

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, June 17, 2015**

*Reference text: J. Carrón, Introduction, in A Presence Within the Gaze, Fraternity Exercises 2015; L. Giussani, “The Continuity of Christ: Root of the Church’s Self-Awareness,” Why the Church?, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001, pp. 65-71.*

- *Por tudo meu Jesus*
- *Favola*

*Glory Be*

We had given ourselves the task of continuing to work on the Introduction of the Fraternity Exercises and the chapter of *Why the Church?* that deals with the theme of the Resurrection. The first question is about precisely this. “At the weekly meeting of our School of Community group, as we were reading the chapter on Jesus’ permanent presence among men, some questions arose that became the topic of a heated discussion. Some of us affirmed that one can live the present well because of certainty of the Resurrection and eternal life; others maintained that eternity is a promise, and that one experiences the hundredfold here and now by living the present reality – to the point that, even if, paradoxically, there were nothing afterward, then living like this would still be beautiful and fulfilling. Perhaps this is only a theoretical discussion, but we got carried away with these two views on the Resurrection. In our opinion, it means that we have a question that needs to be clarified. Another discussion started: one of us was saying that, in some situations, he would curse the fact that he was a Christian, because being Christian sometimes makes his experience harder, less happy and satisfying. We had a heated discussion about this, too. Being Christians doesn’t spare us any hard work in daily life, but isn’t it true that, by judging according to the criterion born of faith, one experiences true gladness?” Each of us is called to verify this, otherwise it is a fruitless discussion (because ultimately, each person verifies the point of view that he is defending in reality). If, in front of circumstances, one did not find that faith helped him to live, then he would curse the fact of being Christian. That is why we said at the Exercises that faith cannot say, “This is how it is, period,” asking for blind consent, because it is tied to experience. So much so, says Fr. Giussani, that it has to appear before the court of your experience. The Church cannot cheat, proposing something that it cannot fulfill; but in order to affirm the truth, I cannot cheat either. If, at a certain point, one cannot recognize that he is living reality, a difficult circumstance, differently precisely because of faith, then he will gradually empty faith of its reasonableness, and his faith will not last. Thus, it’s not the theoretical discussion that resolves the issue. What provides a solution – what Fr. Giussani always exhorted us to do – is to verify faith in experience. Otherwise, we cannot get out of this dilemma that faith, like any other reality in history and in life, brings to the surface: Is it true, or not? Truth emerges before my eyes only in experience.

*In the past few weeks, I forced myself to read the School of Community every day, because, unfortunately, it’s not something that comes naturally to me yet, and I often read it reluctantly.*

*But I understand that, even if I am not enthusiastic about it, the School of Community is the first tool that I have to really understand things. In fact, left to my own devices, I would stop at the surface. This work of comparison has revealed that my “I” is still dominated by pettiness and bewilderment. In front of dramatic events in my life, I never felt that Christ was distant – on the contrary, my relationship with Him became deeper precisely in those moments. However, I realize – not without sadness – that it is in my daily life, in the normal routine of the day, that I grow distant from Him. On p. 11 of the Exercises, it says, “Christianity is the exaltation of the concrete reality, the affirmation of the carnal [...], the affirmation of concrete and perceptible circumstances, so you feel no longing for greatness when you see yourself limited in what you have to do: what you have to do, even if it is small, is great, because within it vibrates the Resurrection.” On the contrary, many times when I am home with my “normal” life, I find myself thinking, “Is that all?” The routine of daily life becomes banal, and I find myself desiring something else, wishing that I could do something else. I think: if someone were here, or if I did something else, then it would really be worthwhile – and I feel this weighing me down, as if it were my responsibility to transform that reality into something different. This perception that I have of things doesn’t leave me indifferent. On the contrary, I am full of sorrow, because I end up looking at my family and my reality with sadness. I would like to live without the expectation that the world around me will change, but with the hope that I can change, as Christ is asking of me. What does it mean to live the Resurrection in everyday life? What is it like for you? How does the Resurrection make you look at things and people in everyday life? I desire to live according to this victorious gaze and to have it for myself, but my heart is often heavy.*

