

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, June 20, 2018**

Reference text: J. Carrón, Introduction to “See, I Am Doing Something New: Do You Not Perceive It?” 2018 Fraternity Exercises of Communion and Liberation

<https://english.clonline.org/publications/other-texts/fraternity-exercises/see-i-am-doing-something-new-do-you-not-perceive-it-2018>

- *Along the Jordan River*
- *La notte che ho visto le stelle [The night when I saw the stars]*

*Glory Be*

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Good evening everyone, both present in person and connected! We continue our journey in search of familiarity with Christ through all the vicissitudes of living. As we have seen in the Exercises, this familiarity is not achieved except through a history that happens within the depths of our lives. Therefore every circumstance we are called to live through is part of the journey toward this discovery: they are steps toward familiarity with Him. What facilitates these steps?

*In the School of Community we read, “Then, the inevitable question is whether these activities can fulfill us. The wake-up call is that sense of unease we feel when all our “doing” does not really satisfy us. But if we are still poor of heart, the lack of satisfaction we feel when we expect fulfillment from the things we do can become an opportunity to sense this pressing need to return to the beginning, to that enthusiasm for Christ that won us over” (“See, I Am Doing Something New: Do You Not Perceive It?” p. 6). I play on a professional rugby team. A month ago I reached a goal that I had been dreaming of for a long time – we won the final of the top Italian championship and we were crowned champions of Italy. Moreover I also had the joy of scoring a goal in the final and being the highest scorer in the championship. As I heard the final whistle, however, I did not feel the emotion or infinite joy that I expected. After the victory celebration took place on the field, and I greeted those who came to see me, I went back to the locker room, took a shower, and went to my car to drop my bag off before going to dinner. As I walked alone to the car a sudden needling question arose in me, “And now?” I had reached the dream I had had for five years, and I had crowned the season with the decisive goal; I had a crowd of people who were there for me, yet I had to surrender to the fact that all of this was not enough for me. I was almost scandalized; I told myself that it couldn’t be true and that I should have made an effort to be happy. Then, in the next few moments, I tried to look at myself to the core and I realized that my reaction was dictated by the fact that I have a truly infinite need. So, I returned to the origin of who I am, of my “I,” and I was amazed at how reality, in a totally unexpected way, was there to ask me again, “What do you, what does your true self, want?” A measure totally beyond mine entered and pierced all my projects and impressions—as you call them—I have about reality, and suddenly I felt more free and loved. At that moment, that longing was the way in which an Other told me, “You are more than this; are you interested in discovering the love I have prepared for you?” That longing that came over me after the game was the opportunity to rediscover the criterion for dealing with the choices I am facing about the future. In fact it isn’t a lucid analysis of the whole situation that will*

*allow me to take the path that is right for me, but rather the only criterion that makes me free in front of reality is the need for happiness that I have now. I have to thank this companionship endlessly, because without the constant work that is proposed to me here I wouldn't be able to look at my whole self like this.*

The day of the great success: “And now? I had reached the dream I had had for five years, yet it was not enough.” For a moment, this almost scandalized you, and you felt you had to compensate for that lack by trying to be happy. Instead what happened made you understand the nature of your need. It is not so much when things don't work out that we recognize the nature of our need, because in that case we might think, “The day things go according to my dreams will be the end of the world!” The problem begins above all when things are fine, and yet—as you said—not enough; this says much more about our being, about the “eternal mystery of our being” of which Leopardi spoke, than all our reflections. You knew it, you had already read that nothing is enough, but discovering it within yourself—in your experience—is quite another thing. It is interesting that as soon as one realizes this, one is surprised that he is free: “A measure totally beyond mine enters into me and suddenly I feel more free.” Instead of scandalizing me it makes me free! And then you feel a longing, the longing for something that you have already tasted: “You are more than this; are you interested in discovering the love I have prepared for you?” Familiarity with Christ is not something that spoils the party celebrating victory; it is the only thing that really saves it! Because if it isn't enough from the beginning, what kind of party is it? You could have distracted yourself so you could celebrate; instead, what saves the party is precisely this recognition. The familiarity with Christ we are trying to attain to does not consist in adding some devout reflections about our lives. It means to not lose anything, not even the greatest and most amazing things that can happen in life. Yet sometimes this need burns so much that one would prefer not to feel it. What makes it possible to stand up before this profound urgency?

