

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, June 21, 2017

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http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=21600

- *Amare ancora [To still love]*
- *Give me Jesus*

Glory Be
Veni Sancte Spiritus

“What bitterness, my love / to see things as I see them” (C. Chieffo and M. Neri “Amare ancora” [To still love], Songbook, p. 205)—sometimes we reduce life and reality to what we are able to see. What a relief, instead, to be able to recognize that “It would be enough [...] to be like children again [...] / And remember that everything is given” from the beginning of every morning. How true it is what we reminded ourselves of at the Exercises, that unless we make a move, reality crushes us, it crushes us like a lead weight and thus formalism begins. Without a movement of our freedom formalism begins. Like a letter that I quoted in the Introduction to the Exercises said, “It is not enough for me to adhere mechanically to an announcement” for my life be reborn. On the contrary, “Life is beautiful because every day there is an opportunity for a relationship with the Mystery, and everything can become a challenge to discover it and receive that something more for yourself” (p. 3).

What experience has each of us had of this? Because the drama is exactly at this level, as a person who couldn't come because he lives very far away, wrote to me. I want to begin from here, “I feel that I have reached a crucial turning point of my existence. One of those decisive steps that cannot be delayed. I think it is thanks to your recent provocations at the Fraternity Exercises (and I just went over the Introduction!). I'll get to the point: all the considerations (and Father Giussani's 'old' concerns) you propose to us are more than timely, and I am afraid that I am in it up to my neck. Obviously, I risk being a formalist and a moralist. In fact, perhaps I still refuse to acknowledge it, but my faith is formal (it runs parallel to my life). Essentially, I live in a moralistic way (how many things 'cannot be done' or, on the other hand, 'cannot not be done.' Even great gestures—Food Collection, Medicine Collection, Christmas Tents, charitable work, common fund, Exercises, School of Community, etc.). Yet, the test (the usual merciless test), the test of gladness, destroys me: there is none! There is mostly a difficult relationship with everything, selfish and full of pretense. I can't stand it anymore. I wish (the desire!!) I could be glad when I weep, glad when I am humiliated, glad in tribulation, in my trials, in unforeseen circumstances [because formalism is no longer enough to let me live]. Instead, I find myself beaten down by the routine, even when it is—if you allow me to use this word—'light.' All in all, a true disaster. Christ is truly separated from my heart, despite my denying it repeatedly and wishing for the very opposite. Because of this, salvation cannot not interest me; I always think of it [pay attention!] according to my own model. After many years spent inside the history of the Movement I can't believe that I am so 'reduced' [we can be here, participating in all of this, and be 'reduced' like that]. And I can't

behave differently. My strongest feeling is to quit, because in any case I can't 'convert,' and therefore to reduce even more my existence to my good intentions (thus relying once again on myself rather than on Another), with the certainty (always based on my supposed abilities) of being a 'good person' who gives himself with vibrant energy to others who may ask for my help; a person who is not engaged in harmful or damaging practices. In short, who is not that bad! But gladness is always somewhere else! And the companionship? Right, the companionship. I don't feel that there are many people around me who bend over backwards to help me, to understand me, to accompany me. They mostly judge me and isolate me even further. Between one School of Community and the next, there is never a phone call or an invitation to get together. At best some text messages with ludicrous jokes or titillating links that divide us. Can it be also that the part of the companionship I know and spend time with is formal and moralistic? How can I get out of this? [As soon as he formulates the question, he returns to thinking according to his "model" of thinking]. And don't tell me that the restlessness I experience is a 'good,' because I really don't understand this. Please don't tell me that my (possible) cry (or festival of lamentation) 'is helpful,' and that Christ is present also there, waiting for me, and that everything I live is only for my benefit! I understand all of this only at a formal level, not existentially [this is the point: also this recognition is somehow formal]. My heart is isolated. It suffers and I don't know what step to take. Freedom (and, therefore, the path) ...! After such a long time, I am back to square one. But age (growing older) doesn't help, quite the opposite. What is the 'task' for the summer?"

