

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, June 22, 2011**

Reference text: “Whoever Is in Christ Is a New Creation,” Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2011, supplement to Traces no. 6 (2011).

Song: “Vento”

Song: “Il viaggio”

Glory Be

Let's begin our last School of Community before the summer.

I was very struck by the last School of Community we had together, particularly by what you said, that the way rationalism works in us is that we take experience for granted. (That's why, for us, longing does not point to a presence; solitude doesn't point to a companionship; and so we can't stop feeling the Mystery as something pasted on.) Rereading these past two weeks the second lesson you gave at the Fraternity Exercises, I identified the two great discoveries that the journey we made together this year brought to me. The first discovery is that Christ present – not the Christ of my thoughts, but Christ Risen from the dead – is not afraid of my humanity just as it is. Instead, without Him, I am attached to my images as much as I am detached from myself. I discovered that after fifty years, shame for myself is gone; I no longer have to pretend to be what I am not, and for me this is an otherwise impossible experience of liberation. The second thing that struck me about this year is that there is a kind of companionship where one seeks to avoid the perception of the Mystery, and there is on the other hand a companionship (the one you invite us to) that sustains the drama with the Mystery and deepens it. The first companionship always starts outside of me; the second companionship starts from within, and for this reason, too, it is a liberation.

I think it is crucial to really understand what you are saying about the last time we met, because it is truly how Father Giussani challenges each of us personally. I am saying it very succinctly: for us, the clear evidence that the You is absent are sadness, solitude, longing, and the question. For Father Giussani it is exactly the opposite: these things are the most evident sign that the You is present. It is crucial for each of us to face this head on. We think that the Mystery is absent because of rationalism, due to a reduced use of reason that prevents us from acknowledging all the factors implied in our experience. What does this cause? That if we don't become aware that He is present in experience itself (in sadness as the desire for an absent good, in solitude as the moment when one can become aware of the fact that, in order to explain exhaustively why he feels alone, he has to acknowledge the original companionship that is making him in that very moment), then we feel alone, without implying Another. I want this to be very clear – otherwise we misinterpret Christian salvation. What do we think Christ should come to do, according to our reduced perspective? To solve our problems – and for us, “to solve our problems” means to get rid of the drama of life. If after the encounter with Christ we are still sad and we experience longing, this is a clear proof to us that He is absent. But this is the opposite of what we said on January 26! Christ did not come to eliminate our humanity, the religious sense; He has come to reawaken it in a great way, He came to make it more dramatic! Why can He make it more

dramatic? So that I can recognize Him, and enjoy His presence. Instead, how many times do you hear people saying that Christ makes us a promise and then He doesn't deliver? Because we have our own idea of how He should fulfill the promise, that is, to get rid of the drama, to get rid of what is human. Why do we say this? Because we always believe that to be truly human one has to overcome his structural disproportion. But man *is* this structural disproportion! It is as if we had an objection to the totality with which the Mystery made things ("It would be less dramatic if we didn't have this disproportion, if we didn't feel all the drama implied by this disproportion, and if somebody could spare us this.") This is why we think of the disproportion as a phase to pass through; our whole expectation is that at some point in life we will be able to overcome the disproportion. But this way of thinking makes Christianity a big ripoff, because not only has Christ not come to eliminate the religious sense, but He came to reawaken it! Salvation is not about eliminating the religious sense, but about reawakening it, so that we may really enjoy it as human beings. Why do we make this mistake about Christianity? Because we have already made this mistake about ourselves. If in our view, man as described in the fifth chapter of *The Religious Sense* (solitude, longing, sadness) doesn't witness to the fact that the Mystery is present, what can the presence of Christ ever become? At times we have to ask ourselves, "What is man, and what is his fulfillment?" Christ moves us to the core, and this doesn't eliminate the structural disproportion, but totally reawakens it. Instead, you often raise the objection expressed in this letter, "Since the last School of Community I have this urgent question. As you explained the letter we started with, you made perfectly clear that the evidence that the You exists is precisely the experience of longing, of the longing that perhaps we take for granted. [For this person it was perfectly clear.] But, you see, this doesn't solve the problem for me. Because the longing I experience does imply that the You exists, but not that He is present. As when I long for someone I love who is far away: obviously, he exists, but I wish he were here, not only that I were certain that he exists. In the letter that was quoted, this is precisely what moves me and fills me with envy: that for her, the You is right there, as a loved one who is present. I would like the journey of certainty that we are making to become an experience of real companionship, truly a You who is here with me and whom I can embrace." The You exists, but isn't present: this is a distinction that shows the extent of our rationalism! If God weren't present now giving me life, I wouldn't exist. He is present in the sign: my "I" is proof that He exists and is present. He is so present that I am here, now. Let's remember the example of the flowers received as a gift: they are the evidence that someone else exists (the person who gave them), even if he is not present, because the presence of this someone is outside the flowers, so that the flowers may be here but the person who gave them may not be present. But does what works for the flowers also apply to us? That is, can I exist without the You who is making me now being present as well? Can each of you be present now without a You who is giving you life at the same time? If we are not clear on this then we have a hard time understanding what the Easter poster says. Because the idea of God some of us seem to have is of somebody who starts the engine of the world and then goes on vacation, until he comes back. The same for Christianity: Christ came, luckily for those who were able to experience him "first hand"; we are not they, and so can only limit ourselves to putting some of His teachings into practice while He is away, until He comes back to tell us if we have been good or not... But look at what Father Giussani says in the Easter poster: "The event does not indicate merely something that happened and that started everything, but what awakens the present, defines the present, gives content to the present and makes the present possible." Is He present? Where do I see Him? In what He makes possible. It isn't that the Risen Christ exists, but He is not present; the category of event does not refer only to a beginning, but defines the