*For a long time I lived moments when I felt that Christ was totally disconnected from my life; forget familiarity, it was just the opposite! I began to no longer do School of Community and to live on my own, because it seemed to me that nothing was “speaking” to me anymore. I was unhappy, very angry, and sad. I don't know if you've ever looked at the various pieces of your life (family, work, the people around you) thinking that there were only the broken pieces of something left in your hands. Through all of this, my work (I am an oncologist) did not help me at all; instead, it literally tormented me because I could not escape the ultimate tragedy of seeing people dying and leaving their loved ones. All of this opened up giant wounds within me, creating a cloud of unhappiness that I wanted to get rid of. At one point I really thought, “I would prefer not to hear, I would prefer not to desire, I would like to be freed from this wound.” Until, after a long time, my perspective turned around and I started to think, “Okay, I have a giant wound that I have tried to suppress in every way (by going out with my colleagues, by being on my own, by trying to be content, and to fix my life), but this wound is there and continues to be there, and as much as I try to suppress it, it always resurfaces, it is truly irrepressible, it is truly a point in my heart that keeps beating faster and stronger.” And I said to myself, “It is incredible – I think that my life is all chaos, a disaster, but I have a heart that keeps crying out, my heart is alive, so even though my colleagues are happy after an evening spent having fun, I'm not, because the bar of my desire, thanks to what I have met, is higher and I feel a constant disproportion.” Then at Easter, after months of very tiring work, I went to the Way of the Cross – arriving, by the way, only at the last station – and I was surprised by what was highlighted there: the fact that Christ became flesh. That same evening I went to dinner with some friends from my School of Community ...*

How many times had you already heard that fact highlighted?

*Many, many times, but in that moment it really struck me.*

It is a history. We shouldn't be shocked. It is a history that gives you back through flesh and bones what you already know.

*We had this really quick dinner, but something strange happened: after days of heaviness, when I came back home I realized that I was glad. I just thought, "In this moment I have begun breathing again, like when you take a burden off your heart." I couldn't explain it. I had had much nicer dinners in my life, but I was glad I had been there, while for many other beautiful dinners I wasn't. I understood slowly why there was this gladness in me that didn't let me be and I kept thinking about it. I understood that what had happened to me was the rediscovery that Christ is truly flesh and that we encounter Him in a place and through specific faces. It isn't that I missed the individual faces, perhaps of my friends, but that I lived in my life the absence of a presence that I had already met. That is why I decided to come to the Exercises, because at a certain point I realized that I needed to go back to the place where I had seen that presence happen. But I had to live a moment of strong, even dramatic, loyalty to myself. I said to myself, "Be loyal—before today where have you really found in your life what you were looking for and fills your heart? Only in an encounter with the reality of the movement!" At the Exercises the thing that struck me the most was the Saturday afternoon lesson when you read the letter of the young Indian woman. It totally floored me, because I felt very close to someone who lives on the other side of the world, whom I will never meet and whose name I don't even know. It is as if he had slapped me to tell me, "Do you remember what you've been living all these months that made you decide to come here? What do you need?" It's unbelievable, that young woman reminded me why I am here: I too have met someone who looked at me like that and, like her, I have a wound that I tried to suppress, but my desire to see again that different presence comes back constantly, because it's something you have within yourself, by now it's part of you and it's here. Even in Rimini I experienced this strange gladness, which for me is a huge gift, and above all I rediscovered that I am free. For example, in the evening I found myself having dinner at the hotel with people I don't know well and with whom I don't share anything, but I perceived them as a gift to me in that moment. In the morning I was a fish out of water but that night instead I was free, I discovered that I was free. After dinner I went to see some dear friends whom I don't see very often (they live in another city); we spent the evening with others from their community, and there too I felt an incredible familiarity, and I thought, "This is not coming from me, and I know that it is not coming from me because I usually feel full of sorrow knowing that even though now I am seeing some friends, I don't know when I will see them again. I am afraid of losing them, so I usually want to be with them and only with them." Yet, that evening this was no longer a problem, the distance was no longer a problem, and I thought, "The problem is not about being with these faces, but having a familiarity with all these people!" I understood that I was sharing something bigger with them.*

Why weren't you afraid of losing those faces?

*I wasn't afraid of losing them because it is as if I saw, literally, that I and those faces share a new, great root, a common root, so that it doesn't matter...*

You no longer lose them!