I think many of us can recognize ourselves in this description, and it is from within this situation that we can truly rediscover what Fr. Giussani tells us, "No expression of a Movement like ours is of worth if it does not invoke the memory of the presence of Christ in the heart of the concrete vicissitudes we live [we can do everything thinking that it can bring us gladness; we can do everything without perceiving what we do as an entreaty to the memory of Christ]. Rather [and I am not quoting this passage to rebuke us, but rather to console us, to identify what sometimes happens to us], it worsens the situation of the human, because it promotes formalism and moralism. It would make the event among us—the event that we should hold on to, with trembling in our eyes and our heart, as the criterion of our behavior with each other—deteriorate into a sociological refuge, a social position [as things that we must do, as the price we must pay for our belonging to a companionship]" (p. 8). Unless everything is like a cry that refers us to the memory of Christ, nothing will be able to satisfy us. Why? We too can make certain gestures like others do, but that will not be what brings us gladness.

Where can we find gladness? This is the first question we must ask ourselves for the summer: where do I find myself being glad? What is the origin of my gladness? What is the origin of my salvation? Where do I track it down? We already know all the words, but they are formal, because we don't understand them in an existential way. Therefore, it is pointless to explain again words like "gladness" or "salvation," but rather we need to discover them in our life: when do I find myself glad? Where do I realize that, at a certain point, something begins to happen that makes gladness vibrate within me, that makes salvation vibrate within me? Otherwise, we will just continue to repeat empty words. Like a friend writes me, "I do everything, but it isn't enough for me." It is normal that it isn't enough! If what you do is not done to nurture Christ's memory, it will never be enough for you! In that case, we transform our participation in a place like this, the Movement, into something we do. Like Fr. Giussani told us. Go and reread now the Introduction to the Exercises because there Fr. Giussani captured all our reductions and that is exactly why he

helps us understand the origin of the formalism that happens in us, despite the fact that we do everything that is suggested for us to do. It happens because in every instant we can forget the origin and the purpose for which we do it. One can see that, our friend continues, because of the “enormous difficulty I have in recognizing Christ [we are no longer able to recognize Him as we live our life], very often I feel as if I am fabricating His presence. How is it possible that Christ who is the meaning of everything, is so hard to recognize?” It isn’t hard, we have always told each other—it is enough to remember the many instances in which one happened to recognize Him present. It is anything but hard, it is very easy! Yet, one must not reduce Him to a preconceived set of ideas, to the model we have in mind; we must pay attention to how His Presence happens. In fact, the Pharisees had Jesus right in front of them and yet they didn’t recognize Him. We often have Him in front of us as well, but since the form of His Presence doesn’t coincide with our idea, we don’t recognize Him. What makes recognizing Him easier? When it happens, what helps me to recognize it? Often the way we have in mind doesn’t coincide with the reality of His presence. These are questions that we must leave open for the whole summer.

I ask you a question that emerged after a very lively dinner with my small Fraternity group on the theme of our children’s school results that we had received on that very day. Some were disappointed because they had expected different news, or they felt that they should have been notified earlier. All fair expectations that originated from a good desire for themselves and for their children, but with an ultimate disappointment, a subtle perplexity about the facts presented by reality: those negative results, that injustice. Exhibiting a certain impatience and lack of trust that this was the way (which of course isn’t perfect) Jesus gave us to make us and our children grow. In the Introduction, on p. 12, there is this statement: “With Christ we can face any situation in which we find ourselves. This is the verification,” and to carry it out “our freedom is needed” and “we have to decide where we stand,” whether we want to stay “on the side of the sepulcher or on the side of Jesus. (...) Each one of us already has a small sepulcher, [...] a wound, a wrongdoing endured [...], an unrelenting resentment [...]. Thus, we hear directed to each one of us Jesus’ words to Lazarus: ‘Come out!’” I understand that often there is a way of saying, “I am on Jesus’ side” that contains an ultimate formalism, not evil but not acknowledged, that prevents us the freedom to wait patiently—to take a step after another that doesn’t come immediately, to sacrifice security in the certainty of Another. If you can, it would be helpful to go deeper into this theme of verification and this being “on Jesus’ side.”

What does this “ultimate formalism” consist of? In what do you perceive it?

In the fact that we say that we are on Jesus’ side, but in the end, we agree only if Jesus continues to think according to my idea of what He should think.

