

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, January 20, 2016

Reference text: L. Giussani, Recognizing Christ, in J. Carrón, A PRESENCE WITHIN THE GAZE, Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2015, pp. 75-88.

- *Lágrima*
- *Favola*

Glory Be

Let's tackle the last part of Fr. Giussani's lesson *Recognizing Christ* and finish our work on the *Fraternity Exercises*. We will start with a question that I received in advance via e-mail.

Thank you for taking my question seriously. I am a medical student, and I wanted to tell you that, for the past few months, when my friends ask me, "How are you?" I no longer know how to answer, that is, I cannot lie and say that everything is fine, because it's not true. I notice that every day I desire a fuller happiness, and I desire it so much that I can no longer deny that this is how I am. However, this...

Thank goodness, otherwise you would deny it! Instead, your being, the nature that you have been given, doesn't allow you to live without striving for this happiness.

Yes. On the other hand, I feel like I have my back against the wall, in the sense that, when it's not like this, you obviously feel badly and say to yourself, "Why did I have those moments of happiness that allow me to say that I have this desire to be happy, and that this desire is not false?" I am not sure how to stay...

Why isn't it false? What experience did you have?

To me it is not false because of what I have lived.

Exactly. Otherwise, you wouldn't even have lived those moments. The question is how those moments can become more numerous.

Precisely. How can I desire, ask, that it may always be like this, that is, always live a full happiness?

Let's keep this question open.

Hi.

Hi. Do you want to be happy, too?

Yes.

What do you do?

I study Literature. Last year, at the Macerata-Loreto pilgrimage, you said, "Christ is a presence so present to us that He fills us with gladness, making it possible for us to live in every situation." You also added, quoting St. Paul, "My grace is enough for you, for power is made perfect in weakness." [...] Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and

constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 12:9-10).” You remarked, “We are small, and aware of our limits, of our daily betrayal and of the frailty of all of our efforts; but more than anything we are certain that the Father chose us just as we are so that it may be even more evident that the strength comes only from Him.” Can you explain how this experience is possible, and how it can last? When I went back to college after summer break, I was full of life, like a whirlwind. The summer was extraordinary, the first months at college were very full, a continuous back-and-forth between God and me, so exciting and moving. I have a very hard time saying, “God” or “Jesus Christ.” Often I am vague, saying, “The Mystery,” “that which unites us,” “that thing.” Thus, I remember well that I was saying “Jesus Christ;” and if I said it, it was because it was Him, and not something else. Then, around Christmas, classes ended, and at a certain point, this gladness and this relationship that was everything sort of froze. It was as if only inertia kept me going, and gestures were just that – they didn’t lead to anything else, they weren’t a relationship. They were beautiful things, period, or important things... I don’t know how to explain it – they were just things! At a certain point, boredom, and then loneliness, set in. I am struck that Fr. Giussani defines solitude not as the lack of people, but as the lack of meaning. I was not alone because there were fewer people, but because everything was random. Working on School of Community was not difficult, because I didn’t even think of it! Prayer was useless: it was hard, almost painful. I no longer knew how to seek Jesus. I don’t want to say that He is present if I don’t see Him, to stick His name on because “in any case, He is the One who does everything.” I saw no trace of the divine in my days, just me doing a series of things. Other people’s happiness and certainty continued to be desirable, but they seemed unreachable – whereas just a few weeks before, I was the first to live like that, bursting with joy. I felt almost abandoned, because before, I felt that entering the day like this was effortless, I was happy to exist. Then boredom and self-loathing took over, and everything was fake and flat. I felt that before, leaving the house was like going to see a friend – your bed is still comfortable, your house is still cozy, but if you go to see a friend, you don’t think about that. Then, at a certain point, I was no longer able to get out of bed, as if there were no longer a friend waiting for me.

No reason to get out of bed.

