“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18, 8)

Sermon by Don Giacomo Tantardini on the seventh anniversary of the death of Don Luigi Giussani

Padua, 21 February 2012, Basilica of St Anthony

Just a word, a brief thought to remember Don Giussani on the seventh anniversary of his death. Many times in these days my mind has gone back to the words of Jesus that Giussani – picking them up from Paul VI – would repeat at the decisive moments of life: “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” (Lk 18, 8). When Jesus returns, will he still find faith on earth? Because it is of this gift that, first and foremost, we have need: faith. When the Lord returns, will he still find faith on earth? We need faith instant by instant, moment by moment. And how splendid it is, how real, that, having such need of faith, faith is the grace of God, is God’s gift. Gratia facit fidem, St Thomas says: Grace creates faith, and not only when faith begins, but grace creates faith instant by instant, moment by moment. At bottom the life of Don Giussani was testimony and example of this reality: that grace creates faith instant by instant.

What is given to us – because this, too, is given – is expressed in today’s Gospel and the Epistle of James with the word humility. What is given to us is to be humble, because God stands against the proud, to the humble he gives His grace. What is given to us is to be like children.

Here, in this sanctuary of St Anthony, let us ask him, who as a pure gift carried the baby Jesus in his arms and by the baby Jesus was carried, let us ask St Anthony to be like children. Let us ask him and let us ask Giussani, now that he sees in Paradise, as he had already glimpsed and communicated on earth, how splendid it is to be like children expecting everything from the Lord.
First reading (James 4, 1-10)
Where do the wars and where do the conflicts among you come from? Is it not from your passions that make war within your members? You covet but do not possess. You kill and envy but you cannot obtain; you fight and wage war. You do not possess because you do not ask. You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. Adulterers! Do you not know that to be a lover of the world means enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wants to be a lover of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that the scripture speaks without meaning when it says, “The spirit that he has made to dwell in us tends toward jealousy”? But he bestows a greater grace; therefore, it says: “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you of two minds. Begin to lament, to mourn, to weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will exalt you.

Gospel (Mark 9, 30-37)
They left from there and began a journey through Galilee, but he did not wish anyone to know about it. He was teaching his disciples and telling them, “The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death he will rise.” But they did not understand the saying, and they were afraid to question him. They came to Capernaum and, once inside the house, he began to ask them, “What were you arguing about on the way?” But they remained silent. They had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest. Then he sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, “If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.” Taking a child he placed it in their midst, and putting his arms around it he said to them, “Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the one who sent me”.

Let us ask St Anthony to be like children. Let us ask him and let us ask Giussani, now that he sees in Paradise, as he had already glimpsed and communicated on earth, how splendid it is to be like children expecting everything from the Lord.