

DON GUISSANI

9 years ago today a most remarkable man died. A priest of the diocese of Milan, Don Luigi Guissani taught in the seminary, but then in high schools, where by trial and error he developed a most effective method of engaging with the young. He taught theology at Milan's Sacred Heart University and it was there in 1969, from its origins in GS, 'Student Youth,' he founded the international movement *Communion and Liberation*. CL has flourished and was much supported by Pope John Paul II; it is now in over 80 countries world-wide, including here in Southampton. Speaking at his funeral in 2005, Pope Benedict said Don Guissani had *changed his life*. Guissani always sought Beauty, which he said could only be found ultimately in the Person of Jesus. Indeed, our Catholic faith is not just a set of doctrines or a moral code; it's about a Person, Jesus Christ, and a real, life-transforming encounter with him.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Let me say a word about today's Gospel, an extract from the Sermon on the Mount. In it, Jesus says in effect that being a disciple means being an extremist. Like Him we must go to extreme lengths to shew our love. We must never use violence; we must give 'over the top' *to those who ask*; we must always go at least one *extra mile*. He then adds, we must *love our enemies*. We must love those who persecute us, those who hate us, those who make our lives miserable: yes, the awkward squad, our critics, the ones who don't like us. Jesus says it's not enough to love people you like. We're called to be extremists, to love those who don't love in return, to be perfect like God. This is surely the hardest of all Jesus' teachings. It's a massive challenge. It's also huge in our parish communities. A priest told me recently his parishioners are very friendly - to those they know!

Today 22nd February is actually the Feast of the Chair of Peter, when we celebrate the *magisterium* or teaching authority of the Pope, who as the Vicar of Christ guarantees the communion of the Church and keeps her free from error in faith and doctrine. Don Guissani, who died on this feastday, understood well that to be a disciple today, each one of us must do our utmost to maintain full communion of heart and mind with the Church. For it's only the Truth of Christ that sets us free; error enslaves. In fact Guissani went further, saying that today every disciple needs a stronger sense of belonging, which is why he envisaged CL as a network of cell-groups gathering for a weekly 'School of Community' to discuss and apply the Church's teaching to life-experience. In this way, recalibrating our lives and our world with authentic teaching, we gain the very liberation and happiness Christ promises.

Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect. Every single person on earth wants to be free, want to be happy, wants to live for ever. In our lives, we often manage to make some progress in truth, goodness and love, but then we fail through our sin

and selfishness. This is why we need Christ and His Church, so that nourished by His Word and by the power of His Sacraments, we can find the sure Way of Truth, healing and love. In this Mass, in which we pray for the repose of Don Guissani and for God's continued blessing on the members and the work of CL, let us pray earnestly for ourselves and for our diocese. May we be filled with the extremism of Christ's love. And also may we develop really effective ways of showing others where they can find that TGLHH&F for which they long: here, in communion with Jesus Christ and His Church.