present, gives content to the present and makes the present possible. What awareness Father Giussani had and has of what is happening now! This is why he says later on, “Christ is something that is happening to me.” How can we say that He exists, but is not present, when faced with a sentence like this? It is impossible, impossible! In fact, then we think that the only way He can be present is the one we imagine. For the disciples at Emmaus Christ was something that was happening to them in that very moment: “Were not our hearts burning within while He spoke to us on the way?” They didn’t know Him outside their present experience. In fact, listen to what another person writes to me: “I feel longing for some people when I don’t see them, because they are a strong presence in my life. They are present, and this is why I feel longing.” Father Giussani says, “One cannot adore a presence – God! – without suffering over an absence, an absence that you want to fill: it’s like a fever. [He reawakens us so forcefully that we desire even more.] [This is why] I am not scared by my limitation [as we were saying earlier]: it is the most extraordinary evidence of God’s existence, showing itself in the negative, as something I miss.” This morning a friend was telling me that, while talking with his wife, they were wondering, what does “I love you” mean? And his wife told him, “I love you because I am waiting for you; I see that I love you because I wait for you.” Can you imagine someone waiting without the other person existing? “I am waiting for you” is the clear evidence that the other person exists. This is why “to love” is identified with “I am waiting for you.” The more I love you, the more you are present and the more I am waiting for you. But for us, as another person writes, it is as if this were only an intellectual journey: “For me, listening to your presentation – forgive my inadequate words – was like following a rational path, the evidence that I don’t make myself, the longing, the sadness, the solitude that imply a You, the desire for an absent good and the original companionship. I perceived very clearly the distance between your experience and mine, as if those words, for me, were not made of flesh and blood.” This is the problem. For us the You lacks flesh and blood. And how can one fill the words with flesh and blood? This is the great contribution of method that Father Giussani offers to us continuously. A university student said that life had started to change for her since she had started to enter life, to enter things with the hypothesis of Christ, that is, with the hypothesis of what had been revealed in the encounter with Christ. Then she discovered that, little by little, by entering life like that, the hypothesis becomes at a certain point not only a hypothesis, but a certainty. If the words are identical, why is it that for some they are flesh and blood, while for others they remain just words? Because what fills the words with flesh and blood is experience. If you are not open to following this path, you may continue to say that they are words, and who will be able to convince you of the opposite? Only if one verifies it in experience, will he start seeing that they become flesh and blood, because what you live in your experience cannot be just words any more. So this becomes certainty, that is what we are often missing, as another person writes to me: “It’s like I took these things for granted: I tried to understand why, and I am unable to be satisfied with what I have received. I have a hypothesis: the reason is that I am not poor, I don’t have the eyes of a child any more; I stopped along the road that I have to walk. Why so? Because I cannot recognize Him any longer. It’s like I did recognize Him in the past; I recognize that He was present, but I cannot see Him now in everything I do. As a consequence I cling to people, my girlfriend first of all, and my heart is not free and open. I went back to the chapter on poverty and I found a possible answer: ‘If Christ gives you the certainty of fulfilling what He makes you desire, then you are extremely free from things.’ But for me, most of the time it is hard to have this certainty. The chapter continues with this sentence: ‘We need to become poorer, that is, certain of a few great things.’ I desire to be certain of this presence always, because I am certain of the name I carry.”

