

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, April 6, 2011

Reference text: The Religious Sense by Luigi Giussani (McGill-Queen's), pages 34-44.

Song: "Il mio volto"

Song: "La strada"

Glory be

It is crucial not to miss the beginning of chapter four, because it confirms for us the path we are trying to follow. We have always reminded ourselves that it isn't a matter of insisting on certain words; it isn't a matter of just repeating certain things, but to recognize them as they are happening. Here Father Giussani reminds us again about it with his usual basic concern on method. "We are made for truth, and truth is the correspondence between reality and awareness. We already have described this as the nature of our rational dynamism. It is also worthwhile to restate that our search for the ultimate meaning of our lives is not a matter of a particular intelligence, or some special effort, or even exceptional means. Rather, finding the ultimate truth is like discovering something beautiful along one's path. One sees and recognizes it, if one is attentive. The issue, then, is this attention." It is a matter of attention, and this frees us from any objection we may raise: "My intelligence doesn't have a special ability; I cannot make a special effort; I don't have exceptional means." They are not necessary. To arrive at truth, attention is all that is needed! The method he proposes to us is this attention, as Carrel's phrase shows us from the very beginning: "Much observation and little discussion are conducive to truth" (the opposite of error). So tonight we don't need to make a lot of speeches, but to tell something that I have discovered about myself by observing myself in action. I hope that you will prove me wrong in my concern.

What I discovered about myself in action these days is that I have a sense of missing something that is getting greater than ever, a nostalgia that awaits me at the bottom of everything; and because of the work that you are asking us to do it is becoming an openness, an expectation of something beautiful, of an endless good. At times I find myself judging what happens, relationships, and things with this gaze. I'll give you an example. Last weekend I traveled abroad because my wife had been invited to the 50th birthday party of a friend who had lived with her during college, and whom I had barely known. We hadn't seen her in twenty years, so we weren't even very close. In order to accompany her, I gave up going to another gathering that I was very interested in, which would have been with some people who have been my friends forever, but I understood that it was important for her to go with her whole family. I felt that going along with her wish had something to do with the desire for the infinite that I had, and I went with this expectation. The surprise was to experience such pleasure, such beauty, such unexpected gladness with people who were almost strangers, but who recognized it as a witness to the Lord who was making the same journey, people who were changed by the encounter with the living Christ. The human beauty I saw in the explicit tension we shared to say His name as the source of that beauty, together with the peace, the gladness and the certainty of heart that I experienced, made me recognize Him at work. I also appreciated the value and the meaning of

friendship as a communion that liberates, even with some people I didn't know, but with whom I felt I was sharing the journey.

But what does this have to do with the sense of missing something that you mentioned at the beginning? I don't understand.

It's about attention. I couldn't go there and just visit like a tourist; I had a sort of expectation for Him to reveal himself.

But was this before or after the action?

In the action... And then, the work we are doing at present is certainly educating my heart.

You people relate facts, and then you add whatever you want. But what comes out of the action?

What came out? What have we learned from your witness tonight in listening to what you said?

This is what matters, right? I am not interested in whether we say the right thing or not. What interests me is that we are learning. If the goal of School of Community is to bring out the factors that make my "I," then up to now we didn't hear anything. Thank you.

At a work meeting I had two weeks ago a very competent, bright and capable businessman I had never met before showed up. In dealing with him my attention was focused on catching every aspect, everything, so that life would not be reduced to the technical aspect of the meeting. For this reason it was an encounter. After a few days he wrote me, "Excuse me if I take the liberty of being informal, it isn't out of lack of respect, but out of the respect I have for your fine way of thinking and your very person. I hope I will be able to work with you (he is a supplier and so he is interested in selling – he had come to sell), but I don't care if you never buy anything from me, because life is not just business. I hope to meet you again, because you are able to give me much more." It is this "more" that emerges in the impact with reality, in seeing yourself in action. And he saw it.

And what about you?

I did too, and I was moved.

What did you see about yourself?

That I was attending a meeting not as an interlude in my life, because there is a desire...