In short, Jesus’ otherness is missing. It is Jesus only if He coincides with what we think, with our ideas, said our friend in his letter. Thus, in the end we never run across or clash with something different, something other than us. When something different happens, we don’t recognize Him because we have no expectation, since we have already decided in advance that Jesus cannot come subject to those limitations and that disappointment. We have decided in advance where and how Jesus can come into our lives. With the words “ultimate formalism” you are saying this: that we have already decided in advance that God, if He were smart, would accept “our” plan and submit to “our” way of thinking. But, God’s thoughts are different from ours! In fact, how often we have been surprised that He came to us in a totally unthinkable way! Therefore, the only possibility is

to remain open (even through a summer in which we are upset by the fact that our children must take remedial summer courses). All the unforeseen and unexpected things that happen can become an opportunity for us. Yet, if we don't live them remaining open to the possibility that He can communicate Himself in our circumstances, in the end we exclude Him from reality, because we accept only what we have decided in advance. Instead, the only possibility is to educate ourselves to this position—as Fr. Giussani says in *Why the Church?* —to reawaken in us our religious sense, to be attentive to the sign through which the Mystery comes to us. However, we are often impatient, we are not open to follow—like Fr. Giussani says—the sign the Mystery is giving, and so we leave Him out. This is the verification we must do: let's try to be open to the unexpected way in which He may come to us, because this is the overturning of the method described in the School of Community. With our intelligence we imagine, plan, and decide everything. Yet, there is another option besides that of being intelligent, and it is the position of the poor man who is waiting, like a child, to see how it will happen. “The first method favors the intelligent man, [...], while the second favors the poor, the ordinary man. To encounter a person who is present is as easy for a child to grasp as an adult. In this hypothesis, the dynamics of revelation would cease to primarily emphasize ingeniousness and initiative, but would stress simplicity and love” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 1998, p. 31). This is the only possibility of recognizing Him: to be open to the way in which Christ comes to us. This gives us the patience, as we have seen in Mounier: “It is from the earth, from the solidity that necessarily derives a childbirth full of joy, the patient sentiment of the work that is growing, of the steps that follow one after the other, you wait calmly, with certainty [the plan of Another that comes true]. It is necessary to suffer so that truth does not crystallize into doctrine” (p.11), that is, to avoid that it is just some content in a theory, but also in our existence (it is an experience). I repeat, this happens only if we are available.

How does the Mystery work? Another person who couldn't come writes, “Terrible months. I fell in love deeply with the wrong person and then had a terrible wound. There is a need to be looked at with infinite love, and I had wrongly identified salvation with this person's attention. I had decided that I could be happy only through him [“I had decided”: do you see how we establish in advance what salvation should be and what His method should be?]. The most terrible thing was that the absence of his attention carried an implicit judgment of me: I am not enough, I have no value. I felt like a nobody.” When one doesn't have the correct position, everything becomes complicated and our attention turns to something that, even if it happened, wouldn't bring salvation. Until the unforeseen encounter happens: “Then, the most important encounter happened with a girlfriend with whom I don't share my daily life, but it was a huge point of reference. What made me literally breathe was her presence, her personal story, the way she was looking at me which made me feel an enormous tenderness [one imagines where it must happen, but then one is surprised that it happens elsewhere]. Therefore, in front of her who was speaking to me and looking at me [how does she understand that salvation has arrived?], I was recognizing myself again, I was feeling more myself, I was feeling more true. I was saying: there, this is precisely what I desire, to receive this gaze and this newness. I want to look at things the way she does.” Salvation arrives like that. If one is not open to this disruption, he will continue to do everything and be open to everything he is doing except being shifted from his own position. What is the outcome of this openness? Where does one see that salvation has come to his house? That one can no longer look at things in a reduced way?: “I am learning to ask myself what I desire. I am learning to truly ask