*Yes, I no longer lose them, I no longer lose them.*

Do you understand that, without being in front of a presence, one would no longer want to hear or desire anything? That is, without familiarity with a presence, we are unable to look carefully at our humanity, as we heard in the song, "Without Him I can no longer understand things" ("Along the Jordan River"); we can no longer understand the things that are most our own, the desire that

constitutes us, the thirst that coincides with ourselves, that is within the core of ourselves. Instead, being in front of a presence, as happened to you, is the moment when we realize how much our hearts are alive. We must not lose anything of what we tell each other: you asked yourself why others are content, why they go out in the evening together and come home happy. And you understood that this is not enough for you, because the bar of your desire is higher. Friends, we are no longer what we were before the encounter; the encounter revealed us more to ourselves, we have understood who we really are. And we do not become scandalized by others: in fact, if they haven't had the chance to fully discover who they are, they are satisfied with something less, because they don't know that life can reach the fullness we have seen and touched. It is a fullness that makes life even more dramatic, as our Indian friend said, because the more you go on in life, the more you realize that nothing is comparable to what you have seen. You can trample on it, you can distract yourself, you can try to block it and not think about it anymore, but it is there, it is present, and your "I" has already been shaped by this. The Lord is waiting for us. That is why we no longer get confused: "It isn't that I missed the individual faces, perhaps of my friends, but that I lived in my life the absence of a presence that I had already met." And where are you going to look for that presence? Where you first met it: "That is why I decided to come to the Exercises." It is extraordinary, here one truly understands the difference in Christianity: Why is it necessary to go to a specific place, with precise faces, why Rimini? The disciples likely wondered as well: Why, in order to enter into a relationship with the Mystery, instead of going to the rabbi to listen to a lesson on the Old Testament, should they go fishing with Him? Why go to Capernaum instead of Jerusalem? Because we do not decide where the presence happens! In this way, we become aware of the nature of that ultimately unique Face, so much so that one comes to desire seeing Him again and is surprised that the people she finds in Rimini are friends. Fr. Giussani says that if Christ doesn't enter into the depths of the heart, we feel a sense of foreignness toward others, and that only with Him does familiarity grow.

Yet sometimes, despite the fact that we see these things, "an insidious question assails us," as one of you wrote me. In the face of a particularly challenging and very painful news story, the writer's teenage son asked him questions to which he gave an answer that came from faith: "In the face of evil, even if it is huge and shocks us, we must immediately lift our eyes to Him, look at Him, reaffirm His words, His promises, and then we will also see the good, like the love that is in our family." His son answered him, "Dad, but how can I be sure that we are not just consoling, distracting ourselves?" and then he said, "When I was a kid I participated in tennis tournaments and they taught me "positive visualization" [did they teach this also to our rugby champion?] to control the stress of racing: focus on the positive, immediately remove from your mind any mistake you made, look forward, focus on the present moment, never think about defeat, etc. My son's question floored me, and sometimes I ask myself, 'Is it like that now as well? When I do School of Community, when I raise my eyes to Christ, am I doing "positive visualization?'" How do we answer this question?

*From what we say to each other, I am understanding that we must be attentive to the events that happen; I understand well the episode of the Gospel in which Philip asks Jesus to show him the Father and Jesus replies, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14:9).*

Do you see? We have already given an answer to our question: we must be attentive to the facts, because the facts show that ours is not a training, a "positive visualization."

*We need to recognize the origin of the difference of the facts that we relate to each other. Many times I have lived reaching this familiarity with Christ as a duty, which is distressing. In fact I*

*realize that often I miss the best of what happens because I live with the problem of “having to” recognize it. Instead, I realize that when He happens, life allows us to breathe and we can almost spontaneously say “You” to Christ. I can say that because of the experience I have had in the Movement in these years, I have not embraced Christianity in a moralistic way because I have seen people whom I envied since they were happy. So, I ask myself: how do I free myself from the hindrance of my effort?*