This is an example of what we were saying a moment ago. If the Resurrection is not an experience, then I am sad, and I live circumstances saying, “Is that all?” We find the answer to this question in what Fr. Giussani tells us, communicating an experience to us: “The culmination and the apex of the intensity of our Christian self-awareness is in the mystery of the Resurrection, therefore of my new self-awareness, of the way I look at all people and all things” (p. 11). There is no other gaze, friends! If I do not recover this gaze – as I have said on many occasions – then I cannot look at myself properly. I understand that you cannot look at anything, at your husband or at your daughter, without letting this gaze enter, without giving credit to this gaze. I don’t know how one can live faith without this gaze. I was told of a young American woman who had just converted to Catholicism; in answering the question of what it meant to her to “step out of herself,” she said, “It’s easy to understand. Before, when I was upset, I would start to write in my diary, or wander around. Now, instead, if I get upset, I immediately start to do School of Community. And it works. This is ‘stepping out of oneself.’” She is the last comer! Why did the publicans – I have said this many times – keep going back to Jesus? Because in the relationship with Him, a new way of looking at themselves, at things, and at people was introduced. That is why Fr. Giussani says that the Resurrection is the “keystone of the newness of the relationship between me and myself, between me and people, between me and things” (p. 11). One understands that Christ is risen, that the person of Jesus of Nazareth, who conquered life, is alive, that He is not a fact of the past, that He is not a devout memory or a feeling, that He is a presence that endures in time, because He introduces a new gaze toward everything. And we can touch it firsthand on many occasions: in reading the School of Community, or through the witnesses of other people who introduce us to a new way of looking at reality, where the Resurrection of Christ is vibrating. This allows the concrete circumstances to start to become different, so that, in a particular circumstance, which is totally limited and therefore not commensurate with the infinite longing for fullness that one has,

he doesn't yearn for something greater. What you have to do is great even if it is small, because it vibrates within Christ's Resurrection. What is the most immediate, the simplest way to start to understand these things? A loving relationship, when a presence determines the present so much that the instant – which is and remains full of limits – explodes as fullness of meaning. Because all circumstances are limited! When we don't see this superabundance, we either end up angry at circumstances or we want break through their limit by going beyond our own possibilities. On the contrary, when you see people who, in the daily and banal circumstances that we all live, are happy – that is, their faces don't look dull, they are not permanently uncomfortable with that underlying bitterness – then you understand what it means to be glad because He lives (and not because the circumstances change and become glorious). Have you ever experienced a boundless sense of fulfillment, even in the relationship with limited people and things? Yes. Well, this is only a very pale image of what Christ introduces into life. If the Resurrection is not this, if Christ is not the Presence that introduces this newness into life, then we are in the fray like everyone else – because man's desire is infinite, but reality is always limited (“Is that all?”). However, in certain moments, it is as if this horizon were pierced and we started to see that the Mystery introduces something new, as yet unfamiliar, whose full truth and substance we have already intuited in reality because we have experienced happiness, a sense of overflowing that is not due to the fact that things “went well,” but to Him. If this is not an experience, then the Resurrection remains a totally empty statement, because it is there – within, not next to, not afterward, not in dreaming of a different situation – when you are cleaning your children's rear ends, that the Resurrection of Christ vibrates. Even if it is not yet familiar, Fr. Giussani offers us this possibility – it is like this, even if it is not yet totally ours. The point is whether one starts to give credit to this, because then it will start to be like this. On what does this depend? It depends on being open.

*What has been troubling me in the past months is not a huge drama or who knows what else, but rather the dead calm and coldness of heart that I experience.*

Dead calm.

*I feel apathetic in everything. Nothing moves me. And it's not as if nothing has happened lately. On the contrary, many important things have happened (for example, the sister of a dear friend of mine was ill, and I could see how this wasn't an obstacle or something that stopped my friends, but rather it was always a help in judging and not letting life slip by, as instead happens to me). What upsets me the most is that I see how my friends are growing, how they notice every single detail in their day and treasure it, from the enthusiasm that they have when they recount things to me – such an enthusiasm that you don't even have to listen to a word of what they are saying, because when they speak, their faces are enough to understand that there is much more behind those words. Therefore, I need to find my “much more,” even if only because I can no longer study and I pay little attention in class, and in November I am due to graduate. The only certainty that I have is that I have experienced that “much more” and I know that it exists, and therefore that it is possible for me, too – but I don't understand what I am missing in order get it back. In the evening and in the morning, I pray that I may find it again during the day. I go to the Angelus every day, and I try to read the School of Community, but there, too, I am totally apathetic. I don't know how to start again.*

Praying is not enough – we also have to be open, available. In fact, what are your friends witnessing to you? Why do you desire to be like them? Because they recognize what is present – you say – in every detail of the day. This is not a problem of will or a problem of being clever – the point is to

