

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, June 17, 2020**

Reference text: J. Carrón, Introduction to *What Saves Us from Nothingness?*, pp. 1–11.

L. Giussani, S. Alberto, and J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010, chapter 1, "The Christian Event as an Encounter," and chapter 2, "The Event Goes On In History," pp. 3–67.

- *Marta Marta*

Glory Be

Good evening everyone. This evening's theme is the *Introduction* to the new text that I am preparing and on which we have already started to work. The text intertwines with everything we are living at this time (it is nice to see how it constantly challenges us) and with the provocation that comes from *Generating Traces in the History of the World*. So let's get started.

After going through a difficult experience, I have understood that living life fully and serenely cannot depend on circumstances. In fact, circumstances may not be in my favor. So what do I do? I strive to make them change "because then I will feel better." Meanwhile, I live in a holding pattern, just scraping by. Yet, things may not work out, and even if they did, I am afraid that that may not be enough for me. Who said that things should go like an American comedy? They may go like a Greek tragedy! What do I do then? Are we destined to live with sadness? I cannot believe this! For this reason, pressured by the reality that I find myself living, I wish to accept the invitation of the movement "to always live the real intensely" as an "itinerary to the ultimate meaning." Living reality!!! Not a dream, not an illusion of what will come or regret over what has been. At this point, I would like to understand what this "to always live the real intensely" means concretely in my life, in my daily life. I don't want it to become an empty slogan. Obviously it is not a question of making yourself enjoy reality: if it is hostile, it is hostile, period. Some friends suggested that I see the bright side of things. But what's positive in a situation that gets more and more tangled up every day? This appears not to be the path to follow: reality may not even contain a glimmer of positivity, understood as "pleasantness" of circumstances. It is not even about adding more devotion, which sometimes looks like a band-aid put on retrospectively. So what does it mean "to always live the real intensely"? What is the path? What should I focus on?

With this question we begin the journey of this evening, because circumstances challenge each and every one of us, and it isn't enough for us, we are not satisfied with living them just in any old way. We want to live them to the fullest, not just repeating a slogan like "always live the real intensely," even if it is true, or following advice to look on the bright side, when on many occasions there seems to be not even a glimpse of positivity. Instead of answering you theoretically, with an explanation, tonight we will make a journey together to discover along the way, adding a piece at a time through people's contributions, what "to live always the real intensely" (L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queens's University Press, Montreal 1997, p. 108) actually means.

“There is One who embraces our cry.” I see the risk of reducing this embrace to something sentimental, with the consequence that if I do not “feel” it, then I “feel” abandoned and darkness advances. Recently, in a certain circumstance, I discovered my immaturity: the fact that I am still like this when I am well past 50 is humiliating. The crowd of voices that lives in me tried to silence me: “Leave it alone, go ahead, your consistency is not defined by that.” Yes, even with important, true words, the crowd inside and outside of me can shout at me to silence me, getting annoyed in front of my limitations, or it can embrace them in a sentimental way that is useless. I need to hand over my poverty, my pettiness, and my hideousness into the hands of someone who has a first name and a last name, to someone who sees my desire to not get stuck in my limitations. Someone who can look at (and help me look at) my limitations as an opportunity to walk on the journey. It has occurred to me that embracing my cry means being led step by step toward fulfillment, starting from the point where I am now, through all of the circumstances and my reactions to them. I would like you to go more deeply into the question of embracing the cry. Thank you for your friendship.

Do you see? We listen to this phrase — *“There is One who embraces our cry”* — and we can perceive it as sentimental, reducing it to the sentimental reaction it causes in us. Yet, obviously this is not adequate to our urgent need, to our cry. So, one wonders: How can we not reduce the embrace to something sentimental? Otherwise — as you said — one remains at the mercy of the crowd that is inside and outside of us, being tossed about by all the things around him. You want to entrust all your poverty into someone’s hands. Why? Because you need someone who will lead you step by step toward your fulfillment. Our friend who spoke first wanted to understand what “to always live the real intensely” means, and now you observe that the embrace you really need is the embrace of someone who shows you a way of living the circumstances as an opportunity to grow. It is a matter of perceiving an embrace without having to leave the circumstances in which we find ourselves. With this desire of yours, you begin to make a journey that leads you to recognize the One who embraces you, not in a sentimental way, but in a real way, overcoming the reduction that you mentioned.