that He may show His path for me, which is very difficult, because it entails being very serious about your own life.” One sees that salvation has arrived because the “I” begins to take life seriously. Then, truth doesn’t crystallize into doctrine. “What does this change consist of?” she asks. It consists—first step—in running into a person (in this case, a friend who looks at you in a different way, to the point of making you become yourself: “I was recognizing myself again, I was feeling more myself.”). This is the first thing that strikes us: pure grace, so that at a certain point I feel more myself. Second step: freedom can accept or reject it. I can recognize it or not. The first jolt is not something that I decide, it happens, but right after it must be recognized. It is easy to recognize it when it happens. Third step: what does the change consist of? In the fact that after having recognized it, I can accept and follow the way in which Christ came to me. Fourth step: what causes this acceptance? My desire to not look at things in a reduced way, but rather to take my life seriously, to begin to be the protagonist of what I live because Christ continues to reawaken me. It is what Fr. Giussani told us, as we repeated in the First Lesson on which we will start working in the coming weeks: the human foundation of the “I” is reawakened, man becomes truly poor and begins to become aware of the true nature of his “I” and of his true need. However, as someone wrote me, often we don’t perceive the hunger and the thirst—the awareness of the need—as the first sign of salvation: “For those who are hungry and thirsty life is a rip-off.” Do you understand? How disturbing! If it doesn’t coincide with the way I have in mind, everything becomes a rip-off.

A few days ago, I reached a point of no return. Nothing serious happened, nothing particularly serious, just the fact that normal life is testing me. I do everything, I throw myself completely into what I do, I find things to do if there isn’t anything to do, I look for my friends, I try to do beautiful things with my daughter, but in the evening, I go to bed asking myself, “What happened today?” “and wondering whether I am happier in my life. Often the answer is “no” and, in fact, I think that it was another day spent on my way to getting old. I say that nothing beautiful is worthwhile if what makes the instant full is missing. I find everything burdensome and sad. When I am like that I don’t get over it very easily and I wonder whether I have some problem. Why am I never truly happy, at least once in a while? This time, in reading the Exercises my situation felt truly described by the psychology of the tomb, but acknowledging that it is true was not enough to get me back on my feet. It isn’t enough to say that I want to let Jesus in—and I really want it—because to think that I want to be happy doesn’t eliminate the fact that instead I am often sad, that I have a melancholic temperament and rather than seeing the beauty of life I feel its burden and sometimes I wonder what am I here for. I ask for help, I asked for help, because I have seen how one can live intensely. To lay my uneasiness and my sadness on the table puts me in relationship with others. Yet, deep down I still think that it is up to me, that by doing or not doing something, I can give myself happiness. However, the people I see who are happy are those who live a relationship that constitutes and defines them. They may suffer, but they are not resigned. I see around me great examples and witnesses that often amaze me, but sometimes they irritate me, because I wonder how it is possible that things like that happen and I struggle in my normal life. Not even the companionship that helps me to begin again is enough for me. I need a change in my self-awareness. I need help, sometimes I feel tired of this struggle because my life looks like a continuous falling down and getting up without any growth in my relationship with the Mystery.

Sometimes I am ashamed of even speaking about Christ, so much so that I haven't mentioned Him until now. I don't say His name often because I feel far away from...

Thank goodness that Christ is not ashamed of you! What is for you, my friend, this change of awareness?

Sometimes I feel that I need someone else, that I physically need someone who can remind me... You often told us that we strive to be self-sufficient, but I understand that when I am alone with my daughter who looks at me, in that moment I need to be sure of my relationship with Christ. It isn't possible to always have someone coming through the door to say something to me. In this sense, I am asking for help, because I follow, I try to follow, but I often feel that I fall back to my sadness.