This is what the Easter poster also says: “Nothing exists outside this ‘now’!” This is why we either recognize this in the present, in the “now,” or there is nothing left to do. To grasp it in the “now,” we need the simplicity of a child, who doesn’t take everything for granted. Paradoxically, it is this simplicity of a child that makes us become certain. The most obvious example we can think of is that of the man born blind (You cannot be poorer than this!), who was certain of only one thing: before he could not see, and then he could see. This poverty, this being like a child in the face of what happens, makes him certain, while everyone else is there manipulating the data, trying to destroy the evidence: before he couldn’t see and now he can see. It’s not complicated. The man born blind shows that recognizing Him present is not complicated; with the simplicity of a child, he doesn’t take for granted the fact that before he couldn’t see and now he can see. My friends, this is the journey we need to make, because a hypothesis becomes certainty only if we verify it in our experience constantly.

How have you verified it?

Last week I went to a market and I was handing out the leaflet Ready to Give Reason for the Hope that Is in Us. As I was going there, I had this question burning inside of me. I was wondering, “What can really change me, that is, what can really pull me out of the skepticism I am so often immersed in, from the weariness I fall into? What can really move the root of my ‘I’?” At a certain point, as I was standing in front of a market stand with a man selling eggs, he asked me what I was doing. I gave him a leaflet and I asked him this sincere question: “Is there something that can change you? Something that can overcome skepticism, weariness, boredom? Something that supports your desires and meets your true desires?” After talking for a while, he was more and more provoked and interested, and he answered me this way: “For me the answer to this question comes from the Gospels and the Commandments.” So I said, “What makes you follow the rules? Is this enough? How useful is this in your life, in your daily life? Does this meet your deepest human needs? Does this meet your desire for an intense daily living, so that your life is not mediocre? Does this support your truest and deepest desires?” He was more and more shocked and touched by those questions. He said that, actually, this was not useful at all, and that his days were somewhat weary. I was very much moved by this, and I kept asking him, “But do you desire to be happy? Do you want to live your daily life intensely or do you want to just get by? Can you be happy with just getting along somehow?” Faced with these questions, the man was not willing to back away; he wished for all these things, but he realized that the answers he was giving were half answers that were not enough, and could not convince even him. Yet they were radical questions because they touched on something decisive. Then, in front of all his criticism about church scandals and about society, I felt free enough to ask him, “Wouldn’t you like to be embraced just as you are, with all your limitations, even your sin? Don’t you wish to be loved and to love always with an infinite love? Is there or isn’t there something in reality that doesn’t betray you?” And he answered, “You are putting my back to the wall; you are confusing me.” Then he started to say to me, “But then tell me, so tell me what it’s like for you, then.” So, very briefly – because most of the time I had been asking him questions – I told him that what changes me is Christ happening in my life. I told him that for me Christianity is flesh, not rules, however right they may be, and that I live it in the flesh of the movement. Then I told him about my boyfriend, about my friends, about relationships that change, about a new companionship and the possibility to look at all my needs. I gave him the May issue of Traces while telling him how that for me is the witness, it is the proof that the Mystery constantly happens in the world, that He enters our days and stirs up our daily life.