Exactly. And my first reaction was precisely that I am worthless, that it is because of my own limit, my mistake, that I am no longer able to see Jesus. I lived my days on tiptoe, trying to make as few mistakes as possible, trying not to bother other people. I wasn’t free. Everything bothered me, especially myself. If something bad happened to me or someone treated me poorly, it was the proof that something was wrong with me. It cost me an effort even to say it, because I am embarrassed by my limits. However, something happened, and on that day I wrote to you. I went back to college, and we had the first School of Community in my department. It was striking – all of the people who spoke said something that related to my experience. I could have spoken, I could have spent an hour speaking, because it was my winter that they were describing. They were all people whom I would have perhaps considered to be ahead of me. On the contrary, they weren’t ahead, they were just like me. They weren’t better than me, they recounted my own mistakes and my own

difficulties. Above all, I no longer felt that the others were ahead of or behind me. While I was there, this way of thinking really disappeared. What a liberation! What a grace! If I don't dare to speak up because I am ashamed of having a hard time, there is someone who has a greater affection for himself and stands up to ask the same questions that I have! Thus, the issue of being "ahead" or "behind" or "having more or fewer shortcomings" didn't even come to mind. I was there because something beautiful was present there, truer than all of the bad moods that had been tormenting me since the end of classes. I realized that, in spite of my apathy and sorrow (over myself and everything), I didn't think once of leaving the Church, and in particular the Church as I am living it, that is, the Movement at college with my friends, because I wouldn't know where to go. I couldn't wait to go to School of Community. I was sure that I was right in saying that, deep down, I am worthless, but I couldn't wait to go there. So maybe I wasn't really that sure of it. Last time, you said that even if you were to get 999 out of 1,000 actions wrong... And I thought: That's me, making one mistake after another, because if the "doing" is left up to me...

I said it for you!

Thank you.

"Ante praevista merita" – foreseeing what had to happen.

When I read it, I was moved, because I did meet Jesus and I miss Him so much. Sometimes I also miss my longing for Him. When I feel that apathy, I would like to say: Where is my desire? Otherwise, I don't move, and I suffocate in my thousands of thoughts. My prayer in that moment was, "I miss You, when are You coming back?" and not, "Can You change me?" I understood above all that the memory of Him, that is, of how He entered and continues to enter my life, is my salvation, because it doesn't allow me to deny everything, since I cannot pretend that I didn't encounter Him. However, I ask you to help me, because right after that, I was already busy making myself invisible, pretending to be a bit better, and I feel schizophrenic and stuck. I want to ask you if you can help me to understand what this work is that allows one to love her life and not be disgusted with herself. It has already happened to me, but I want it to become my own attitude. Another thing. The day I wrote to you, I called my boyfriend, who asked me, "How are you?" I answered, "Terrible. Imagine, I even wrote to Fr. Carrón!"

To receive last rites!

Instead, he said, "Ah, then you are really doing well!" "No. It means that I have some problems and therefore I go around asking why I feel so bad." "No, no. When I feel bad, I don't move and I don't ask myself questions. When I am well, I ask everything." I wanted to understand this point. What did you learn from this experience? Because you said many things, but the point is whether you are aware of what you said.

Are you asking me why I had become frozen?

Yes. First, why were you frozen, to the point that things no longer spoke to you?

Everything had become a formality.

It had become a formality. You used a beautiful expression: “Gestures were just that – they didn’t lead to anything else, they weren’t a relationship. I saw no trace of the divine in my days.” What does this mean? What were you missing?

Nothing was united anymore.

Nothing was united anymore. But the first point of which one has to become aware is that your relationship with reality had become reduced. It’s not that He was present and then He disappeared. The problem is that I can no longer read reality in relationship with the Mystery who makes it. Reality doesn’t speak to me of this divine present in my days. Why do you think that the Mystery allows these steps? What does He want you to learn (as you saw later on)?

I think that He doesn’t want it to be something sentimental.

He doesn’t want it to be something sentimental. Because – as your boyfriend told you – when you are aware of your need... What happened when you went to School of Community with all of your need?

I listened.