What do you mean when you speak of “self-sufficiency”? The opposite of self-sufficiency is to become aware that you cannot resolve your situation on your own. And you must not resolve it on your own. To grow in self-awareness means to grow in the awareness you have of your true need. The more one becomes aware of the nature of his need, the more one becomes aware that self-sufficiency is the stupidest attitude one can have. The more I become aware of the boundless nature of my desire, the less I think that I can answer it on my own. What does this mean with regard to the “change of mentality”? Who gives you this desire for fulfillment? Who gives you this sadness? Who gives you this dissatisfaction? What does all this tell us? That you are greater than any other thing and that the relationship that can answer your needs is with Another, a relationship that you see happening in others. The point is whether each time you are stuck in these things you realize that the awareness of your true need, the growth of your self-awareness, depends on your being “in relationship with.” You can see it in your daughter. When you take care of her, what does your daughter tell you about herself? That she is all relationship with you. All of her is relationship with you. Definitely, this has nothing to do with self-sufficiency. If there is a creature who is not self-sufficient, it is your daughter. She is very aware that she needs you. If you follow what your daughter is witnessing to you (or that you see in other witnesses), you realize that you too need Another. What do you see? Consider what you see, because the Mystery places your daughter and some witnesses before you so that you may see, to the point of wondering: why are these people, who have the same problems I have, living like that? The Mystery gives you the circumstances as if He wanted to tell you, “Do you realize that there is an answer?” He places them before you, He doesn't give you a lecture. He places before you someone in whom the answer is happening, challenging your mistrust: “Look, observe what is happening in them!” In fact, like Fr. Giussani told us, to follow is to relive the experience of another. That is how you will be able to begin to make a journey toward that change of awareness that allows you to live reality like your daughter is living it when you are with her: happy. Not because you need someone to be always with you, since sometimes you are alone. What do you do then? Do you wait to see someone? If you can, do it, it isn't necessary to do penance and stay alone to try it. The point is that often the commitments you have force you to live certain circumstances by yourself, as it happens when one goes away for work, or must deal with all the unforeseen circumstances of life. The question is whether we begin to say “I” with the awareness of being in relationship with Another. That change of awareness that you already see witnessed by your daughter. So, this summer try and see how this awareness grows, and what happens in you when that occurs.

Three years ago, something happened that affected me deeply. A lot of time has gone by since then. Last year I met the Movement, which changed my life, raising a question about the meaning of what happened to me, and giving me a companionship with which I can walk. It was a year of new things and discoveries. Each day a great enthusiasm accompanied me, especially the extraordinary correspondence I felt with what I always intuited from the very beginning to be my first need: to take my heart seriously. Now, though, I must admit that I have a very hard time. Now I realize what a responsibility it is to continue to question one own's heart, how painful it is to admit that in the end, not even now, do I know what my heart is continually missing. It isn't enough to give a name to the lack that I feel, it isn't even enough to say that it is Christ who manifests Himself in my life through that sense of lack. I still need to verify that. Perhaps it is the most precious thing that I retain from the past year. The pain was not resolved and my sense of loneliness hasn't disappeared, but a possibility of meaning for my life opened up that needs to be constantly rediscovered in order to exist, to make me desire to know the truth of things every day. Yet, it isn't very clear to me when they say that "it is necessary to suffer so that truth doesn't crystallize into doctrine," so that Christ doesn't remain an example of moral values, "but is born from the flesh." What does it really mean to adhere to Christ with regard to the suffering I carry in my heart? I thought I had encountered Him, but now I feel as if I have to begin again from square one. The Pope told us that we have to remember, but I don't understand what he means with this "keep the memory alive," because remembering the day in which I met the Lord doesn't return to me the fullness of that moment, and not even the faces of the friends who fascinated me that day, convincing me to follow them, can give me back the fullness that now I ask for and desire so badly. How can I get it back? And when it is not there, is it simply because it isn't given? There is one thing that I noticed has changed in me from last year: I am surprised by the loyalty with which I continue to seek an answer. Despite the fact that lately nothing seems as exciting as it was at the beginning, I feel a great tenderness in realizing that, if I am sincere, I cannot rid myself of all of that. In fact, I have become so attached to this possibility of meaning for my life, for my story, that I need to continue to understand its reasons, and see Him happen again in the present, to be able to say that He really has to do with me now, that He is still with me and allows me to breathe again.

What do you think is the most precious thing you said? Because, that is the first thing you need to become aware of. Perhaps the most precious thing is that "a possibility of meaning for my life needs to be constantly rediscovered." To say, quoting Mounier, that truth must be born from the flesh, means that you already begin to see being born in your flesh this desire of rediscovery that you didn't have before. Why does it happen? You said that the change in you that surprised you the most was this "loyalty with which I continue to seek an answer." That is the sign of the growth of your "I": now you cannot go back to what you were before. In fact, "if I am sincere, I cannot rid myself of all of that, because I have become so attached to this possibility of meaning for my life, for my story, that I need to continue." It means that this desire of rediscovering a possibility of meaning has already begun to sneak into your flesh! The question is whether you want to give credit to what has happened to you, whether you want to follow this desire to rediscover it all the time, to continue to grow as you have grown up to now. Otherwise you will depend only on the comings and goings of feelings, of your mood. It is like when you discovered an author you liked: it is different listening to a good poem and wanting to learn it by heart. To learn it is harder than listening to the verses. However, since you want to learn it so that you can repeat it when you walk