You have to tell me what you discovered about yourself, otherwise it is pointless to give a witness, because each person gives his own opinion, no matter what we are talking about.

I discovered that there isn't only the technical aspect (and so my material aspect), but a possibility for me, as Giussani is saying here, to make the journey toward destiny. This is what...

Thank you. If you people have nothing to say, please stay quiet and sit down.

I want to talk about something that happened right after the last School of Community. I went home, and just before getting there I had this thought like a bolt of lightning (I don't know why): if someone were to die in this moment, it would be because his destiny is fulfilled. I parked the car, took the elevator, and when the door opened I saw my neighbor in tears because a dear friend had died suddenly. I felt that I was at peace, which is what sort of defines this period of my life, where everything seems to go where it should, to the point that it almost seemed to me that Jesus was asking me, "Try to tell me again in front of this fact all the things you just said at School of Community." And my first reaction was to respond, "Yes."

Thank you.

Up to now the work you proposed to us on January 26 has remained interesting but abstract, because it my attempt to meld the religious sense and Jesus.

Why so? Because you have blatantly ignored every question I have asked here! This is why I ask the questions. If we follow the path the way it is proposed to us, as Father Giussani is proposing it, that is, starting from experience, how can we say that things are abstract? Is experience something abstract? Only if we don't start from experience can we say that things are abstract. Is this clear? Then, when we say these things, it is only because, despite the fact that the text is saying one thing, we shift away from it. This is why I say, "Let's try to pay attention, because it is specifically to avoid having abstract thoughts that we have to focus on what is happening in reality, what emerges in our action. So, tell me something concrete.

Two weeks ago the "I" in action was a revelation for me. My seven-and-a-half year old daughter is going through a very restless phase. As her mother, I went through a string of emotions, but her uneasiness was never the source of a work on my part; it was never the starting point for me to reach deep inside her and understand the mystery she is made of (and inside myself to understand the mystery I am made of) – until two weeks ago, when I organized a special night at the movies for her and all her schoolmates. Arriving back home that night, she took my hand and said, "Mom, I don't understand why tonight, which should have been special, was one of the worst nights." At first I was bothered, as if she were being ungrateful; afterwards, though, I found myself trying to understand the reasons for her sadness. She started to have a terrible tantrum, and yet she was reaching for my hand. So I smiled at her more, and in that moment, as I saw her crying (which was a cry for independence that nevertheless wanted to surrender to my presence) subside, I understood what I am made of. The "I" in action was to discover my surrendering to Christ; that I need to abandon myself to Christ in the same way my daughter needs to abandon herself to me.

And why do you need to abandon yourself to Christ? Let's not just repeat phrases....

Because the independence I long for is actually a search for Christ.

But the first thing we have to understand is what this event reveals about ourselves; what it reveals about your daughter.

The need I have, the need for His Presence.

Before anything else it reveals the need she is made of.

Because of which she judged her sadness in a very sharp way: what is the meaning of even the special evening your mom prepared for you?

But instead of giving her a pre-made answer, help her to understand what she learned from her experience! What does her experience of this lack of correspondence tell her? What can your daughter learn about herself, even after such a well prepared, carefully arranged party, given with all your tenderness?

The need that she is made of.

This is what need is. Don't shift your attention to something else.

It made me understand the need that I am made of, because even as her mother I cannot totally respond to her happiness.

Thank you.

Then the "I" in action, which is always centered on myself, became the You of Christ to whom I surrender.

I am telling you again: let's not rush ahead! Let's hold on to this: the true nature of "I" emerged, the very factors life is made of.

I wanted to tell you about a strange thing that happened to me that made me understand how much I am looking at my heart and at others' hearts in a schematic and ideological way. For the

first time in my life, by chance, I ended up working with two people who had committed serious crimes in their youth, one for political reasons and the other for passion. In relating with them, I realized that I was treating the first one better, because I was considering his desire for social justice nobler than the passionate desire of the second. I was rating the desires of the heart (because I think I learned that the desires of the heart also lead a person to certain sins). Then I told myself, "I am probably also looking at myself in a schematic and ideological way. It is really true that I have to start again from zero, looking at what I desire and at what has happened in my life.