In this period, like many other people, I have been forced to stop. I am retired and I should be used to how things go, and yet I am not! The forced stop has made me recognize that previously I didn’t see anything. After 50 years in the movement, today I discover that I have lived everything as if it were nothing, learning the speeches by heart and enjoying the companionship for my own benefit. In fact, put to the test of what defines my day, now that I no longer receive any acknowledgement, I must admit that the attempt at finding consolation in performance is desperate, it always leaves me hungry and empty. Yet I wonder, What is this lack a lack of? as you reminded us by quoting Mario Luzi. I can’t cheat — I understand that my attitude implies escaping reality by dreaming or making assumptions, living today but always thinking about “after,” and therefore never living the moment. It is truly nothingness that reigns. In fact, already in the morning I wake up angry because of an unfulfilled expectation I have. Is this nihilism? Is that why my need to see and enjoy the presence of Christ always remains unfulfilled? I understand that nothing is beneficial to me except Him, but even while I am thinking about this, I am already drifting away, following my own project. This kind of personal disorder upsets me, and I ask you: How can my heart stay right here and not pull away, stay right here where the Lord has placed me? How can I experience Him? By

answering yes to what? To the apparently dull facts of the day or, on the other hand, to my expectations? Is this saying yes?

Thank you, friend, because what you have related to us is so true that each of us can recognize it happening on many occasions. We can stay in the movement for years, memorizing speeches and enjoying the companionship, and yet, when it is put to the test of what defines our day, what you described emerges. For this reason, it is not obvious that you, as well as our friend who preceded you, wish to make a journey. It is not obvious that we are not satisfied with repeating certain words or attempting to achieve a consolation that leave us even emptier and hungrier, but that we want something that truly responds to all the urgent needs of our heart. The fact that we can't cheat speaks volumes about how real this need is. You realize that your attitude involves an escape from reality by dreaming and living even while always thinking about "after"; it is an inability to live the real that we often perceive in ourselves, being always "outside" of our experience, always dreaming of something else. A character from Graham Greene reminds us of this: "To me, the present is never here" (*The End of the Affair*). Reality is reduced to something that has already happened or has yet to happen, but is never — as you said — "here." This is the situation we try to describe by using the word "nihilism." If you don't like it, use another one, but the reality doesn't change: we are tossed about here and there without knowing how to get out of it. Even thinking about the word "Jesus" is not enough. With what impressive lucidity you said, "I understand that nothing is beneficial to me except Him, but even while I am thinking about this, I am already drifting away, following my own project" as if there weren't a single instant in which that name has a total hold on us. Then the question arises, "How do I experience Him? By answering yes to what?" We will find out little by little.

I thank you for how you are accompanying us during this period, with all the tools you offer us to work on ourselves, not allowing us to just get by. I have a question about desire. "The more nihilism advances, the more it becomes evident that it is impossible to live without meaning, and the more the indestructible desire to be loved, makes itself known" (Introduction, What Saves Us From Nothingness? p. 9). In the Introduction you say that what defeats nihilism is that this desire is not extinguished. If I look at myself, I realize that in me this absolute desire manifests itself in everyday life in many small desires linked to the circumstances in which I live: that you be yourself at work, that a particular person looks at you, that studying can make sense, that a difficult relationship be saved. Often, however, it is easier to allow your objections, your excuses, for not following these small and sometimes annoying desires, prevail. It is easier to let yourself be carried away by the circumstances of the day without bothering. I see that listening to and following one's desires requires a risk, an involvement, an effort with respect to one's own wounds and one's own needs. However, I am often afraid. Or, I just don't feel like it. So I ask you: What allows someone not to be afraid of his desire? Because I know that when I risk and go along with it I am happier! You added a piece to what we are saying insofar as you have begun to realize that, even if the things you told us about happened to you, there is something in you that resists: your desire is not extinguished. You also sense that this is very significant for you. On the one hand, you see all your desire emerge, but on the other hand, you are sometimes afraid of it. This is striking! When one describes his experience, if he pays attention, the structure of the "I" slowly emerges. So what allows us not to be afraid of desire?