recognize what is there. You can see it in the enthusiasm that your friends have when they recount things to you, in how they are amazed. They don't have more than what you or I have – the point is that we take for granted all of the reality that we have before us. Therefore, we have to learn, especially from those friends with whom you spend time: “What did you see?” Start to pay attention, to identify with those who are given to you: “Why are you so enthusiastic? What makes you so enthusiastic?” It is your gaze that must widen; a gaze has to enter into your own gaze! What makes this easier? Another email says, “With regard to the woman in *Barco Negro* or to Mary Magdalene, I realize that many times I don't have this perception of my need. I was also thinking of the Gioventù Studentesca kids who, at a *raggio* meeting a few weeks ago, were saying, ‘When there are no problems, it is difficult to recognize Him.’ How can one want and remain in this need? Does this wanting and remaining in need mean to love what is pure and to get rid of what is false?” We need to remain full of need like children, as Fr. Giussani says in speaking of the Resurrection, because children are amazed by everything. Instead, we are flat, because at a certain point, reality no longer speaks to us. This, says Fr. Giussani, is what we need to educate constantly. We need the intelligence of a child to be able to look at things in a true way. “We call ‘faith’ the human intelligence that, remaining in the poverty of its original nature is entirely filled by something else, because in and of itself it is empty, like open arms” (p. 12). This is what we have to renew, because reality is all there for you, but often it doesn't speak to you, because – as St. Augustine said – reality speaks only to those who make the comparison with the heart. That is why Fr. Giussani always told us to reread the chapter that is the key to getting out of this impasse: Chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*. Because when the presence of the Risen Christ makes you see the circumstances, makes you see reality, gives you a jolt, then this is the clearest sign of the Resurrection. Let's read. “This Mystery – the Risen Christ – is the judge of our life; He [...] judges it day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment” (p. 12). What does it mean that He judges, that He is the judge? It is as if you were in love: you see the judgment about what your girlfriend means to you in your relationship with reality. Moment by moment, you verify whether or not that gaze is so determining, so present, invades your life so much, that you cannot avoid entering reality, living anything, without that presence that has settled into your bones determining your life. When this is missing, when this stops, everything is flat. When this experience is not there, everything becomes flat. Because it is flat in and of itself? No. It is because that childlike intelligence that we must constantly renew is missing. That is why Fr. Giussani says that an education is necessary. It was the condition that Jesus always gave: “You can enter the Kingdom of God – that is, see the richness of life and what I bring – only if you become like children.” What makes you become less flat? You don't have to generate it, but you have to let yourself be struck by reality with simplicity – like a child. I remember a friend who had been in a car accident and was paralyzed and unconscious for six months. When he woke up, everything seemed new to him, different – everything was new! We see it every day and we are flat, because we are used to it; we take everything for granted. This requires work from us, sustained by those whom we find near us, who help us in the process.

*In recent weeks, we brought the exhibit about Fr. Giussani, Dalla mia vita alla vostra [From My Life to Yours], to the university. I noticed two things. First, it was an immense grace for everyone due to the encounters that we had. In explaining the exhibit, everyone delved deeper into what had happened in his or her own life, and this made us much more amazed in front of the reality that we were facing.*

This invitation to show the exhibit produces the first fruit in us: they were more amazed. Then, what the Lord will do with our “yes” is His business.

*Second, I saw in action what the Pope told us on March 7<sup>th</sup> with regard to the charism and to decentralizing: through the explanation of Fr. Giussani’s life, all of the kids deepened their first love, their encounter with Christ, and this is what they were bringing to everyone. What happened to us was great, so much so that everyone wondered: Is it possible to live like this always? In the subsequent days, we saw that, with that gaze of the Resurrection in our eyes, if one is loyal to a heart full of need, then he can’t help but go back and seek Him day and night. The most impressive example was a young man who visited the exhibit and has stayed with us ever since, even at an assembly that we had last week. He wrote to us (it is really an incredible “intelligence”), “Today, as School of Community ended, I had the deep desire to look everyone in the eye and embrace them. I went home on the train full of joy, and I wanted to understand. But it was something so great that the only thing that I could do was to remain silent, full of a profound amazement. How I wish that it were like this for everything, for every encounter! But there is more. It was a silence full of meaning, the same silence that I experienced in front of the Holy Shroud: the Face that I contemplated and that was drawing me to Himself is what I met again today through all of you. I only said ‘yes.’ Today, as you spoke, I was moved. I asked myself: Why was I moved? I realized that I have a heart full of desire for truth that made me aware of what was happening. You were saying that Jesus had used the people who were explaining the exhibit to remind us that it is possible to live like Fr. Giussani lived. I asked myself: Who is Jesus for me? Today, as in the past few days, it has been you, my true friends, who unexpectedly and mysteriously have allowed me to remember why I am in the world and for Whom it is worth living. Today you said, ‘We live for love of something that is happening now.’ I asked myself: Who was I for all of you? I did something normal, I said ‘yes,’ I came to see an exhibit – but in this normality, you, I, and the others have recognized Him alive within us. I rediscovered myself through all of you, and this brings me to say: it is beautiful to live with the awareness of the presence of Jesus who is keeping us company. I want to live like this always.” I was struck, because I saw in him what you told us about Peter: it is not enough to recognize the fact, but one must have that positive intelligence ready to grasp reality and what constitutes reality.*

One recognizes that a presence has entered the gaze because he finds a desire in himself that he didn’t have before: the desire to look everyone in the eye and embrace them, and not as the result of one’s own project (going back home full of joy, in silence). And in listening to those who were presenting the exhibit, he had to acknowledge who they were – that is, Jesus’ presence, something that entered into his flesh and started to introduce a newness into his own limit, in the circumstances of daily life. This is an opportunity within reach of everyone who lets it in, no matter what the circumstances.