around, since you want to remember it because you like it so much, this gives you the desire to learn it by heart so that it can become yours. If you begin to become aware of the loyalty with which you continue to seek the change that surprises you, following this awareness is what will make that change of awareness grow more and more. Then, you will be able to verify how what happened to you, and is making you emerge as a person, continues to happen within you. Otherwise, as we have said recently from the Exercises on, it will never be yours, and you will depend only on the comings and goings of circumstances. After having lived moments of great correspondence, do you want that to become yours always? This is the point. It will happen only if you follow what Christ has already generated in you, that “I” that has begun to emerge in you. If we don’t follow it, it will never become ours. Thank you.

I am always struck by the comparison you make between the child and his mother. I reread many times one of the answers you gave at the last School of Community, on p. 6 of the Notes: “This is the possibility: that everything that seems to be an objection becomes dialogue with the One who makes us.” I changed into this: that everything, regardless of any objections, becomes dialogue with the One who makes us.

“That it becomes dialogue with the One who makes us,” not that it becomes things to do. That all that we do may become dialogue with the One who makes us, like it is for your children with you: they are dialogue with you, not what they do, and everything they do is dialogue with you.

“Look, it is very easy, your children do it,” you said.

On this issue you have already lost, because you constantly see it happening at home!

“In fact,” you continued, “it isn’t that the problems are on one side and memory on the other. As I always say, when your children wake up in the morning and have the problem of feeling lonely, what do they do? They cry, they scream, they look for you, they don’t have anything else. Not from the outside, but from their very core the desire to find the face of their mom arises. It is easy!” Not for me! I am deeply struck by this answer, because it is crystal clear, it is very simple. Yet, for me it is very hard.

Why? Where is the difficulty?

It is in the fact that for me what you say is so linear and clear-cut, so natural and corresponding to the desire of my heart that I truly cannot understand why it isn’t just as easy to apply it in reality.

There is a basic difference: that in the child it is very easy. But if we don’t work at it, says Fr. Giussani; if we don’t commit ourselves to keeping awake the natural ease the child has in living with this disposition, at a certain point we lose it. Let’s look at the trajectory that we follow in our life: all the curiosity and the impetus with which a child is born from his mother’s womb grows, but then it begins to decline until it gets old and almost disappears. The same often happens with work and relationships: they wane. What is necessary? We sang it at the beginning: “It would be enough to be like children again / And remember...”

The song had already answered me.

I understand why you say that it is very hard. It is very hard if we don’t commit ourselves so that this openness to reality that you see in your children becomes ours as adults. It is so easy to find a curious child, but it is very difficult to find an adult who is a “child” at heart. Our problems start here, not because it is hard, but exactly because we have lost the poverty typical of a child.

This relates directly to the First Lesson of the Exercises that now we must begin to tackle. We will go over it not because we have nothing else to do, but rather because it is crucial to making it easy

for us to recognize Him! Like a child. Yet, if when we read the First Lesson we are not aware of this need, we will not realize that it isn't a path that we already know (as if to say: first there is the religious sense, then there is Christ, then...), and not even that the experience of Christ is not yet ours, like you are saying. For the child, it is very easy. It should be easy also for us as the fruit of an education, of a work, of an attentiveness, of a journey we have made, but instead it isn't easy at all. Do you understand where the difficulty lies? This is the "task for the summer" that today's first letter mentioned. Giving ourselves the First Lesson as our summer task is to help us recognize Him with the same easiness with which a child recognizes his mother in front of him. Otherwise, it isn't that salvation is not in front of us—like the mother for the child. Salvation exists, in many moments it is staring at us in the face, but we don't recognize it like your child recognizes your face when he wakes up in the morning. Is it clear?

Yes.

So, how do we go about it? We get committed to this work. Clear?

Crystal clear.