Most importantly, I gave him the Exercises booklet because of the value it has had for me lately in helping me look back and rediscover everything that I am, the root of my being. And he answered, "So where are you? Do you get together?" So I told him about the School of Community. Then he said, "Now I have told you my issues. If you help me, I'll be grateful." And I, facing that man, realized that really, without all those questions, my humanity is reduced – mine and his – and that I feel the urge to look at all that I am, because I am made to live at the height of my need. I could not spare him all those questions. I could not take a single one away from him, although that vendor could not provide himself with sufficient answers. But I was there, free in asking those questions and in going deeper and deeper into our most radical needs. I am certain that there is an answer to all this. In fact, I found that I was totally grateful to be there and to be just like that, with something irreducible, and not with something that is wrong, something that needs healing, after all: Christ exists because He responds entirely to my need. Does one who asks in this way exist, or not exist? What changed her is the happening of Christ. Otherwise, could she have gone after that man in this way? The fact that one faces all these questions, that one can deal with these questions: is it a sign that He exists, or that He doesn't exist?

After some exceptional things that happened at my university (student elections, election campaign, pilgrimage to the Pope), I felt that something was not right. It was like I was telling myself, "Okay, now the fireworks are over, and you need to think about your own life." But the more time that passed, the more this thing didn't seem right: I want and wish for a united life. Then there was the leaflet that the previous speaker was talking about, and I was struck by the reaction of one of my friends: "When you asked me to take the idea to take part in an election campaign seriously, I was okay with you; but going to announce Christ in the marketplace, this is too much." And I was impressed by that because she simply voiced a question that I am still trying to understand and that is becoming more and more radical for me. This leaflet saved me from being deceived, because not even miracles are enough for me. The only thing that can be enough for me is what this leaflet says: "The force that makes history is a man Who has made His dwelling among us, Christ." I need this radical thinking. Now I am coming to understand much more what the Easter poster meant: either everything I have seen, even all the great and exceptional things, is given back to me now, or everything slips through my hands and in the end I remain a slave of myself and of those in power. Something else also helped me understand it more. My girlfriend is a nurse and she told me about two minors who had been wounded in a car accident. They had stolen a car, and had an accident in which other people had been killed – a tragic situation. She was telling me that many in her ward were scandalized by this. They did not want to give them a painkiller: "They did something wrong and they have to suffer." What struck me most is not so much the scandal of the nurses, but that she, without fussing around, or saying: "Okay, but there's Jesus," treated them despite her coworkers, saying, "By treating them in a certain way, these young men who probably don't even have an idea about what is good and what is evil, may perhaps see a small difference in their lives." Why was I struck? Because there was nobody else; she was there! I understand that I need this presence now, so that the day I happen to be alone, I won't have to keep looking for a crutch (such as a friend, or all our CL sayings); even in the silence, while I am studying, all by myself, I can have the experience of Christ who makes a mark on history.

Do you see? There are exceptional facts and miracles, but without recognizing His presence, after all the frenzy stops, everything decays. And he says that he needs it to be given back to him

now. And how does He remain in our midst today? By creating a people who can stay in reality, even against everything and everyone, by witnessing Christ, as his girlfriend did, in the way of dealing with reality. These young men did something absolutely wrong, and will have to face it with the Lord; this, however, does not take away her responsibility for meeting their needs. Not being embarrassed about Christ means looking at the circumstances the way one has been looked at, and this is a challenge to everyone. And this has to be happening in her now: otherwise one prefers to do the same as everyone else, to adjust. What a challenge!

Hello.

Briefly, okay?!

I am here to talk about something a little strange that is happening to me. In my daily life I can say with certainty that at this point of our journey I can betray, forget, or avoid a thousand times, but I can never, ever go back. I want to try and explain this to you. I feel I have become able to acquire and perceive with the voracity of a piranha everything that Father Giussani and you explain to us about the religious sense. That question, the question that man has been carrying inside himself since the beginning of time, I've had it ever since I was born, but nobody taught me either to read it or to look at it. I always suffocated it, denied it, and repressed it, with the support of the world around me. It was there, though. It's always been there, precisely because I didn't give it to myself; it was there, locked in my heart. It started to explode, and I couldn't hold it in any longer when faced with certain decisive facts that required a radical choice: to live or to die. If you choose to live, you need to go all the way to the end in everything, about anything, in every detail, and there you can find yourself again; there you can find all the power and mercy of the Mystery, an infinite grace, who begins to talk to you, to show itself, to respond to all that you are. Where is my doubt, then, about what I was talking to you about? That it has been said, and so perhaps I was wrong ...