You listened. And everything spoke to you. In spite of how you saw yourself – in spite of the fact that you had repeated to yourself for days that you were worthless, that you were disgusting – that was precisely the wound, the crack through which Christ entered. Then, everything spoke to you with an intensity that surprised you, so much so that you couldn’t forget it and you wrote, “I couldn’t wait to go there.” If the Mystery doesn’t spare us this, it is because the real point of the journey is not to have a miracle happen, so that everything becomes automatically exciting, but that your relationship with reality is educated to the point of seeing things as they really are, with all of their substance, with all of the divine present in them. Because if you don’t see the divine present, then, at a certain point, you depend only on your emotions, and then this causes you to suffocate. At the last School of Community, we said that even if you get 999 out of 1,000 actions wrong, you are loved. You couldn’t even dream of being moved by this fact, unless it resulted from the experience that you had, which proves what St. Paul says: “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” “My grace is enough for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.” The question is whether we make a journey starting from this. Otherwise – like you said – a moment later you are back at the beginning, as if you hadn’t learned anything from the experience that you had. This is the path to which the Mystery invites us – not because He wants to make it harder on us, but because He is always present, reality is always full of His presence, and you are always full of His presence, in spite of all of your mistakes. However, you have to approach the reality of yourself and of everything that you touch with a gaze that is not reduced, without depending on your feelings, because the Mystery doesn’t interrupt the relationship that He has with you. If He interrupted it, you would cease to exist, you would disappear. This is the journey that God invites us to make, so that everything may become exciting. This is the game that we are asked to play. Thank you.

At the most recent Schools of Community, I felt described in great depth, and this aroused a strong desire to thank you for how you are helping me in this journey, like a father. For a while, I had the grace to go to daily Mass, and I also had some free time during the day to read the School of Community and other texts. This was very helpful in carrying on a dialogue with the Mystery within my life's dramatic and precarious circumstances. Then, a period of demanding work began, and I had no time to do anything but take care of work and my children. Thus, I began to ask, "Jesus, I need to see You in the things that I have to do, You have to come there, because there is no other way." He answered me, and He doesn't let go. I get in the car with this uneasiness; in a flash, I understand that something is not right. On the way to pick up my older son at school, I am already thinking that he will upset me and that the afternoon will be hard and, perhaps, sad. In that moment, I feel His gaze upon me, and I realize that I am already destroying the possibility of good for me that He puts into things. In that instant, my freedom comes into play and I say, "Wow, I was already on the brink of destroying everything, but I don't want to. I offer You my fear and my struggle – come and teach me how to love my children, help me to keep my eyes open and recognize the good that will happen." Or I start to work and I feel an uneasiness, an inconsistency: "What good can my work contribute to the world? How can I make a positive contribution by staying here in front of my computer, alone in this room?" It becomes an entreaty to Him, the offering of this sacrifice. I feel liberated by His gaze. My work fills with enjoyment; I can put all of my creativity and passion (in the sense of love) into it. Perhaps no one will read my report, but that work of mine is a way in which I give glory to Him for the talents that He has given me, and it is the expression of my gratitude to Him. I could relate other instances of my daily life when I happen to take a feeling of my heart, my person, my humanity seriously. I am surprised that Jesus uses this as a springboard in order for me to recover my relationship with Him. In that moment, I have to decide if I want to let myself be embraced by Him again. This is the experience of His mercy in my life: every time that His grace gives me the opportunity to become aware once more of His presence and His tenderness in my daily circumstances. Only when I am propelled by this tenderness do I see – sometimes – that something changes within me, and I am moved, I experience a gratitude that I cannot hold back. In spite of my past, shaped by a moralistic "having to be" and "having to do," it is increasingly clear that my effort is useless. Never before has the difference between actually doing work and making an effort to do something (even work) been so clear to me. For example, one weekend I kept thinking about the beautiful things that had happened to me in the preceding days, and I found myself incapable of goodness in front of the things that are dearest to me. Thus, I wondered, "Where is my faith if I am not able to do good? Why, given these beautiful things that just happened to me, am I still sad?" Then, on Monday, my eyes opened and I realized that I was thinking that I had become good, capable – and instead, everything plays out in the instant, in that instant. I had not surrendered to that instant that I didn't like. Judging this experience made me focus once more on the fact that work is not something to be done out of duty, something that burdens you and ultimately gets stuck in the inevitable disappointment of not being able to do or to be. For me, work has become a faithfulness to the heart, a search for a journey,

and God always lets Himself be found. I see that everything plays out in that instant in which, for a moment, I become aware of His gaze, and I have to decide if I want to tell Him again, “Yes, You know that I love You.”