I told you often—and I have no problem repeating it—that what saved my life was accepting that I needed to learn what I thought I already knew. If we do it thinking, "I already know this" when certain things happen, then at a certain point we get bored listening to the words that we already know or that we think we know, without ever putting ourselves in the position of continually learning them.

These months have been burdensome for me and full of a question that my tiring days made become insistent. A question that moved me and made my heart tremble as I was posing it to Jesus, "Where are You? Please, show me Your face. I want to experience You."

Like a child would ask, "Where are you, Mom?" There are people who are given to us in whom this begins to emerge as their attitude. At the beginning of the day, one behaves like a child: "Where are You? Where are You? Come!"

From this question, as a spontaneous reaction, a seeking was born that increased my awareness of being an empty vase.

This hunger and thirst is anything but a misfortune! I begin the day asking, just because I am like an empty vase. Yet, if we consider the asking as a terrible misfortune instead of treating it as what pushes each of us to seek Him ("Come!" like the child with his mother), then in listening to a witness like this we think, "But, I am already an adult!" Instead, no, I am half-witted, not an adult! Half-witted in the etymological sense of the word [one who is missing something]: one who doesn't realize who he is as a man. This is not an insult, but rather the description of one who is not aware of what it means to be a man with all the magnitude of one's desire, with all the awareness of what one truly is.

Thus, I searched in the texts that are offered to me, in the School of Community and especially in how it presents itself to me as the hours go by during my day. I tried to go deeper into everything, asking to have a true experience of Him. Thus, many things happened.

"Thus, many things happened." With the same ingredients! She didn't speak of getting a direct communication with the Holy Spirit, or a hidden text. She has the same ingredients as everyone else. Do you understand what makes the difference?

One of my oldest children went to the GS Triduum and came back with the booklet. I stole it from him for one evening and read it with amazement. I was struck by everything, particularly by a

phrase of Father Giussani's: "When Simon [...], found himself there, three or four meters away, he would never forget how He was looking at him!" He said, "No one ever looked at me like that!" I too want to become aware that I am looked at in the same way.

"I too want to become aware." At every phrase she reads, she stops full of amazement. Instead, we go over the words like a rolling tank, without blinking an eye, and so everything becomes formal. Instead, when one begins from one's awareness of being an empty vase, then one begins to not take for granted that such a gaze exists in history.

At the Exercises, everything struck me.

"Everything!" Forgive me, it isn't that I want to interrupt you at every phrase, but when I see that there are people like you among us, with this simplicity, I recognize that this is for everyone. It isn't that she got a Master's from Harvard, but simply the awareness she has of herself makes her live recognizing what we all have in our hands.

When you told us how Fr. Giussani described the constant happening of a "particular story" that is "the keystone of the Christian conception of man, of his morality, of his relationship with God, with life, and with the world" (p. 10), you added what Fr. Giussani says right after: if he hadn't encountered this person and that and that other, Christ would have remained a word that is the object of theological expressions. Afterwards, you underlined: we cannot do without the historical presence of Christ in the flesh who makes Himself experienceable in the Church. Then, there was the School of Community with you on May 24th, when you read the words of the Unnamed: "You will come back, won't you?" [...] "Will I come back?" answered the Unnamed, "Should you refuse me, I would obstinately remain outside your door, like the beggar. I need to speak to you! I need to hear you, to see you! I need you!" That's it. In that moment, it was as if I had been offered a unique and perfectly legitimate way of experiencing Christ. In looking at all the experience that I am having with my friends, I recognized that the Church is truly the Body of Christ. After that School of Community, asking Jesus the same thing, "I want to experience You," felt totally new. The question stayed with me: where today, here and now, and through those You are going to make me encounter, will You show me your face, Jesus? What an immense gift the companionship of my friends is, which is not limited only to the moment in which I see them, but expands to inhabit my burdensome day! How new and beautiful to encounter each person who is for me an immense opportunity to see You, Lord! Thus, it has become easier to recognize Christ, especially if one has the grace of being corrected, like so often happens to me. The correction Jesus extends to me through a friend generates a sense of correspondence, it re-orientates me almost immediately toward the path that is truly mine, especially and above all if it is a path of sacrifice. These months have been a re-awakening, a rebuilding of my person. One day something happened—at breakfast I found myself discussing a painful and personal matter with someone. Just a few months before, the words, the attitude, and the reasoning of that person would have immediately caused me to react strongly and end the discussion abruptly. Almost surely, I would have reacted poorly and ended the discussion. Instead, on that morning I fell silent and, almost unaware, I happened to see in my mind the expression of a dear friend: when he is attacked he closes his eyes, going beyond his instinctive reaction, having at heart the good of the other and continuing to think about it, remembering the beauty that God has placed in every heart, and I felt like doing the same. It was as if the person of my friend became a slide that Jesus used to show Himself to me. Then, it happened that you came to our town for an assembly and that evening I wasn't able to go home due to the amazement that had seized me, exactly like after you spoke to us about the Unnamed