Don't worry about it.

I betray Him a thousand times too; a thousand times I am wrong. I also feel the entire weight of the electric tension, the potential difference, just as it is described in the School of Community, all this disproportion of mine. My rediscovered life of question and answer, of begging and gift, is a continuous provocation within the provocation, which leads to an uninterrupted adherence and an invitation to live Him wherever He is, that is – inexplicably – in my heart. If I don't answer, my life's light goes out, and something inside knocks hard; I think it is my conscience with its little voice that my parents would tell me about when I was a child. To feel Him right next to me is so beautiful, so beautiful! I feel like I have dynamite in my heart, a pure taste for living, a hundredfold cubed, an infinite grace. For example, while I was standing in line in a government office, I was looking for a pen in my purse and all the contents spilled out on the floor. Someone behind me helped me pick everything up, and among the things there was the Exercises booklet. As I was apologizing and thanking him, I must have looked at him in a special way, and I said these words: "Thank you! O my goodness, this booklet is irreplaceable for me: it is my life. You know, I have gone from Mao's booklet to Carrón's."

Seems like a bit of a jump...

It may sound ridiculous, but it really is so. In these words there was my whole life, really, all of it. The guy looked a little bewildered and said, "When you're done at the window, will you tell me who this Carrón is?" I started to "download the file" by telling him, like a river in flood, about my amazing life that had changed, become colorful, illuminated. My heart has become grateful for everything, even for poverty that used to scare me to death, grateful for my

marriage, for my children. Everything is a starting point. Now I feel a little like a matador, as you said last time. In short, I feel all this sadness when He is not here with me, but I also feel all this dynamite in my heart. I only wanted to know whether I am on the right track.

What do you think, is this the right track, or isn't it?

For me, it is, absolutely.

Why?

Because it responds to everything, everything that I encounter in my experience.

If you say that you are gladder than ever, can you find a confirmation to your question in your experience?

Yes.

That's it, then. No comment that I may add can give a bigger confirmation than your own experience. All of us have had the grace she has had, each with his own drama. The problem is not the circumstance a person goes through, but whether what has happened to us is what dominates now. This is what makes us gladder and freer than ever, whatever the circumstance. But she talked to us about a condition: "If I don't respond, my life's light goes out." Christ has connected man's participation in this newness to following, that is, to responding, which is not just any kind of energy. No, responding means abandoning oneself, as she said. This is why it applies to everybody, including in the summer that lies ahead of us, when we'll be able to take up again, little by little, everything we have already begun to work on. The text of the Exercises will accompany us and we hope its words will become familiar, that they will become the normal way we look at life. It would be a good idea to reread Father Giussani's text, chapters five and eight of *The Religious Sense*, so that we can really enjoy all its richness much better, and all the details that we often tend to miss. Since we have months ahead of us, even if we read only a few minutes a day, this text should accompany us more and more.

After Beginning Day, we'll resume the simultaneously transmitted meetings of the School of Community.

Vacations: We all know about Father Giussani's special appreciation for free time, because in our free time, when we are not bound by certain tasks or commitments we may be responsible for, we can use our time as we want. This is why it is in our free time that we can see and discover what we hold most dear, what we really want, what we dedicate our space and time to, apart from resting, obviously. However, let's be careful about our idea of resting. One can think that resting means interrupting the familiarity that I was talking about a few moments ago, as if this were part of our commitments, too; but this bespeaks our rationalism, as if we could really rest without the totality of our "I" resting too, without this unity that we were talking about earlier. This is why vacations are an opportunity for each of us to freely express our relationship with the Mystery, our relationship with all of reality that is capable of being filled with the Mystery. Silence, prayer, School of Community, staying together, friendship, or the Meeting: it is all to help us in this personal position.

Lastly, I'd like to remind you about taking part in the **Corpus Christi procession** in your cities. In the diocese of Milan, it will take place tomorrow evening.

Have a good summer, everyone! Let's pray.

Veni Sancte Spiritus