You use the word “spontaneous,” as if the alternative were between being dutiful and being spontaneous. What does recognizing Christ consist of? Is it a duty, or is it a spontaneous act? Does it depend on my effort, or is it rather He who comes to save me? We always risk countering something we receive with something we must do. But it would be enough to answer this question, to look at your words: “Because of the experience I have had in the Movement in these years, I have not embraced Christianity in a moralistic way [you have already answered yourself: it is not something that you *must* reach] because I have seen people who were happy.” It isn’t a “positive visualization”! That is not what changed your life, but rather facts you have seen, happy people you have seen. Unfortunately, we confuse this recognition with something spontaneous, as if we were saying “it is enough to see happy people to reach the origin of that happiness.” This is not so. As you said in quoting the episode of Philip, the disciples can live with Him and not grasp who He really is. “Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (Jn 14:9). In other words, they can stay with Him and not reach the Father. This is not duty, but neither is it spontaneity. It is a recognition, which is not authentic if it does not reach the origin, the source that generates joy. Who is He? “Don’t you realize, Philip, that whoever sees me, who sees these facts, does not need to make an effort to reach the Father? I came down from Heaven to bring Him to you. But there is one thing I cannot do for you: to recognize Him.” Christ asks for your collaboration, asks for your recognition. If, starting from what you see, this process of recognition through reason does not begin, in the end you remain suspended between something you should reach and something that you could reach spontaneously. No! It is neither a duty nor something spontaneous! It is a recognition, a loyalty to what I see, all the way to its origin. This implies that my “I” is involved with what is happening, so that we not lose the best of what happens, that is, the origin. Like when one receives a bouquet of flowers—an example we have given so many times—and is challenged. We see the bouquet of flowers in a spontaneous way, but discovering the person who sent it is not spontaneous. If the disciples stop at looking at Him and do not recognize the Father who manifests Himself in Jesus, then they ask Philip’s question, even if they live with Him. Which facts facilitate a recognition that faith in Christ is not a consolation or “positive visualization”?

*I teach in a technical and professional institute. In May, as we were tackling the last weeks of school, I participated in an assembly of teachers with this question as the theme: “How was your work an occasion to verify faith?” Provoked, it struck me to realize that I am full of gratitude. I do not think I have ever lived a year of work that has been so tiring and so marked by a great sense of powerlessness; yet, it had never happened to me that all the things that occurred to me became so dear. In fact, there isn’t a day I would want to forget about, because I continue to discover that there is One who uses everything to educate me. One of my classes is very difficult, all male—half foreigners and some kids who are repeating the year—and the work in class has proved so hard that several colleagues have deemed it impossible. Complaining and discouragement have often dominated the comments and judgments, and I too often found myself driven by a sense of failure. However, precisely in the most difficult moments, and more and more as the year went on, this*

*question arose in me, as a kind of hypothesis: “And what if instead of expecting something from them, these kids and these colleagues were given to me because I am the one who must discover something and change?” Starting from the awareness of this possibility, there is no day in which I cannot begin again. My wound created by a sense of powerlessness and my yearning for those guys to know something great remain, but the measure I was applying to the project has broken down – what is at play and can happen is bigger than the idea with which I enter the classroom, an idea that is promptly destroyed. Sometimes, when I leave my classroom, overcome by discouragement, I think it was a failure; but when I say this, there is a moment when I stop because I have to admit that it’s not true, it’s not true that nothing happened. A particular situation kept me company this year. One of the most difficult boys, the boy who set the tone in the classroom, who draws in all the others, who is repeating the year, last year was always up to something, but this year showed almost a docility with me; somehow he realized that I cared about him, so he was waiting for me to look at him in class, showing a greater desire, even if it was often suffocated. At a certain point, I met his parents during a parent/teacher conference and in tears they told me, “Professor, we do not know what to do with him anymore.” Actually, he was failing again, but that could not be all there was of him. Together with some practical advice, I found myself communicating this hope to his parents because I was betting on his heart: “We do not know what will happen in him in the next months.” I would have never imagined that those parents, who were so disheartened, would have trusted, would have accepted this challenge, so much so that at a certain point they talked to their son and proposed that he start again and that they enroll him in an afternoon tutoring center, which he agreed to (which I didn’t expect). It strikes me so much to look at that boy now – when I go to his class, the scene is this: he waits for me in the hall, and when I arrive, he says to me, “Prof, look! This is the notebook with the diagrams. This is my homework.” He had never done his homework before! At a certain point, I found out that many colleagues hadn’t noticed the fact that he done his homework; when it came up during a meeting, the general reaction floored me, because it seemed that this fact was worthless, too small ...*

As if it were the fruit of some “positive visualization” on your part.