Thank you.

I started out the week thinking that all I needed would be fulfilled by a certain thing.

Perfect: an image. What happened next?

It happened that by Monday this thing had already collapsed, and so I started the week trudging uphill, giving up on any expectation. I was reading School of Community and telling myself, "Yes, but pay attention to what, since nothing is happening here?" I was also a bit critical of your question. Then it happened that I spent a very intense couple of days with two coworkers who love me very much, and I understood what it means to be committed to reality as a whole. In the relationship with these two persons I rediscovered how much I need to be serious with my life, because I saw how they light up. Then, as a reflex, I was totally reawakened as well.

What did you discover about yourself in this being serious, in this engagement with reality?

I discovered that even in front of certain things (such as what I was expecting for the week) I need to take my desire seriously, because when I take my desire seriously it follows that even daily things acquire meaning. Is this clear?

Yes, things start to have meaning. And what about you? Because here, Father Giussani says that the "I" is revealed in an involvement, and that one who is unemployed cannot understand the factors his "I" is made of. I'm asking you, what has this involvement made you discover about yourself?

I discovered that the seriousness about life that I need is being serious with things one at a time as they happen to me, that is, that there aren't exceptional moments...

OK. But this is already a generalization. You have to tell me a fact where, by getting involved, something surfaced in your awareness, because this is the issue. Not that everything all of you are saying isn't true. The problem is that it doesn't surface in our awareness, and so the next time we start over with another image. Because if you don't learn something about yourself, then the next time you'll start over again from square one. Always.

I discovered that... I discovered that while I was with them I was present in what I was doing; I wasn't saying, "I am going to dismiss this piece of reality." Isn't this what happened?

Do I have to be the one to tell you this? You are the one who is telling me what happened!

No. I am saying it. It is what happened.

Thank you.

My husband is losing his job, and this has made him very anxious. I am concerned about this, because we have three children, and I have been thinking about all the consequences of this thing. I am a teacher and I have carried this load along with me. Even when I am preparing my lessons, I have realized that I want to find out where the good is in this terrible circumstance. This morning in class, at a certain point, one of my students disturbed the class and I asked him to leave the classroom. Then, as suggested by a friend, I took him aside and asked him what was the matter. So he told me about a very serious family situation. I had asked him to meet with me

so that I could scold him, but instead I started thinking about my husband's huge problem: "Look, I'm going through something that I hadn't foreseen too, and I'm having a hard time; it's causing me a lot of pain, but I have learned that this is where we can walk together. I know, because I have seen it in my life for some time now, that Someone loves me and has shown me so, and is still showing me in many ways. There is Someone I can lean on for everything, and I can be certain, even now, when I can't see Him in this situation with my husband. I am sure about this. This is the only thing that takes you in your situation in as well. You are not condemned by circumstances. There is a possibility of something good for you, too."

Thank you.

A coworker of mine is pregnant, so we had to figure out who would cover her shifts. This has been a threat to the very same concessions that I have been trying to hold on to for the last few years. At first I didn't sacrifice anything. As a matter of fact, when someone else offered herself, my reaction was, "I'm safe!" I'm ashamed, but my game with the Mystery didn't end there. The next day, this same coworker shows up in tears, because a few other coworkers had laughed at her desire to be constructive in her job. This affected me very much, and I had a feeling that I cannot yet explain, a torment. Who is this person in front of me who really wants to work? I can't explain it very well. So I said to the Mystery, "It's pointless for me to gain an abstract perfection if I'm not open to the way you come into my life." There I was, ready to defend my position, but I understood that there was also another factor involved. So I said to my boss, "I'll take a shift." This week, by acting this way, I started to breathe. It's a little harder of a way than what I had in mind, but I think that ...

What did you learn about yourself?

I learned that in the end, not even a career, a position. let's say, of perfection corresponds and gives me that freedom that He gave me by introducing this drama. And what's striking is that it's not that now everything is clear, because I really feel that I can't understand a lot of things anymore.

Thank you.