*I, too, am going to tell you – with a heart full of gratitude – about some encounters that we had at the university during the exhibit about Fr. Giussani. On the first day, as we were setting up the panels, two students arrived who usually meet there to smoke a cigarette. Surprised by our presence, they came closer and started to take a look. We asked them, “Do you want us to explain it to you?” The exhibit opened and they were the first there. At first, they were skeptical, and once in a while they smirked – but little by little, their faces changed, and they told us about themselves and their own questions. At one point, one of the two looked at us and said, “Beautiful! I didn’t expect it to be like this. People don’t know these things, you have to tell everyone!” Then he looked*

at his watch and said, "Wow! An hour and a half has gone by! I was supposed to go to lunch with some friends; time flew." In the afternoon, while we were taking a break, I saw him again behind the hedge, and I called to him, "What are you doing here again?" He answered that he had to go to class and didn't really feel like it. I said, "What classroom do you have to go to?" A classroom on the opposite side of the university... "But I wanted to see you guys again. Give me your phone numbers, even if I'm not sure that I'll call you." The next day, he came back and told me, "I never had a class as beautiful as yesterday." In the afternoon, we printed 150 fliers and we invited all of the students who were at the university. When my friends asked me why, I answered, "Because yesterday a student whom we had just met told us to invite everyone." On the third day, a professor came (we didn't know him, he is not in the Movement) who had read the email invitation that we had sent around. During the exhibit, he was moved many times. Listen to what he wrote to us the next day: "I thank you very much for the invitation, but especially for how you welcomed and accompanied me today. It is a special gift to have students like you, with the smile and the tenderness that you carry in your heart, as clear as the air and as limpid as spring water. Today I carried this image and that of Fr. Giussani home to my family, and I told them what happened. Your firsthand witness of faith represents an incentive for all of us to go on, even in difficult times." Faced with these facts (and others that I don't have time to recount now), I wondered if this was any different from the disciples of Emmaus who, after being with Him, go home and say, "Weren't our hearts burning while we were with Him?" Two thousand years. Christ is present today, and this is not something that I do. I am not capable of doing all of this with my hands and all of my good will. The next day, I went to Mass, and there was the Gospel in which Jesus says to Simon, "Put out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch." For me, it is you and my friends who tell me, "Go and present the exhibit. I give you this opportunity." "Simon said in reply, 'Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets.'" Here there is all of my resistance, but at a certain point one gives in. "When they had done this, they caught a great number of fish and their nets were tearing." If I look at the fish that we caught, then, in front of the temptation to be proud of the good work that I did, I lower my head and say, "Thank you, Lord, because I only followed You." I understand more and more that this You with a capital "Y" coincides with a human face. Reality, the companionship of the Movement, my friends, the proposals that we receive, are all the flesh of Christ who comes to get me and tell me, "Friend, come here, answer Me here, I will show you who I am." But the greatest discovery for me has not been the many fish that we caught, but to have realized again that I was precisely the first "shrimp" to be caught, mysteriously and undeservingly. In fact, while I was seeing how many of the students whom we met are looking for an answer for their life, their questions, and the reticence that they cannot overcome, an episode came to mind in which Fr. Giussani was speaking with a man whom he had just met, and he said, "If I see [...] how he is bustling about, looking for the road, there is a respect that is born precisely from the certainty that one has. Because if one who is certain sees one who is uncertain, then he feels an infinite pity for him and says, 'My God, what did I do to be different from him?'"

This newness in the banal circumstances of everyday living is simply that intensity of life that the Resurrection introduced. The judgment that emerges from these facts is that Christ is present because He introduces this newness. The question is whether, when it doesn't happen, we miss Him and return to Him – not because we want to generate this with our own attempt, but in order to let His presence enter into our "I," which is suffocating in the circumstances.