*Yes, something too small and fragile compared to the boy’s generally failing performance in school. They weren’t able to see. I realize that not seeing facts like this causes frustration to prevail. I felt so provoked that I had to wonder what had happened for me. What did I see? A student who begins again, who begins to do a great thing, because he is free from any measure; a student who begins to have self-esteem because he has felt appreciated. One day I related all this to a friend and she read me a phrase from the Easter Poster: “Ever since the day Peter and John [...] saw Him risen and alive in their midst, everything can change. From then on, and forever, a person can change, can live, can live anew.” In fact, it moves me to see how this year Someone is changing me, and the sign of this, the first sign, is that it makes me see more. There is One who makes you see more.*

So, what has increased your familiarity with Christ this year? A “positive visualization”? A consolation?

*No, seeing things that I did not see before.*

Repeat what you just said!

*Seeing more.*

“More.” “Seeing more,” forget “positive visualization”! All the others do not believe in this “seeing more,” and not even if they try hard with all their pedagogical strategies can they imagine a different measure with which you can look at a difficult kid, as you described. What if this were the real way to look at reality, not “positive visualization”? When you look at reality seeing the

“more” that is present in it, even for the kid who seems to be stuck, who it seems should be cast off, with the parents who don’t know what to do, you begin to see differently. Anything but “positive visualization”! But there must be something present. It is through reality – not next to it, not after it, but inside it – that we know Christ and that familiarity with Him grows in us; not by racking our brains, not by trying to convince ourselves of something about Him. It is Christ who constantly surprises us, making us see a difference, a newness that enters history and breaks down every measure to the simple things.

*On Friday morning, together with other friends working with the Solidarity Bank, I prepare the packages and then go around to deliver them, spending a couple of hours in the homes of some families in need. Paradoxically, their difficulty is a great help to me, first of all in helping me stay awake with regard to the ultimate questions, those that a friend of mine—who is not in the Movement, but knows everything about Fr. Giussani—calls “questions about meaning.” The father of one of these families, unemployed with two children (his wife is also unemployed), told me on Friday that as much as he can he would like to reciprocate, giving me something for the package that I bring them. He gave me his son’s backpack —the kind kids use for school, which he had repaired because it was a little broken—to give to a child who needs it. I could not help being moved. He noticed it and hugged me without saying anything. At that moment I realized that my heart and his were touched by something true; in fact, my heart began to work again, to do what it is supposed to do, and from this a relationship with him can start. Spurred by this, I thought about the people in our government—these were the first days of the new Italian government. What scares me most is not a “populist” government, but that the people that no longer exist, that people respond with their gut and not with their heart, no longer capable of solidarity, friendship, and sharing. I live in a small town and these things really happen. Then you deliver the parcels and you find hope again and touch it with your hand, that is, you can look at the other and be his friend. The heart must resist, exist, and we must accompany each other on this point – this is what I ask my friends about. We will not change the world, but we will be the ones to change, just as we will not change the lives of these people, but we will be the ones who change. Then the world will change.*

You can see how what we are saying is not only valid on a personal level, but is something that begins to change reality, because it introduces a truer way of looking at the student and his parents, and at the poor to whom you bring a grocery package. And yet, at times, in spite of everything we see, we let ourselves be swept up in demoralization. What pulls us out of it?

*The other day I found myself in a group on WhatsApp to organize a party for the daughter of friends. It was proposed that the party would be on the following Friday, the same evening in which our bishop had invited all the movements of the diocese to celebrate Mass in the town of Sotto il Monte to celebrate the arrival of the urn containing the remains of Pope Saint John XXIII. I wrote to the group, “Friday evening there will be Mass, but I will not attend because my youngest daughter, who is one year old, wouldn’t stay still for a moment, therefore we are not going and we can have the party.” At that point, a friend wrote, “No, guys, this is too important, it is the Pope who is calling us! Having a party at the same time would be ignoring all of this.” I was stunned, because what she had just said was much more beautiful and true than what I had written. In those days I was re-reading the Introduction to the Exercises, and thinking back I understood: the demoralization, which I honestly thought was “old” stuff, was affecting me; I was all intent on organizing my little reality and my things without allowing the possibility that the unexpected*

would open my eyes. Jesus was calling me personally: “Do you love me more than your projects? Are you willing to make room for me in the midst of your organizing frenzy?” That evening my daughter was fine, so my husband and I went to the Mass. On the street I almost ran pushing the stroller because I did not want to be late. My husband asked me, “Why are you running like this?” I answered him, “I am nervous and happy to be here tonight; Jesus is calling us through the Pope, do you understand? We cannot be late!” At Mass and before the remains of John XXIII we prayed for all the families and for our hearts to continue to be open and wounded by the good Lord.