I'd like to go back to the episode with our friend who died suddenly. The next day, when I went to see his wife, she came to me and said, "You can and you have to ask for a miracle." I hugged her and said, "Let's ask together for a miracle from Father Giussani and from Mary, because I am sure that miracles happen, even though they may not be what we imagined they would be." What I understood about myself is this certainty. If you hadn't read the Easter poster the last time we met, this certainty in the fact that He is risen... I remembered when He asked Martha, "I am the resurrection and life: do you believe this?" And I say yes, even though it is very mysterious.

Thank you.

At work, there is a coworker next to me who doesn't talk to anybody. We worked for four hours next to one another until lunch time, and finally we started to be a little more comfortable with each other. I came back after half an hour, and she had gone back to being a stranger like she was at 8 a.m. I felt some tenderness toward her and toward myself. I told a friend, who said, "That's it. You realized that you were there; you became aware of the 'I' in relation to the 'you.'" This tenderness has continued, to the point that in the last few days I realized all the strangeness there is ...

And why is there this strangeness? Because we are not good enough?

No: it is for two reasons that I discovered. First of all, I need it to happen again... No, this is the second reason. My first reason is that there I pay no attention to myself, that is, I am not

watching myself; I am not going deep inside of myself. And the second is that, anyway... No, I'm not answering your question.

Thank you for admitting it.

Look at how hard it has been to do our School of Community tonight. In itself, this doesn't scare me. It means that we are still not doing what Father Giussani proposes to us: looking at our experiences to discover in them the constitutive factors of the "I." This is what he says, isn't it? Most of the time, what dominates are the images we have about ourselves; most of the time we think about how things should work in life. But if we are loyal to ourselves, we need to admit that, in experience, even when things work out according to our plans, we can discover in ourselves something that was unknown before. I could give many examples. I have often told you about our friend from the community of Barcelona who was working at the Italian consulate, and who loved painting. Her dream was to have a big exhibit with her paintings. Finally she did it – a great success. Later on, she told me, "As soon as it ended, I spent the whole afternoon crying." Why? What did she find out about herself that she didn't know before? She had an image of herself, of her desire, of her need: "If I can do this, it will be the end of the world!" It happened, and went far beyond her expectations — and then she cried the whole afternoon, because she realized that not even that was enough to fill her hardwired expectation. This is discovering yourself in action. You don't have to have a special intelligence, or to make a special effort: by observing yourself in action, you are surprised to discover something about yourself that you knew in theory because you'd read it. But when it comes out of experience, it becomes something existentially new. Has this ever happened based on the absolutely normal fact of our experience in these last two weeks? What has surprised us? It's an absolutely simple problem, but if we don't realize it, then after our experience we remain attached to the image we have of ourselves, and to the image we have of what fulfills us. If we don't start from experience, and we don't "surprise in action" all the factors of our "I" as they come out, we can't really understand this, and then we say "Christ" superficially. It's not that Giussani doesn't want to get there, to get to saying His name. Rather, he wants to get there in such a way that one becomes aware of Him as the impossible correspondence to what he has been surprised find that he wishes for deep down inside. Otherwise, faith will be reduced and forced. Just think of all your attempts, all the images you've gone after in these last two weeks, and you will realize how much images determine our lives. We are not trying to work on our religious sense alone, but to work on our religious sense as the verification of faith! In other words, after your encounter with Christ, this should be infinitely multiplied. But based on what we've seen tonight, it's practically absent, as a self awareness. A little while ago, I read Father Giussani's comments on the Angelus in *Tutta la sera desidera il tuo volto (The Whole Evening Desires Your Face)* where he describes Mary's self-awareness: "All of Our Lady's personality comes out from the instant she was told, 'Hail Mary' ... From the moment of the annunciation, [Mary] took up her position in the universe and in front of eternity. A totally new source of morality established itself in her life. What emerged [Here is what I am particularly interested in] was a deep, mysterious self-awareness: a self veneration, a sense of greatness equal only to her nothingness, about which she had never thought about in the same way." Can you understand? Our Lady's encounter with that announcement led her to discover her self-awareness: a sense of greatness equal only to her nothingness. We can see this in many passages of the Gospel, like the episode of the great catch, in the fifth chapter of the Gospel of Saint Luke. Peter was working all night, and then come all those fish; his disproportion is made clear to him, and he gets down on his knees: "Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man." Peter understands even more about himself in front of His