and Federigo. The same thing happened to me, and therefore I want to thank you deeply. Everything in that assembly struck me, every word you said to us. In fact, my friends and I will get together to go over everything, so that all of that can take root in us. I also wanted to say that I was struck by the incredible familiarity that you brought among us that evening, objectively visible in your face, in your smile, in the tone of your voice, and especially in how you helped us after each contribution to go to the core of what we were saying, to the root: whom do we need today? From this was born the desire to follow, that it may be an obedience, together with the great desire to get down to work with my friends and go over everything from that evening. I really hope to have the possibility of doing it, of meeting you again in such a familiar way.

It will happen again! I have nothing to add to what we just heard. It is enough to go over it again through the Notes [of the School of Community]. When the Lord gives us, with the simplicity you just witnessed to us, the possibility of seeing that there is an adult child or an adult who is like a child, amazed and struck by everything (even by the simplest things), we experience that it is something within the reach of all of us. The poverty mentioned by the Unnamed is the same poverty which I made you come from your town to hear about (even if you had many commitments: eight children, a sick husband, etc.), because I wished to listen to you again and to share it with everyone. That is how the Mystery makes Himself present among us, through what He makes happen in front of our eyes. We are all affected by what happened and continues to happen. This is for us first and foremost.

To be able to recognize it, though, it is necessary to follow the entire journey we will make from now until the end of July, working on the First Lesson of the Exercises (from the Exercises Booklet [available soon] pp. 24-46), and going over some questions and answers from the Assembly (pp. 75-78, 89-97). We will see how only by re-awakening and acquiring that poverty that the Pope asked of us, can we truly be amazed—like John and Andrew, like Our Lady, like the shepherds—by what happens instead of taking it for granted. In August and September we will work on the Second Lesson (pp. 50-74) and the rest of the questions and answers in the Assembly (pp. 78-89).

Community Vacations. As the theme for the vacations we suggest this question: “Has salvation remained interesting for me? How do you perceive it from within your personal experience or the experience of people in your community?” Imagine what summer can be if we bear in mind these questions. The question on the meaning of salvation was the most popular at the Fraternity Exercises. We received so many questions related to this: “What is this salvation?” It means that we who are Christians, we who belong to the Movement, don’t know yet what salvation is. We don’t learn it by listening to a lesson. Like tonight’s first letter said, even if one recognizes it in theory, it has lost its existential value. That is why it is necessary to pay attention during the summer, asking oneself: where do I perceive salvation? How does it happen? What traits does it have? What makes me realize that salvation is happening? Then we will be able to answer the question: Has salvation remained interesting for me? And after it happens, does it remain interesting? It isn’t a matter of discussions and interpretations, because one can do many things, but when the famous test—the test of gladness—comes, the question arises again: where is salvation? *Evangelii gaudium*, the joy of the Gospel, the gladness brought by Christ: where is it? Gladness is the sign of salvation. Like our friend said this evening, it is a good “possibility of meaning” for this summer work: to pay attention to recognize where salvation happens, and the gladness which is its sign.

Rimini Meeting. It will be held from Sunday, August 20th to Saturday, August 26th, with the title “All that you have, bequeathed by your father, earn it in order to possess it.” As you can see, it is the most appropriate title for us now. If we don’t regain what we were given, we lose it along the way. I remind you that everyone can contribute to building the Meeting by participating in at least one day and also, concretely, by volunteering.

I bring to your attention my interview with John Allen, one of the most authoritative American journalists on religion, published on *Cruxnow.com* and now on the CL website.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Have a good summer everyone!