This is work, as you demonstrated to us even in the details. Fr. Giussani used to say it: our continual initiative in the relationship with things, with what I have to do, where my reason is constantly engaged, so that I may see the You to whom I respond in everything, so that my freedom may respond to this way in which the Mystery calls me through things. However, this is not something that happens only at the beginning. The point is that this dialogue become increasingly familiar, so that everything may become a relationship with Him. You just said, “I have to decide.” Nothing is mechanical in this relationship. Everything always plays out in the instant. Therefore, the “doing” is not moralism, but rather it is to live constantly within this relationship in which everything is at stake – that is, it is a journey.

I am going to tell you about a very small thing from which I learned a lot. One evening last week, a friend of my sister, whom I knew only by sight, came to dinner. That day I was very sad, caught up and absorbed in my thoughts about an exam that I had to take, and I had absolutely no desire to participate in that dinner. We began to eat, and this girl started to tell us about herself, in a simple way, and we all began to laugh – my parents, too. The first thing that I noticed was that suddenly I was present again, not in my head, in my thoughts, but I was present in reality again, at dinner. I noticed this because, during the day, I had tried my best to concentrate, to allay my fears, to change my position, and I had not been successful. The first question that arose in me was: Who has the power, and so much mercy on me, to bring me back to being present in the present, to make me present in things again? Because this is a miracle. After dinner, I had to start studying again, and all of my worries came back. But at a certain point during dinner, that girl had said something that had struck me, about a conversation with a friend of hers. I was very hesitant to ask her to explain it better, to tell me more, because I didn't know her and I am very shy, so I didn't want to intrude. However, at one point, I realized that what had struck me constituted the alternative between continuing with my thoughts or following the only thing that I had, that is, something that had struck me. I mustered up the courage and asked her. A beautiful and essential conversation ensued – not telling each other the details of our lives, but getting to the heart of things with a frankness and a sincerity that I had missed for a long time. It was one of those conversations in which the other, without knowing you and everything about you, says exactly what you need. It was one of those facts that correspond precisely to what you were looking for, the umpteenth fact that proves that there is One who saves me, who pulls me out of my thoughts and doesn't leave me alone with them. With regard to the method, I understood two crucial things of which you often remind us. The first is that everything that I need in order to live, to be happy, is present in reality, but reality has to be followed. When I was sad again after dinner, I had a choice: either my thoughts or a fact, something that had struck me. This choice is the moment in which everything plays out, and I had to decide what I wanted to follow. The problem of happiness

is a matter of seriousness and freedom. Most of the time, for various reasons, I choose my thoughts. The second thing is the importance of being attentive to oneself and of judging. You told us that each of us has to stop and look, has to become aware of the things that arise from within, the questions, the changes, the joy and the sadness. During dinner, I realized that suddenly I was no longer a prisoner of my thoughts. I wondered what had happened, what had changed, what had caused that change. One has to observe himself when he changes, because he changes, and he has to judge it. This is the only way in which things remain instead of slipping through your fingers, so much so that now, a week after those facts, I don't think of them as a vague memory of the past, but rather as constitutive elements of my person, as if I had laid down a brick in the construction of myself. I am moved by how such a simple fact can educate me and teach me so much. Everything is present in reality, and I realize more and more that I need to let myself be educated. The other thing that I realized is the importance of School of Community. Without it, the facts that I recounted to you would have happened anyway, but I wouldn't have noticed them, and in any case, I would have seen them less clearly. I realize that it is like a lens that allows me to look at what happens to me more truly and deeply.