Such a simple thing – by which one feels called – can be an occasion that makes me realize how much I have lost that tension toward the unexpected, toward the way in which the Mystery calls me. This is one of many unexpected events that happen every day. Who would have thought that it would be an opportunity to pull you out of demoralization? We do not decide through which absolutely unpredictable way the Mystery will call us. That is why I always offer the example of the disciples: Who would have ever thought of that invitation to go fishing with Him? Friend, someone could have suggested to you, “Why go to Mass instead of the party? You had every reason not to go!” As with the disciples: the fact that the relationship with the Mystery passed through joining Someone on a boat leaves us all stunned. Yet, without this willingness to go along with the unexpected, we get stuck, demoralized in our little world, and then we suffocate. But sometimes things happen that upset us so much they reopen the wound in us.

*A few days ago two friends and I were driving back from a vacation study involving graduating high school seniors. We had just finished telling each other what we had discovered about 1968, about our experience, and about studying, as we had worked on the exhibition that will be presented at the Rimini Meeting. It had been a very useful and beautiful moment for everyone. We got in the car feeling happy and peaceful. I was driving, and at one point I was very hot because I was wearing a sweatshirt, so I pulled over to take it off; it took a few seconds, no more. A few bends down the road after we had resumed driving we were the first to come on the scene of an accident that had just happened between two cars. Maybe if I hadn't stopped to take off my sweatshirt we would have been involved too. The accident was very serious: a head-on collision between a car carrying a family and another driven by a lone man. We got out of the car immediately to call for help and to understand what was happening. In the face of such a thing, a question arises urgently, “What am I doing here? Who wants me here?” All it takes is to be hit with a bit too much force and we break; we are not here tomorrow. We could have been in the accident if I had not stopped to take off my sweatshirt. The kid who was in one of the two cars was just coming back from his class's end-of-the-year party, but I am still safe and sound. Yet, what makes this “here” and this “now” full? The protesters of the Sixties used to say, “Until we are free ....” But what makes me free here and now? What makes me fulfilled here and now? If I do not answer by what happens in every minute, if I do not respond to this question carnally, if the You is only the logical conclusion of a reasoning and not a presence that breaks through time, I build my whole life, which is hanging by a thread, on nothingness. One thing amazed me: between the screams and the swearing (even the rescuers were cursing like mad), from the moment we brought the wounded kid to sit in a place that was far from his mother, I started praying to Our Lady incessantly. Why did we come across those people? Why us and not someone else? Probably at that moment – who knows – we were the only ones who were thinking of Christ. I had the same experience as the child you mentioned in “A Leap Of Self-Awareness” (Traces, no. 4, 2018): the child cannot but look at the father in front of an accident, in front of the pain and sorrow. It was exactly the same thing as the guy in love at the party, even though this was not exactly a party. In*

*front of such a thing all the usual deductions, to which we attach the You at the end of our reasoning, disappear. The next morning I woke up a bit later than usual, because we came back at 3:00 a.m., and I couldn't fall asleep before 4:00 a.m. Honestly, I did not really want to get up. Only one thought made me pull the covers away: "Today we have Diakonia!" I had a very strong and urgent need for a place, not an abstract explanation of pain and sorrow, pain and sorrow that Christ did not spare Himself. I have a huge need for this carnality, this familiarity. When I think about how often we treat Diakonia as a place you can go and sit comfortably, I shudder. We literally risk life and death in every moment. That day I couldn't wait to be there, even though I was tired, sad, and distracted by my thoughts. But the thing that moves me is that I have a relationship, a place to think about when life's needs become urgent. A question opens up for me: "What do you want, Lord, from me who is so fragile?" The desire that Christ take every inch of my heart, that I allow myself to be filled so much that I am fulfilled now, soars. I have also realized that even in the face of such an urgent event one can stop at his impression, you can stop at the fact that you have seen something that has literally struck you and this can fill all your thoughts. One stops at the impression if someone does not provoke you to look up again, if you do not train yourself to do it; that is, to realize what really happened there at that moment, to realize that the facts are given to you for your conversion. This is the only way to overcome our impressions in front of what happens.*