powerful Presence, which is exactly what Father Giussani says all the time: Christian experience should give us an even more powerful awareness of the constitutive factors of our “I.” We sang this at the beginning: “I look deep down inside of me, and I see endless darkness.” If we don’t find this, it’s because what we are missing most (I’ll go back to this at the Fraternity Exercises) is the sense of the Mystery. And we can see this from the fact that, in the end, we look for satisfaction in life in the same place where everybody else is looking for it. This is a backward verification: on many occasions, by not letting all the meaning of our “I” emerge from experience, we think we can respond to life’s problems like everyone else does, and we go after things like everybody else... However, how marvelous it is when you have someone in front of you, as happened to me this week, someone who has this sense of the Mystery! This person was telling me about a scene in a movie where there is a birthday celebration in a family: the husband is happy and very proud, while the wife is overwhelmed by her sense of disproportion. And he told me, “Like the woman in the movie, I also have a feeling that I am lacking something, a feeling that I can’t get rid of. I can no longer stand chitchat, certain ways of being together.” In one of her poems, Luzi asked, “This lack, what is it the lack of?” And we can find this out not by doing “spiritual exercises,” but during lunch, by observing ourselves in action, by discovering in action this sense of disproportion which is the sign of what we are. If we don’t make room for this attention, for these constitutive factors of our “I” emerging from experience, what happens is that the “life images” that we make for ourselves will prevail, and then we are like everyone else. But the Christian Event is something present, as the Easter poster says: “The event is what awakens the present, defines the present, makes the present possible,” that is, it makes the sense of the Mystery possible, the sense of self-veneration, the awareness of disproportion, that infinite desire. Do we suffer because of this lack, or is our EKG flat? Are we really reawakened by the Event? We should have seen this clearly in our work on this chapter of *The Religious Sense*, in terms like how Giussani talks about Our Lady. No sense in feeling scandalized, though. Let’s see how much longer we still have to go on our journey... So, in the next two weeks, please go back and review everything we have been working on, all the way from January 26 to the Easter poster.

Our next School of Community will be on Wednesday, May 11, at 9:30 pm. We’ll talk about the introduction to the Fraternity Exercises.

During Holy Week the Church proposes a few gestures to us. We can participate in these gestures, even ours, out of habit, with a flat EKG, or with the awareness of the drama, if it emerges from our experience, as the Pope said on the occasion of Manuela’s death: “Christ, on the vigil of His passion, renewed, in fact, exalted our memory. ‘Do this in memory of me,’ he said, and so He gave us the memory of His presence.”

Knowing that we couldn’t make it by ourselves, He gave us His presence to renew and raise the memory that was wounded, obscured, and oblivious to God. Holy Week is an opportunity for this to happen, and so is the Church’s tenderness toward each of us.

Please remember that the Fraternity Exercises will begin on Friday, April 29, with dinner at 7 p.m. Please be punctual, so that we can start things in the auditorium at 9 p.m.

For the beatification of John Paul II on May 1 in Rome, Saint Peter’s Square will be open starting at 5 a.m., and the celebration with Benedict XVI will start at 10 a.m.

The book of the month for April and May is Emanuel Mounier's book, *Lettere sul dolore* (*Letters on Pain*), which has just been republished by BUR. It's one of the books that was very dear to Father Giussani, who recommended that we read it, saying, "It's for a glorious purpose that I am reading these pages, not for a melancholic one. The starting point is pain ... but it's meant for the explosion of a miracle. If a miracle is the reverberation of perfection and greatness in difficult times, of the magnificence and totality of the Eternal, of the Infinite, then this reverberation is found here. I read these letters because it can be, it must be (I'm not saying necessarily in this exact way, but perhaps so) in our daily life."

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Happy Easter to everyone.