

SOLITUDE AND COMMUNITY

by fr. Luigi Giussani

A vital cue comes to us from the situation of the apostles as narrated to us in verses 9 to 11 in the first chapter of the Acts.

Christ has left and they remain there still and astonished. Hope has vanished and solitude falls upon them just as darkness and cold descend on the earth after sunset.

The more we discover our needs, the more we become aware that we cannot resolve them on our own. Nor can others, people like us. A sense of powerlessness accompanies every serious experience in our lives. This sense of powerlessness generates solitude. True solitude does not come from being physically alone but from the discovery that a fundamental problem

of ours cannot find its solution in us or in others.

We can well say that the sense of solitude is borne in the very heart of every serious commitment to our own humanity. Those who believe they have found the solution to a great need of theirs in something or someone, only to have this something or someone disappear or prove incapable of resolving this need, can understand this.

We are alone in our needs, in our need to be and to live intensely, like one alone in the desert. All he or she can do is wait until someone appears. And human persons will certainly not provide the solution because it is precisely their needs that must be resolved.



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The apostles returned to the place where Christ had ascended into heaven and they stayed together.

One who truly discovers and lives the experience of powerlessness and solitude does not remain alone. Only one who has experienced powerlessness to its depths, and hence personal solitude, feels close to others and is easily drawn to them. Like someone lost, without shelter in a storm, he or she feels his or her cry at one with the cries of others, his or her anxiety and expectation at one with the anxieties and expectations of all others.

Only one who truly experiences helplessness and solitude stays with other people without self-interest, calculation, or

imposition, yet at the same time without “following the crowd” passively, submitting, or becoming a slave of society. You can claim to be seriously committed to your own human experience only when you sense this community with others, with anyone and everyone, without frontiers and discrimination, for we live our commitment to what is most deeply within us and therefore common to all. You are truly committed to your own human experience when, saying “I,” you live this “I” so simply and profoundly that you feel fraternally bonded to any other person’s “I.” God’s answer will reach only the person committed in such a way. It must immediately be pointed out that this solidarity with all of humanity is achieved in a particular place.



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Even in the Acts² the community of the apostles is born in a very specific situation. They did not choose the place or the people. They found themselves there almost by chance and their whole life depended on this fact. This is how our personal humanity is born, shaped, and nourished, in a particular setting: we find ourselves in it; we don't choose it.

Our effort to understand the entire setting and offer our sense of community to all the people in that setting, measures the openness of our human commitment and is commensurate with the sincerity of our commitment to all humanity. It is not up to us to exclude anyone from the experience of our human life; only God can make that choice and He does so through the

situation in which He places us. Otherwise it would be a private matter on our part, a selfish looking-inward; we would be taking advantage of a given situation through our own preconceived schemes.

