

WHAT CAN WITHSTAND THE TEST OF TIME?

Introduction - 1

“Who is the true friend?”

by Pierluigi Banna*

What can withstand the test of time? Does time extinguish everything?

This question won't leave us in peace; it is terrifying and heart-rending, because it makes us remember the many experiences of failure that life has not spared us. It is the failure of feelings, when enthusiasm quickly falls apart and leaves us prey to disappointment. “Nothing lasts, nothing lasts” – Vasco sang.¹

But there is a failure that makes this question even more piercing: the failure of our dearest relationships, when our friends, and even our parents sometimes, betray us. So then, who is the true friend that does not betray us? Who is the friend that withstands the test of time?

In front of disappointment and betrayal, we will be tempted to respond that nothing withstands the test of time. The idea creeps in that all the light that has enlightened us has only been a brief flash out of the black hole where everything eventually ends up. What use, then, are those happy oases, those places where now and then we seek shelter by putting on a mask, even if only for a night, if in the end everything ends up in nothingness? What use is it to wear ourselves out trying to be somebody in the eyes of others? As one of you wrote: “The adults call it ‘growth’, and instead I call it ‘torture’”. This temptation – to use a more exact word – is called nihilism, which means affirming that ultimately everything is nothing, everything is nothingness, as Montale described it in his poem “Maybe One Morning”: “nothing at my back, the void / behind me, with a drunkard’s terror”.²

Nihilism is an option that lies in wait; but how reasonable is it to say that everything is nothing? Deep down, it is a comfortable way of escaping, an easy solution when we cannot manage to stay in front of betrayal and disappointment. So, we prefer to escape, but to escape from what, deep down?

From ourselves. We escape from the desire for something new to happen again, for something to happen that makes us come alive again even more than when our mother gave birth to us, something from which we can no longer turn back, something greater than our failures, our feelings, greater even than death.

We are together because we don't want to escape, to be scared of everything, to be afraid of the nothingness. We are friends in order to defend our truest desire from this nothingness, so that something may happen to us that finally stands the test of time.

* Introduction to the Easter Triduum of Gioventù Studentesca, Rimini, 18-20 April 2019. For the passages cited here, cf. *CHE COSA REGGE L'URTO DEL TEMPO?*, pp. 4-7 of the booklet for the GS Triduum, [downloadable as pdf from the CL website](#).

¹ V. Rossi, “Dannate nuvole [Damn Clouds]”, p. 6.

² E. Montale, “Forse un mattino [Maybe One Morning]”, p. 5.