Everything is decided by how we relate to reality, because when I am not present in reality, then through the most unforeseen thing, “suddenly I was present again.” I discover that I am alive through the presence of a person who comes to dinner unexpectedly. A presence that – you said – has the power and the mercy to bring me back to the present. One who saves me and pulls me out of nothingness. This happens. One doesn't need to have visions when he lets himself be “taken over” by reality. We can see that everything that we need is present in reality. Everything that one needs in order to live and to be happy is present in reality, but reality has to be followed – not endured, but followed. Each of us can decide whether he wants to follow or not. The problem is not about following who knows what. What should we follow? We should follow the form in which the Mystery calls us – life as vocation – through the circumstances of our life (like a totally unforeseen thing, which one can dismiss in advance because he doesn't expect anything from it). How many of the things that happen to us every day would we dismiss because we don't expect anything! On the contrary, only if we are open to following can we realize to what extent Someone pulls me out of nothingness through reality. This transforms everything. Instead of remaining a prisoner of your thoughts, you begin to be present in reality, and all that you need is to be educated to this. The Mystery educates us through reality in the constant companionship that we are to each other.

I would like to ask you a question about the last part of Recognizing Christ, that is, about work as obedience. On the one hand, I realize that, for me, it is not enough to think of living work only in order to bring home a salary at the end of the month, and as a recognition of what I can or cannot do. However, that work could become obedience in life surprises me, arouses my curiosity, and attracts me, because I perceive that it is a position that could give me an enormous freedom in front of the demands of work. On the other hand, I don't understand this completely, and I would

like to examine this statement of Fr. Giussani's more deeply. I don't think that it is a casual remark, because he speaks precisely about the work that I have in front of me for eight to ten hours every day, which affects me greatly.

Thank you. I will begin to introduce an answer. In my opinion, the first thing to clarify is the word "obedience" in its relationship to work. Many times, we can reduce it to simply doing our work well, which is obviously part of the issue. However, one can be – let's say – committed to his work (as if everything depended on his performance) and suffocate at the same time, because from the beginning of the month to when his salary arrives, many hours go by... The point is what makes work different. This is where the concept of obedience to which Fr. Giussani introduces us comes into play, because work does not consist only of professional ethics (not wasting time, being precise, etc.). Obedience is obedience to a You, because He is calling me through work. This is part of what we were saying, which reaches that point (work) that is so crucial for our life, because of the amount of time that we dedicate to it every day. The Lord is calling me, and therefore the point is to live reality and circumstances, and therefore work, as a dialogue, as a relationship. Obeying is not simply a moral consistency, but it is what makes work different. As we were saying a few minutes ago – that one may be constantly saved from his nothingness.

I was very struck by the phrase with which Fr. Giussani's lesson ends.

Perfect. We will end our itinerary with this: the phrase with which Fr. Giussani's lesson ends.

"The fight with nihilism, against nihilism is to live this 'being moved'" (p. 88). I was very struck, because I perceived it as a formidable judgment on what I live, on my daily personal experience, on the historical events that we are going through. It seems to me that this sentence says that being moved by Christ needs reality, that is, it needs to be verified and lived so as not to become a feeling. Striving to do many things is not enough to avoid collaborating with nihilism. The instant in which one is moved by Jesus is not sentimental when it becomes the substance of every instant. For example, for me, your Christmas article in Corriere della Sera was an example of living this "being moved."

Why?

Because you were moved by facts, aspects of reality that I can see as well, but that do not provoke in me what they provoke in you. In fact, it affected me not just for its content, but especially for the method to which it witnesses. I was struck by the fact that, if one begs for this "being moved" – that is, if he realizes that the problem of life is living this "being moved" – then he starts to notice those who witness it to him every day. Otherwise, you don't see it, and you are full of thoughts about Christ, but you don't recognize the person next to you who is giving this back to you. At times, the witnesses are the most improbable, as was evident in your Christmas article. I will mention some things that happened during this period. The impossible change of one of my students who was affected by a great difficulty, and whose impressive essay was published in a national newspaper. Or the amazement of many new GS kids who came to the study weekends, where the last comers showed an amazement for our companionship that we didn't have.

