the need to defend ourselves should force us to reflect on what we truly want to defend and on what defense will be successful in the long run. What is the fear that makes us feel uncertain, insecure, and suspicious when we see people different from us speaking in languages that sound like Arabic on the street, in bars, on trains, and, especially, at airports? Our well-being and our social system are not enough to give us certainty, to fight terrorists' commitment to death which makes them seem so much stronger than us. Is there an ideal worth living for that is more powerful than the one terrorists die for? An ideal to live for is much more than one to die for.

In the first case, life, even with its burden of contradictions and sufferings, is positive, and is a place of meaning, fulfillment, and promise of fulfillment. Christian martyrs gave and sadly still give their lives, living and affirming life even when it is taken from them so violently. In the second case, one's own life and the lives of others are insignificant, and life can be dispensed of or extinguished for a utopian idea of earthly paradise. It is a more basic variation of the ideologies that bloodied the twentieth century. While we are busy discussing the alleged new rights that contradict the values and truths of our tradition, we are run over by a passing train that sweeps away our superficiality and distractions. The darkness of this tragic wave of nonsense that we are victims and creators of needs to become a push to reflect on who we are, and thus an occasion for a possible change, for a possible new outlook on things.

Is there still something worth leaving the house for, going to work for, starting a family for,

bringing one's kids to school for, going to the movies for, going shopping for, going on a trip for, taking care of one's health for, helping those in need for, choosing to keep breathing even when in a hospital bed for...in short to live and live together for? During a retreat for the university students of CL in 1994, Fr. Giussani told a story about Mother Teresa of Calcutta. A journalist had interviewed one of Mother Teresa's youngest nuns, not yet twenty, and she told him, "I remember one time when I found a man in the street and brought him into our house." "And what did that man say?" "He didn't complain or curse but simply said, 'I lived on the streets like an animal and now I am going to die like an angel, loved and cared for. [...] Sister, I am about to go back to God's house' and then he died. I never saw anyone smile like that man." The journalist replied, "Why does it seem that even the greatest sacrifices does not seem stressful or difficult for you sisters?" At that point, Mother Teresa stepped in, "Jesus is the one we do everything for. We love and recognize Jesus, today."

Fr. Giussani commented on this story saying, "What was yesterday either is today or does not exist anymore." It is precisely this "today" that makes the difference. Recognizing that gaze on one's life today, and not yesterday, or 2000 years ago, is what makes the difference. Why do we immediately understand a gesture like the one in the story that was just described as good, regardless of our religious or ideological position? Because it is profoundly human, and therefore true for everyone. It reawakens something in the "I," something we might not even remember having. It corresponds! A heart that desires to live for the good, for that good that makes sense of the past and awakens hope for the future can fight the inhumanity of our times.

The ideal of freedom which our countries were built on challenges any act of violence that occurs both inside and outside of its boundaries, and has its origin in the fact that every single human being, regardless of his physical or moral state, is in relationship with the infinite and so, has a destiny that no one can own. Giving one's life for the good of the individual person, not to destroy the other in the name of death. Those who defend nothingness, and deny the urgent need to sustain each other and look for a meaning in life, become a support for the messengers of death. Because, the messengers of death are the messengers of nothingness.

In this situation we must recognize that the only possibility for beginning again is an authentic education, the liberation of the "I" from the slavery of a horizon too small for its existence. Only with a great ideal is there freedom, and therefore courage to face life, no matter what happens. An adequate response to this need does not begin with our initiatives, but from welcoming what perhaps we unconsciously await. It's Christmas! Christmas, with the good news of God made man, call us to recognize that this greater humanity we are in need of comes through the entry into the world of a concrete truth, as unexpected as it is visible. This ideal has an objective point of verification that anybody can recognize, in any

part of the world, whatever their beliefs, religion, gender, or sex. This ideal affirms the good and loves the destiny of every single person.

Is there a good to give our lives to that is greater than the evil that denies life? Until we begin spending our lives to answer this question, we will be slaves to fear, because each of our lives is hanging by a thread. Pope Francis reminds us that the only justice that can triumph is God's name and that it is called Mercy: "Only love fills the emptiness, the negative chasms that evil opens in hearts and history." Today like 2000 years ago, the great announcement that John's gospel begins with, and echoes in all corners of the earth through the mouth of that Christianity which has shaped Europe: "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."

But will today's man, exhausted by his anxieties and hurt by disappointments, be able to recognize and welcome it? What the Pope proposes with the institution of the Year of Mercy is the presence of a historical reality, positive for all of us, against any threat of evil, from the enemy outside of us to the pettiness inside us. The Church turns to us as a place chosen to house and make known the event of Christ that remains in history. This shabby human companionship in which the Word made flesh continues to be present is the method that Christ himself wanted. This, in the end, is our security, nothing else.

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