*When the exhibit came to our city for presentation, we had the possibility to receive the panels a few days earlier. Therefore, I had the idea to set it up in the school where I teach. It is an officially recognized private institute, middle and high school, with about 350 students. I planned on having guided visits only for my classes, also because the exhibit would be at the school for just two days, and then I had to set it up somewhere else. For logistical reasons, the exhibit was placed in the atrium where we have the coffee machines and where the high school kids take their break. It happened that I presented the exhibit to one of my classes (8<sup>th</sup> graders) precisely during the high school students' break, when many of my colleagues were waiting in line for coffee. I was ready to ask rather sharply for people to be quiet; but at a certain point, as I was speaking, I got in front of the panel "Woman, don't cry!" and, remembering very clearly what Fr. Giussani first, and then you, always repeated to us, I told my students, "Kids, imagine this fact, this woman who is following the casket of her son, this desperate woman who has lost her husband and now her son, too. Imagine her sorrow, imagine this woman's anguish. Try to imagine those tears that no man can dry. Jesus comes up and tells her, 'Woman, don't cry!' Who can do something like that? Is there anyone who can say something like that? Who can do that?" I stopped speaking, and I realized that the initial chatter had died down. I looked up and saw that those who were present in the atrium – I didn't count them, but there were many people because the whole high school group was taking its break and my colleagues were having coffee – were completely silent and were looking at the panel. They weren't looking at me, they were looking at the panel, they were looking at the question. I got to the end of the exhibit with a sense of awe for the silence, which was much more deafening than the initial noise. After a few hours, some students came to me and said, "Can you present the exhibit to us?" So for two days, I presented the exhibit practically non-stop. I even happened to show it to a group of my colleagues, which was something unexpected and unforeseen. I don't know what will happen now, but what happened is an answer for me; it is a fact that struck my heart. Someone could have dismissed what happened – and someone probably did – as something small. After all, some people said that the Apostles were drunk, so perhaps – I wasn't drunk!... But nothing can diminish what happened. At the end, a kid – and this deeply struck me – came to me and said, "Why does no one tell us these things?! Why didn't you tell us this before?" I felt a bit guilty, because in the end, it is not totally untrue, especially during exam time, when my concern is to prepare the students instead of proclaiming a Man who, in this moment and in spite of everything, in spite of all of the problems, says, "Do not cry!"*

What amazes me the most in the simplicity of these witnesses is that the first benefit is for us, which means that the Pope's invitation to go out and tell everyone what happened to us is first of all for ourselves. Because it is different when one sees these things happen in reality, as the occasion to challenge any flat moment, any difficulty. Faith grows, as we have always said to each other, by giving it, by sharing it, because it was given to us to share in any circumstance, in this case the exhibit about Fr. Giussani. Once our brothers and sisters encounter it, they say, "You have to tell everyone!" "Why does no one tell us these things?!" What is our contribution? What are they expecting from us? What does it mean to be a presence? All of these witnesses really show us the expectation of many who are near us. Thus, in our attempt to live what happened to us, to go deeper into what was given to us, one understands God's method, how God reaches others and changes them. As Fr. Giussani told us, only if our faith grows constantly will it be able to become a good for everyone else, too.

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Before concluding, I will say a word about the demonstration on June 20<sup>th</sup>, which we have been discussing in these days. The defense of the family is a need felt by the whole Church: the Pope stressed it once again last Sunday during the *Angelus*, and especially at the meeting of the Diocese of Rome. It was affirmed by the Pontifical Council for the Family, as well as many Bishops, associations, and ecclesial movements. The Secretariat of the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI) also took an official stance, confirming the need for unity among all Catholics on the topic of family. The entire Church fully agrees on this issue. However, the CEI clarified that no one has a monopoly on how to intervene in the public and political debate. Thus, it decided not to commit the Italian Church to direct support of the demonstration. Therefore, participation in the demonstration on June 20<sup>th</sup> is only one of the options – free and legal, but perhaps questionable. Does this mean that one doesn't agree that the family needs to be defended?

I have in mind the experience of Spain, which can serve as an example. We Spaniards have organized many and also more numerous demonstrations in defense of the family (I don't know if any other country has had so many), gathering millions of people in the streets. We all know that this did not deliver the success that we desired. On the contrary, we know how things ended: a much more tolerant law in favor of the "new rights." What do we learn from this? That demonstrations, which are a legitimate modality in a democratic society like ours, leave things as they are. Also, it is even more urgent to recognize what we have repeated by quoting then-Cardinal Ratzinger, who had the courage to say certain things that – in my opinion – we find hard to acknowledge: that we are facing the "collapse of ancient religious certainties," of the most basic evidences. For this reason, in the speech on last year's European elections, I quoted this passage: "At the time of the Enlightenment [...] in the opposition of the confessions and in the pending crisis of the image of God, an attempt was made to keep the essential values of morality [that is, the family, life, etc.] outside the contradictions and to seek for them an evidence that would render them independent of the many divisions and uncertainties of the different philosophies and confessions. In this way, they wanted to ensure the basis of coexistence and, in general, the foundations of humanity. At the time, it was thought to be possible, as the great deep convictions created by Christianity to a large extent remained and seemed undeniable" (J. Ratzinger, *L'Europa di Benedetto e la crisi delle culture* [The Europe of Benedict and the Crisis of Cultures], LEV-Cantagalli, Rome-Siena 2005, p. 61). What was the result of this "claim"? Ratzinger answered in no uncertain terms: "It failed." (*Ibidem*, p. 61). We can be sorry for this, but it is a fact. Thus, the first realism is to acknowledge that this is the situation, and that therefore, we are called to live these challenges, like the one regarding the family, in a totally different context. And even before it is a challenge to others, this new context is a challenge to us. What allows *us* to hold out, in a world where everything, everything, says the opposite? How will our families avoid drifting away in their substance, in the education of children, in the relationship between husband and wife? Do we still believe that God's method is able to sustain this, or not?