Therefore, our only problem was following those who were amazed. Or a businessman (who is not a practicing Catholic) who is working in the Holy Land, who told me, “I made an incredible discovery here! I don’t understand why nobody talks about it, but Christianity is a fact, not a religion, and with my work I touch this fact with my hands.” I was also very struck by a recent conversation with some friends, in which we had a lively discussion about recent political events. At one point, I couldn’t help saying, “Friends, what does what we are saying have to do with Fr. Giussani’s last sentence in Recognizing Christ? It seems to me that sometimes we replace this ‘being moved,’ which perhaps we haven’t felt in many years, with what we do. Then the experience of the Movement becomes something to do instead of Someone to love. Thus, we can fight many battles, we can go to the Family Day or not, but without living this ‘being moved,’ we will only keep feeding what we actually want to fight.”

As we said in the Christmas article, the last comer gives us back what we no longer see in reality or what we no longer see in the Church, in the place where the presence of Christ historically remains. Christ takes hold of us, not only in the first moment of the encounter, but throughout the entire journey, so that when skepticism starts to emerge, the only thing that we need to do is to follow those who are full of amazement at what they are living. That is why I think that Fr. Giussani’s final sentence is a summary of what Christianity is. It also offers us a criterion of judgment, not only for School of Community, but also for living reality, living historical events, answering the question of what our task in the world is. The battle against nihilism is living this “being moved,” not the things that we do.

With regard to this, I want to end with a letter sent by a friend who unfortunately could not come to speak in person. “Dear Fr. Julián, in view of the Cirinnà bill that is going to be presented in Parliament, a new public gathering in defense of the family has been announced for January 30th in Rome. With the punctuality of a Swiss watch, the race begins among us to take a stance for or against this ‘Family Day,’ a choice meant only to convince the opposite side of the goodness of one’s own position. Those in favor take this stance because ‘one cannot sit still, and it is impossible not to witness one’s belonging in front of a government that intends to approve bills of law that threaten the foundation of the family.’ Which is like saying: what the Movement is telling us is okay [living the “being moved” is okay], but up to a certain point, and then one has to act. Those who are against the public demonstration oppose it – in my opinion due to a wrong interpretation – because ‘in the famous internal note related to the public demonstration of June 20, 2015, Carrón and the Movement advised us that having a public demonstration is useless.’ Dear Fr. Julian, I find this debate suffocating and depressing [if we feel like this, imagine what the others feel!], I perceive it as a reduction of my ‘I’ that cuts off a great portion of reality in one stroke. I wondered: Why is such a debate so inadequate for my heart? What I think is missing is a ‘true’ judgment about myself and about reality.” In reading this e-mail, I wondered: Why does our friend feel that the ongoing debate is suffocating and depressing? Because a true judgment about himself and about reality is missing. After what we heard this evening, it is clear that when one reduces reality, when a true relationship with reality is lacking, then one is not “taken hold of.” This is not only a