One can stop at the impression in front of a powerful episode like this. Fr. Giussani told us in the text that we quoted last time, "Let's be careful [friends] because Jesus among us can be the origin of the whole world of humanity [that makes us feel right, as you said], full of joy and friendships [...] formally, but also a materially concrete help [...], but Jesus could be reduced to the 'portrait of a beautiful woman sculpted on her gravestone'" (L. Giussani, *L'Attrattiva Gesu* [The attraction of Jesus], Bur, Milan 2001, pp. 150–153). We could, therefore, remain attached to a cold thing having no impact on our lives. Instead, the more urgent life is (as our rugby champion said, or in the classroom, or in front of a serious accident), the more you realize that life is hanging by a thread. If one does not reach familiarity with Christ, what is life? That is why the more one desires, the more serious life becomes, the more one feels the urgent need for this familiarity, and not just any familiarity, but a familiarity that is equal to the human drama. "What does man desire more powerfully than truth? What is truth? A present man, a *man* who is present [Fr. Giussani said this, pay attention!]: He cannot be dissipated or washed away in the beautiful and glad manifestation of the companionship of faces that should be a beckoning sign of Him!" (ibid.) We saw it this evening: we can have some faces next to us, but when life is urgent we need something else, we immediately feel the urgent need to raise our eyes to something else. Because if there isn't this ultimately unique face – Christ – it all ends in an instant. "This doesn't mean diminishing the importance of our friendship, nor the effectiveness (full of eyes, lips, faces, words, songs, and the heart) of a companionship as beautiful as ours, but it is like an exasperated tension [...] to cry out your name, oh Christ: 'Thank You for making Yourself seen and for sitting here.'" (ibid.)

As you can see, the urgent need of this familiarity arises from the depths of life, starting from the challenges we must constantly face. Therefore I wish that this summer is for you, for us, an opportunity to grow in this familiarity through all the circumstances in which we will find ourselves: may the exasperated tension to cry out your name, oh Christ, grow in each of us.

The work of School of Community will continue during the summer on the text of the Fraternity Exercises:

- from now until the end of July we will work on the First Lesson (pages 18–35) and the related questions/answers of the Assembly (pages 64–69 and 71–75) and those of the Exercises in Spain (pages 79 to 84);

- in the months of August and September we will work on the Second Lesson (pages 41–62) and the related questions of the Assembly (pages 69–71 and 76–77).

The parts of the Assembly related to the Introduction are pages 77–79 and 84–87.

Fr. Giussani's book *La Convenienza umana della fede* [The Human Relevance of Faith], Volume 2 of the Bur series "Christianity Put to the Test," which collects the Fraternity Exercises from 1985 to 1987, came out yesterday. "Do you believe that the world needs something different than the witness, the light, the warmth, of this absolutely inconceivable intensity of life, of this redemption of nothingness, wretchedness, contradiction, and death? Christ is God because he has conquered death" (pp. 88–89). We wish to increase our familiarity with Christ so that we can face even death without being frightened. That is why we have a new tool we can read during the summer, in order to continue our journey in search of this familiarity.

Community vacations. The theme we propose for the vacations is linked to what we have been relating to each other: What can help us to become familiar with Christ? Looking at the facts. This is why the theme is: "This is how you will know that I am the Lord." It is taken from the First Lesson of the Fraternity Exercises and is intended as a suggestion of a method for living the vacations, looking at the events that happen as occasions to help us to know the Lord, to respond to the temptation to think that reality is a "positive visualization," a cheap consolation. Instead, it is something real, historical. Without facing all these things together, we can't overcome dualism.

The Rimini Meeting this year will be held from Sunday, August 19 to Saturday, August 25. The title is: "The Forces That Move History Are The Same That Make Man Happy." The Meeting is a rare space for dialogue, shared life, and encounter between people inhabiting very different realities, but it is our participation that makes the Meeting, before any debate or exhibition. Therefore, we must not miss the opportunity to participate, to create it by our presence, involving ourselves first hand, inviting all our friends and our communities to live it as protagonists. I challenge you to verify whether, by participating at least one day, the Meeting cannot change something in your life. Furthermore, I ask you to take seriously the request of the Meeting, this year more than usually, for adult volunteers.

Beginning Day will be held on Saturday, September 29 in Milan and will be connected to many cities in Lombardy and Italy. It will be the occasion when, having collected from the vacations and the International Assembly the provocations and questions of those who want to make a journey, we will propose them to everyone to help us at the beginning of the new social year.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

Happy vacations to everyone!