Now, what we had prepared as an internal notice sent to the communities – not a press release, a document, or a flier, as someone recently wrote – and which we purposely did not post on the CL website, was only sent to help to give a judgment. We didn't forget to sign it – we have no problem with signing it, just as I don't have any problem with talking to you openly about these things. We purposely did not want to sign it, and now I am going to explain why. The concerns expressed in the notice were brought up at the meeting on March 27<sup>th</sup>, promoted by the Neocatechumenal Way, to which we were invited, along with all of the Catholic associations. At that meeting, it was

precisely the Spanish demonstrations to which I referred that were mentioned as an example of great Catholic mobilization. On that occasion, and at the next meeting, when the date of the demonstration was announced (even if no consent had been reached during the previous meeting), we explained why we didn't think the proposed method of a demonstration was suitable for affirming the value of the family. In discussing the most adequate ways to face the topic of the defense of the family, we did not reach a clear and unanimous proposal. Along with us, the majority of the Italian Catholic associations (Catholic Action, Renewal of the Spirit, Community of Saint Egidio, Focolare, Opus Dei) and the Forum of Family Associations decided not to participate in the demonstration. Thus, what was conceived as a Catholic initiative became a 'non-denominational' demonstration, without emblems and flags, attended by the Neocatechumenal Way and other groups like Catholic Alliance, Manif pour Tous, and Pro Vita. At this point, we felt free, and therefore we deemed it inappropriate to take a public stand as Movement with regard to the demonstration. However, since, in recent weeks, many friends asked for help in giving a judgment about this initiative, we prepared the communication. The fact that we did not adhere to the demonstration was not dictated by political tactics, but by a criterion of realism and prudence, because recent history shows that every time that we take to the streets in order to defend a value, the result is not a positive effect, but a wall. We don't stop or slow down the process, but we fast-forward it. In 2007, on the occasion of the proposal of a Catholic demonstration against the bill for the legalization of civil unions, both same-sex and heterosexual (the famous DICO: "Rights and Duties of People Living Together in a Stable Union"), we had expressed a similar judgement, with the conviction that, in the cultural climate in which we live, a conflicting approach rarely leads to constructive and convincing results, because we live in a society in which ideology prevails over experience. In this sense, we were stressing that the tendency toward ideology can be fought with the witness of an experience in which one can recognize that the family is a "more" of humanity. Then, this doesn't mean that we should retreat into the sacristies, because this "more" is given in life! The witness of daily life is as public as a demonstration in the streets – it's not that one is public and the other is private. Otherwise, we easily lose focus, and above all, we forget the most important aspect, that is, the educational one. However, in 2007, the CEI specifically asked us and all of the other movements and associations to support the demonstration, and we obeyed. Now, the different context obviously inspired the Bishops to choose a different approach, and we continue to follow. This doesn't prevent anyone who wants to attend – as the Bishops also said – from going to the demonstration.

Where can we start again in this context? Lately, we have often recalled the Christians who are persecuted. When everything collapses, where do they start again? What do they turn to, if not to what we said tonight, that is, the witness of the newness of life that the Risen Christ introduced? In a situation like this, the method can only be to show a "more" of humanity in the witness of our daily life. Yet, we often think that this is too little, and that is why we are surprised by the method of God who, upon deciding to become man, emptied Himself and lived like everyone else (no one would have done this, none of us would have done this!), betting everything on the attraction that His person provoked in front of everyone. We know this because this is how Fr. Giussani communicated Christianity to us. What surprises me is that we have such a hard time understanding it.

For us, the duty of being witnesses, in daily circumstances, with the instruments of our professions, remains crucial. Our contribution to the debate consists in communicating an ultimate positivity in every situation and relationship. This is a task that each person can – and should – live in the dialogue with anyone else. Because this is the problem: when families break down, when people are unable to stand in front of reality, do they see something that opens a possibility for them? Countries were full of good laws, but that didn't stop the avalanche that we are living today. Part of this witness is also the defense of a space for the freedom of each person and all people, as we said on the occasion of the European elections. As we wrote after the events of Paris, "Space for freedom means space for saying in front of everyone, individually or together, who we are. Each makes available for everyone their vision and their way of living. This sharing will enable us to encounter each other on the basis of the real experience of each person, and not on ideological stereotypes that make dialogue impossible" (J. Carrón, "The Challenge of True Dialogue after the Attacks in Paris," *Corriere della Sera*, February 13, 2015, p. 27). Let's ask for the same freedom to live and to educate that others ask for themselves.