problem that others have, but it is also our problem. There is a way of placing ourselves in reality that doesn't leave us at peace. Thus, let's try to help each other to make this judgment emerge, to really understand the purpose for which we are in the world. I will clarify right away that this bill has many critical aspects, as authoritative commentators have observed. The most problematic and negative points are the substantial assimilation of civil unions to marriage, and the introduction of the possibility of adoption by homosexual couples. That being said, we need to ask where this bill originates. It is born from the desire to respond to a need that some people express, a human desire that we can identify in the most varied attempts – sometimes wrong and confused, but not less dramatic, as we have said on other occasions – to reach that fullness that every human being cannot help but desire, and that sometimes conceals itself under contradictory appearances. The theme is always man and his fulfillment. Behind every human attempt, there is a cry for fulfillment. What does this tell us? As then-Cardinal Ratzinger stated, “It is for the sake of man and the world. And neither of them, it is clear, can be saved unless God reappears in a convincing fashion. No one can claim to be sure of the way to deal with this emergency. That is impossible, if only because in a free society truth can find no other way to prevail, and should seek no other way, than simply by power of persuasion; yet persuasion can only be achieved with difficulty amid the multitude of pressures and demands to which people are subjected” (*Truth and Tolerance*, Ignatius Press, 2005, p. 144). We live this difficulty in a world that contains these paradoxes, these contradictions. The difficulty that we live is how to find, through the power of persuasion, a way of defeating these various forms of reduction of our own and other people's desire. Therefore, the first thing that we need to have is – as another person writes – “attention toward the people who claim these rights [which Pope Francis constantly invites us to have]. Who are they? What do they want? What moves them? What are they looking, asking, crying out for? Are they sitting on the sidewalk and shouting? What can we answer them? Let's look at them, let's touch them, let's touch their wounds,” before we answer. We are not the only ones who need to face these people and their wounds, but also all of those who expect the legal system to solve the human dramas that these people are living and to respond to all of human desire, including their own. We all read the story in *Traces* about the homosexual young man who confides to some friends whom he met by chance that he works in fashion, he has an interesting job and a partner, and yet he is not happy, but unsettled. “It is as if something is missing, as if I lived my life from a point of reaction, of defense. This leaves me unsettled” (“You Are Special in a Normal Way,” *Traces*, no. 1/2016, p. 4). As we have said on other occasions, the critical point of contemporary culture is precisely its shortsightedness with regard to the deepest human needs. In fact, the human need of these people, no matter how they choose to respond to it, continues to be present in their lives. Thus, when they feel comfortable with someone – as it happened to our new friend, who then died of cancer – they share their deepest thoughts and reveal the extent of their unhappiness. We need to understand that the so-called “new rights” are attempts to answer these situations. However, as we can see, the real man cannot be reduced through the forms and laws that we may establish. This is the reason for their suffering: the drama that they are living remains exactly the same. Therein lies a crucial point

for us Christians: Do we have something to say to these people? The solution to the problems with which life presents us every day, said Fr. Giussani, “doesn’t happen by facing the problems directly, but by deepening the nature of the subject that is facing them,” that is, “one solves the detail by going deeper into the essential” (A. Savorana, *Vita di Don Giussani [Life of Father Giussani]*, BUR, 2014, p. 489). What answers this necessity to generate a human subject? The letter continues, “I notice a discrepancy between the desire for the infinite and the reduction of reality that we regularly make in front of life’s important events. If it is true that Jesus came to redeem us from sin and cure the sick, as the woman affected by hemorrhages was sick, then what can I – who have been ‘touched,’ like that woman in Capernaum – contribute, so that the men and women who haven’t been ‘touched’ may also be ‘touched’ by the One who was sent into the world to make us happy? Is the public demonstration an adequate response to that need? Or, after we go to the demonstration, will the question, the need, remain the same once we get back home? The challenge that we are facing is momentous.” What can we Christians offer to these people as an original, unique contribution that is truly commensurate to the problem? Each of us has to ask himself, because we cannot solve this problem in any other way than by verifying it personally. It is crucial to ask ourselves this question, in order to give a concrete response to the events that worry us at the present time: civil unions (and the resulting public demonstration on January 30th). The only response is the encounter that frees man from the reduction of desire, because all of these attempts stem from a reduced desire, both in us and in others. It is interesting to see the reaction of this homosexual man from within the friendship that his new friends offered to him: “‘It would be beautiful to experience work and relationships as you and your wife do. [You have a different kind of joy, which I don’t have.] You are special in a normal way. [...] I love talking with you.’ Then he asked me, ‘How do you live this way?’” (“You Are Special in a Normal Way,” *Traces*, no. 1/2016, p. 4). This demonstrates what Fr. Giussani always told us, that “in a society like this, nothing new can be created except through a life – neither structure nor organization nor initiatives will work. Only a new and different life can revolutionize structures, initiatives, and relationships – in short, everything” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [“Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom”], ed. O. Grassi, *CL Litterae communionis*, no. 11, November 1978, p. 44). This is what everyone is expecting from us, like this friend of ours. “What is missing,” Fr. Giussani reminds us again, “is not so much the verbal or cultural repetition of the announcement. Man today awaits perhaps unconsciously the experience of the encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a present reality that their life is changed [and then one can overcome the nihilism, the reduction]. What will shake today’s man is a human impact, an event that echoes the initial event, when Jesus raised His eyes and said, ‘Zacchaeus, hurry down. I mean to stay at your house today’” (L. Giussani, *L’avvenimento cristiano [The Christian Event]*, BUR, Milan 2003, pp. 23-24). Here we are shown the method with which Christianity happened and can always happen again. How is this important for pulling man out of the reduction of desire that causes him to suffocate, so that he can start breathing again? Because Christ is not an ornament on the solution, but the key to the solution! Only Christ as a present event in people’s experience can free man from the reduction of desire,

