



## Message on the occasion of the Macerata-Loreto Pilgrimage June 10, 2023

### *“A wonderful companionship of friends”*

Dear friends,

We are living in a period of history which spares us no trial: the flood disaster in Emilia-Romagna, the war in Ukraine and in many other parts of the world, the many peoples struck by deep poverty and need, the persecutions still cruelly perpetrated in numerous countries, particularly against Christians. Up to the most recent news stories, marked by such harsh and inexplicable violence in which the most fragile and defenceless always suffer. And even in our daily lives, or in those of our friends, there are so many cases of hardship, illness or fatigue that make the ground collapse under our feet. Everything seems to contradict the possibility of good, everything seems to stifle the cry for meaning that springs from our hearts, in a cultural context that imposes on us a vision of life which is so ephemeral and illusory that it ultimately leaves us deeply empty and alone. Added to all this is our pettiness and evil that we are forced to deal with on a daily basis, as St. Paul reminds us, “For I do not do the good I want, but I do the evil I do not want” (*Romans 7:19*).

Yet the genuine desire for a light to illuminate the path, the need for a handhold to cling to that can truly sustain life and save it, is never entirely stifled. Speaking of St. Ignatius of Loyola a few months ago, Pope Francis said: “This is what we must learn: to listen to our own heart, to know what is happening, what decision to make. To make a judgement on a situation, one must listen to one’s own heart. We listen to the television, the radio, the mobile phone. We are experts at listening, but I ask you: do you know how to listen to your heart? Do you stop to ask: “But how is my heart? Is it satisfied, is it sad, is it searching for something?”. In order to make good decisions, one must listen to one’s own heart. This is why Ignatius would go on to suggest reading the lives of the saints, because they show God’s style in the lives of people who are not very different from us, in a narrative and comprehensible way; because saints were made of flesh and blood like us. Their actions speak to ours, and they help us understand their meaning” (*Audience, September 7, 2022*).

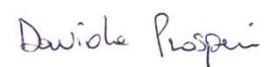
In order to make “good decisions,” in order not to be crushed by our own and others’ evil, each of us needs to be educated to listen to that original demand for happiness, truth and justice that dwells in our heart, of which Fr. Giussani spoke and witnessed to us so passionately, a heart that is called to open in order to merge with the heart of the One who created it, leaving a lasting trace of the work of His hands in our little existences. The loneliness to which the contemporary world leads us is an existential condition that complicates this education, to the point of making it seem impossible. For this we need a place, we need signs: friends. The saints are our first and greatest friends, as St. Ignatius suggests in the Pope’s account. Or as the letter to the Hebrews quoted by Fr. Mauro-Giuseppe Lepori at the Fraternity Exercises describes: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith” (*Hebrews 12:1*).

A “cloud of witnesses.” Starting with the person next to us. I wish you to look at each other in this way, in walking “with perseverance” alongside each other. So that the question that gives the title to this year’s edition of the pilgrimage to the house of Our Lady of Loreto that you are about to undertake emerges in all its force, that question that Jesus addresses to Mary Magdalene on Easter morning: Who do you seek? On Whom do you “keep your eyes fixed”? Christianity introduces this method into history: that of human companionship that, while shovelling mud from the kitchen of your house, or finding you a new home when yours has been destroyed by bombs, reminds you that you are not alone, that there is Someone who loves you and saves you. Hence the continual search and begging for such signs, within and beyond the drama of life. Signs that make possible a journey together, and the looking at everything, even the ordinary, with genuine hope. Discouraged, miserable, fragile, but on the way filled with renewed wonder because we recognize ourselves, without justification or merit, to be well loved. As a friend of ours from Romagna wrote in the midst of the flood: “Today, with tears in my eyes, because the wound is great, I cannot help but recognize that He never leaves us alone and has preferred us by giving us a wonderful companionship of friends” (Signed letter, May 22, 2023, [english.clonline.org](http://english.clonline.org)).

In order for this being together of ours to last, to whom can we first of all entrust ourselves if not to her who first said her total “yes” to God’s loving plan, and who first intercedes with Him so that our hearts do not allow themselves to become numb? Fr. Lepori said in the last Exercises, “Our Lady is before God as well, entrusting to Him the moment I am living through, the circumstances I am in, everything, moment by moment, hour after hour, until my last moment, until the hour of my death; that is, the moment when I enter into the eternity in which Christ is my advocate before the Father, my defense lawyer.” (*Our Eyes Are Fixed on Jesus, who is the Origin and Fulfillment of Faith*, p. 68, <https://it.clonline.org/cm-files/2023/06/06/libretto-frat2023-ing.pdf>).

On the way to the embrace of the Mother of Jesus, I ask you to pray for the Pope, for the Church and for the movement, that no one will lose heart in whatever twilight of existence he or she may find himself or herself. Just as our dear Fr. Giussani reminded us precisely in his last message for the Macerata-Loreto pilgrimage in 2004, “What every day would be limitation for us is destined to become as great as the gaze of Our Lady. Mary understood that the content of every human condition develops and brings about the plan of an Other: not the plan of our own heart, but of God’s heart. This is the Mystery intrinsic in all the things that God creates, such that it makes us share in the greatness and beauty of His world, without boundaries and without evil. In this way, everything that is born becomes a being of grace even when events are toilsome. Everything is born and blooms in a version of grace. So that in the cross up to the resurrection of Christ everything becomes grace, i.e., salvation, peace, and gladness.” (*The Road to Holiness, Traces*, n. 7/2004, <https://ca-en.clonline.org/archive/altro/xxvi-pilgrimage-the-message-from-fr-giussani>).

In friendship,

  
**Davide Prospero**

Milan, June 5, 2023