A friend wrote to me recently, telling me of a concern that many parents share: "In the end, it is difficult to answer the greatest concern: How can we protect our children? Without a doubt, we need to witness 'life' to them and be vigilant with regard to what is proposed in school or in other contexts, but I often wonder whether it is enough. As a father, I would like to always protect them and shelter them from the evil of the world, with the temptation to fight their battles for them. However, in this context, I think that they may be overwhelmed by a really devastating ideology, and at times I wonder if now it is inevitable that we have to fight the invasion. I know well that history teaches us that what opposed the invasions of the barbarians wasn't what was left of the Roman army, but the 'life' of the monks. However, many died during the invasions, and my concern as a father is that my children not be among the 'fallen.'" That is why I think that it is useful for us to see how the persecuted Christians educate their children to face the challenges of life. Let's watch this video.

*Video of the interview of Myriam, an Iraqi refugee in Qaraqoush.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wMONz2nZgg>

"During our visit to this camp, we were surprised to find this girl, who said that she watched our program 'Laysh Hayk.' Her name is Myriam. How are you doing, Myriam?"

"Fine, how are you?"

"I am great."

"Do you really watch our program?"

"Yes."

"Do you like SAT-7 Kids?"

"Yes."

"Where are you from? Are you from Qaraqoush, too?"

"Yes, I am from Qaraqoush."

"You are 10 years old, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been in this camp?"

"Four months."

"What's the thing you miss most from Qaraqoush that you don't have here?"

“We used to have a house where we played, whereas here we don’t, but thank God, God provides for us.”

“What do you mean God provides for you?”

“God loves us, and didn’t let ISIS kill us.”

“You know how much God loves you, don’t you?”

“Yes, God loves us all, not just me, God loves everybody.”

“Do you also think that God loves those who harmed you, or not?”

“He loves them, but He doesn’t love Satan.”

“What are your feelings toward those who drove you out of your home and caused you hardships?”

“I won’t do anything to them, I will only ask God to forgive them.”

“And can you, too, forgive them?”

“Yes.”

“But it is very hard to forgive those who made you suffer, Myriam, or is it easy?”

“I don’t want to kill them. Why kill them? I am just sad that they drove us out of our homes. Why did they do that?”

“You used to love your school in Qaraqoush, didn’t you?”

“Yes, I was the first of my class.”

“Did you also have friends from school?”

“Yes.”

“Are they here with you? Or are none of them here?”

“There are, but I don’t know where.”

“Maybe some of them are watching SAT-7 Kids on TV now. What would you like to tell them?”

“I used to have a friend before I came here. Her name is Sandra. We used to spend the whole day together, all day at school we were together even though we didn’t live close by. We loved each other a lot. If either of us wronged the other, we used to forgive each other. Sometimes we used to play and hurt each other, but we used to forgive one another. We used to love each other, now I only wish to see her.”

“You don’t know where she is, do you?”

“No, I don’t know where she is.”

“If Sandra is watching us now, I am sure that she will be thinking of you, and I am sure that she loves you, Myriam.”

“She loves me a lot, and I love her, too. And I hope to see her one day.”

“For sure I wish to be with you on the day you meet Sandra.”

“I hope.”

“What do you hope?”

“I hope that we go back home, and she goes back home, so we can meet again.”

“I hope that you go back to a home that’s even better than your first home.”

“If God so wants. Not what we want, but God, because He knows.”

“Don’t you sometimes feel sad? Do you feel that Jesus has forsaken you, for example?”

“No. Sometimes I cry because we left our home, and Qaraqoush, but I am not angry at God because we left Qaraqoush. I thank Him because He provides for us. Even if we are suffering here, He provides for us.”

“You taught me so many things.”

“Thank you, you taught me things too.”

“What did I teach you?”

“You taught me... No, you didn’t teach me, I mean you shared what I feel, you shared with me... Somehow I wanted people to know how I feel, how the children here feel.”

“Do you know that Jesus will never forsake you?”

“He will never forsake me. If you are a true believer, He will never forsake you.”

“Do you remember a song that you like to sing when you are alone, and talk to Jesus through it? Or don’t you remember any?”

“I know some songs.”

“Would you like to sing to me, to us, the song you like the most? Just a short song that you can sing to us, what do you think?”