and cause him to desire that fullness for which he is made. “It would be beautiful to experience work and relationships as you and your wife do.” It is the origin of this “curiosity full of desire that is awakened by the presentiment of truth” (L. Giussani, *Alla ricerca del volto umano [In Search of the Human Face]*, Rizzoli, Milan 1995, p. 125). “How do you live this way?” Where does all of this come from? Without the experience of being freed from this reduction, any so-called “concrete” answer will always be inadequate, both for ourselves and for others. That is why we are all suffocating. The victory over nihilism is to live this “being moved.” Do we appreciate the unique opportunity that this event represents for our maturity, that is, the awareness of why we are in the world and therefore of the value of our witness? This is also our contribution to the good of all, as Pope Francis reminded us in Florence. “*I also advise that you have, in a special way, the capacity to dialogue and encounter [...] in order to build together with others in civil society. We know that the best response to conflicts of human beings, from the well-known homo homini lupus of Thomas Hobbes is the ‘Ecce homo’ of Jesus who does not recriminate, but welcomes and, paying in person, saves*” (*Meeting with the Participants in the Fifth Convention of the Italian Church*, Florence, 10 November 2015). It is from this that we can begin to rebuild together with others in civil society – otherwise, everything remains entangled in the web of partiality, schemes, and oppositions. I hope that these suggestions can also allow us to judge the usefulness of the upcoming public demonstration on January 30th. Since it is an event proposed by laypeople, and since the Italian Church has not given any binding directives this time, either – respecting the freedom of the laity – then each person should decide what to do as a layperson, verifying the ultimate reason for his decision in his own experience.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, February 17th at 9:00pm.

We will begin this year by working on the second part of Fr. Giussani’s book *Why the Church?* As we saw this evening, starting from all of the challenges that emerged, the Church not only continues Christ’s work, but she is the very continuation of Christ Himself, calling us and building our life. Now we have an opportunity to examine the Church’s constituent factors in depth, in the way that they are re-proposed to us by Fr. Giussani. For this reason, we will work on Chapter 5, entitled “The Three Constituent Factors” (of the Christian phenomenon in history), p. 72-87.

We have already seen in the Introduction of the *Fraternity Exercises* how the Resurrection was the origin of that new people, as Pentecost demonstrates. Now, with this gaze, we can begin to read all of the substance of the people that we are.

I remind those who want to enroll in the Fraternity and then participate in the *Fraternity Exercises* that they have to submit their application by February 16th.

As we mentioned last time, on the occasion of the 11th anniversary of Fr. Giussani’s death, we have decided to make the DVD of his lesson *Recognizing Christ*, which we watched during the

Fraternity Exercises (2015), available to everyone. It is a precious opportunity to identify with the heart of our charism, and to offer everyone his witness during this Holy Year of Mercy.

The DVD *Recognizing Christ* will be distributed with the February issue of *Tracce*. For those in the US and other countries that do not receive *Tracce* in print form, the DVD will be available in on the CL International website by early March.

This year, the Rimini Meeting will be held from Friday, August 19th to Thursday, August 25th.

Veni Sancte Spiritus