“There is a song. *How joyful is the day on which I believed in Christ. My joy was made complete at dawn, and my voice sang with gratitude my love for my glorious Savior. Day by day will it grow. A new life, a joyful day, when I reunite with my Beloved. Motivated by love, He came, oh what a wondrous love! He restored me to righteousness, on account of a holy covenant. My love for my glorious Savior, my love to my glorious Savior, day by day will it grow. A new life, a joyful day, when I reunite with my Beloved.*”

We are often concerned or frightened for our children, because of the context in which they live, the really overwhelmingly violent ideology that assails them. But here there is more, as you have seen: Myriam, 10 years old, lives in a context where violence – physical and ideological – has taken away everything. But all of the evil in the world cannot stop a little girl like her. That is why it is a great educational challenge for us: Can we raise children who, in this context, can live in front of the challenges that they will have to face? What do they need in order to live like Myriam? What kind of witness do the persecuted Christians offer to us Christians of the West? What do we need in order to raise children who are able to live like her? This is a huge challenge. This is the great educational challenge. Whatever possibility we may have to block anything, the ultimate root of the challenge is this: whether faith is able to endure, no matter what the context in which we find ourselves living it. Thus, as we said at the Exercises, “The culmination and the apex of the intensity of our Christian self-awareness is in the mystery of the Resurrection.” We need for this to increasingly become flesh of our flesh, in order to be able to communicate it to our young ones.

Until the end of June, the work of School of Community continues on the Introduction of the Fraternity Exercises, including the beginning of the Assembly, because the first question and answer are related to the introduction. Together with the Exercises, we will also resume the work on Chapter 4, the first chapter of the second part of *Why the Church?*, pp. 65-71.

From July to September, we will work on the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises (Saturday morning), together with the questions and answers of the Assembly that relate to this lesson, pp. 91-100 and 104-105. In this lesson, as we know, we deal with the theme of a difficulty in understanding caused by the fact that the religious sense has not evolved. We defined it with Benedict XVI’s expression, “an odd darkening of the mind” (Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church and the Signs of the Times. A Conversation with Peter Seewald*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2010, Chapter 2). Because of this, we no longer recognize even the most elementary aspects of living. Therefore, the question that I invite you to work on is this: What helps us to come out of this odd darkening? Where did you discover yourself coming out of this

darkening, and what made it possible for you to recognize reality, the elementary evidence of things? Because this demonstrates that the Resurrection is really a fact that invades life and that allows us to look at everything, just as the Church looks at everything at the Easter Vigil. This is the judgment. The Resurrection is a judgment. Why? Because no one could dream of looking at everything – from the question of why it is worthwhile to be born, to our guilt, to evil, to difficulties – without Christ’s Resurrection. We have these months ahead of us to help us to really understand the context in which we have been called to live the faith.

Interview in *La Repubblica*. With regard to the interview that I gave to *La Repubblica* on the investigation in Rome: since we don’t have access to great media communication – whereas the media, instead, is always referring to us out of context – I ask each of you to be really committed to sharing the content of the interview with friends and acquaintances in the places where you live.

Summer vacations. The theme of the community vacations will be, “When did we discover and recognize, in our experience, a presence within the gaze?” Let’s not make abstract reflections on what the presence is, but let’s verify when we have recognized it, when we have realized that only that presence in our gaze allows us to look at everything – the relationship with myself, between me and my wife, between me and things and people – in a new way.

During the summer and our vacation time, we suggest that you propose the exhibit on Fr. Giussani, *From My Life to Yours*, and Fr. Giussani’s video *Il pensiero, i discorsi, la fede* [*His Thoughts, His Speeches, His Faith*] publicly, in the places where you are on vacation,.

We would also like to have a conversation together about G. Bardy’s text (*La conversione al cristianesimo nei primi secoli* [*Conversion to Christianity in the Early Centuries*]), to verify what reading this text has provoked and what judgments and questions came out of it. It is an opportunity to re-propose it and to share with each other what each of us has gained from this book. We proposed it precisely because we are called to live the faith in a context similar to what Bardy describes in the early centuries.

We remind you of the importance of attending the *Rimini Meeting* (August 20-26, 2015), and we ask you all to go for at least one day.

Books for the summer. *Un’attrattiva che muove. La proposta inesauribile della vita di Don Giussani* [*An Attraction that Moves: The Inexhaustible Proposal of Father Giussani’s Life*], edited by A. Savorana, a collection of presentations of the book on Fr. Giussani’s life.

*All Glorious Within. The World, the Flesh, and Father Smith*, by Bruce Marshall.

*Vive come l’erba...Storie di donne nel totalitarismo* [*Alive Like Grass...Stories of Women in Totalitarian Regimes*] by Bonaguro, Dell’Asta, and Parravicini.

*La mia porta è sempre aperta. Una conversazione con Antonio Spadaro* [*My Door is Always Open: A Conversation with Antonio Spadaro*], an interview with Pope Francis by A. Spadaro. [For English, see “A Big Heart Open To God,” *America*, [americamagazine.org/pope-interview](http://americamagazine.org/pope-interview).]

We have made a DVD, *In Cammino* [*On the Way*], of the audience with Pope Francis on March 7, 2015. We propose it as an opportunity to become even more aware of the encounter that we had and of what the Pope said to us.

The Beginning Day will be on Saturday, September 26, 2015 in Milan, with video connections with many cities in Lombardy and Italy.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Have a good summer, everyone!