I have to tell you a discovery I made during this period that I find exciting. When I read the third point of the Introduction, after the first part on nihilism, I expected to be rescued by the bursting in of something like an event, an encounter. That is why I was very surprised by your statement, “So what is the first step for those who do not want to live fleeing from a problem they do not know how to solve? In this context of lack of meaning, you have to recognize that there is something irreducible that holds out against nihilism [...] What holds out and endures? My “I,” which is irreducible, as Michel Houellebecq documents” (ibid., p. 8). It struck me that you said this is the first step, because I wouldn’t say that, I wouldn’t think of this as the first step. Therefore, reading this was really a surprise, as the title of the third point — “Surprise” — stated. The interesting thing is that there was an episode that made me understand the scope of this issue. The day after I read that passage, on Sunday, I went for a picnic with some friends. We hadn’t been together in a long time and we wanted to see each other. At some point, one of us said, “Oh, no, tomorrow I have to go back to the office!” This statement, which I have heard a thousand times and which I have also said many times, suddenly struck me. I thought: we say this yet we don’t notice its scope, we reduce it to a lament, to some normal and obvious venting that everyone engages in on Sunday evening. Instead, if we really look at it, that phrase is an expression of a heart that is not satisfied; it is an expression of the irreducibility of the “I” that, faced with the hypothesis of a difficulty, of some discomfort at work, does not want to experience it because our “I” is made in such a way as to go to work happily, to be excited about going there. Yet, since certain things seem impossible to us, we surrender to them and then we no longer notice the cry of our heart. As you say in the text of the Introduction, “The reason for this discouragement and doubt is that we take for granted the existence of the cry of the heart, of that desire that holds out against all form of nihilism” (ibid., pp. 9–10). Our idea of the irreducibility of the “I” is that we have to be superheroes. Instead, the irreducibility is precisely in that wound, in that cry. Why is it so important to recognize it? Because if we notice it, it could be the beginning of a recovery. In fact, you cannot be content with going to work without wanting to be happy! If we didn’t take that statement for granted, then we would begin to cry out, without settling for anything less, but rather looking for the answer that the heart seeks, and that for this very reason cannot fail to be there! We often blame God (or fate) for a lack of response within the circumstances, but the problem instead is that we don’t even begin to look for it! For this reason, being aware of the permanence of desire is the first step. I had not previously understood in these terms your insistence on the desire that remains in your reference to Houellebecq, and I realize now that, without going through this experience, the fourth point of the Introduction — “A ‘You’ who hears the cry” — would be something pasted on, abstract, and it would be impossible to grasp its value. We may learn it by heart and repeat it very well, but if you don’t realize that your heart desires the impossible, as Camus’s Caligula says, and that you are unable to achieve it, you will never realize that you can cry out, nor will you ever notice that we have met One who made the impossible possible and who says to you, “What do you want me to do for you?” Thank you very much for everything, and especially for allowing us to make these discoveries.

Do you see? The first thing you are surprised about is that you would have answered differently, having taken for granted that point of recovery that is already at the center of the “I,” irreducible. This is the help we give ourselves with the work of the School of Community: making a constant comparison between the way we usually behave and statements like “to always live the real intensely” or “a ‘You’ who hears the cry.” It isn’t that we don’t all talk about the same things and repeat the same verbal formulations, but it is as if we felt them pasted onto life because we don’t

notice the scope of a statement like that about the irreducibility of the “I,” which may appear to us to be the logical “therefore” of a discourse and not something real that responds to the question about the nature of our “I.” Luckily the irreducibility — sorry for the pun — is irreducible and we can’t pretend it isn’t there because it doesn’t allow us to cheat. If it allowed us to cheat, then we would truly end up in nothingness! The very fact that our “I” is so irreducible makes us constantly aware that there is something in us that resists any nihilism.

Furthermore, there is another point that we must grasp in what you said. Without realizing it, you have gone beyond this irreducibility. You said that if you don’t understand that your heart desires the impossible and that you are unable to achieve the impossible, you cannot realize that you can cry out, and then you added that you happened to meet Someone. You introduced the theme of the encounter, moving from irreducibility to encounter, but skipped a point in the *Introduction* that prevents us from perceiving the encounter simply as a word that is pasted on, abstract. That is the reason why many people have found that point of the journey so complicated. It is precisely from this irreducibility of the “I” that the cry arises, but this, Fr. Giussani says, is incomprehensible to many.

One person who could not connect with us tonight wrote, “I ask you to better explain point 3 of the introduction, in particular this statement by Fr. Giussani, ‘The very existence of the question implies the existence of an answer’ (ibid., p. 10). You continued, ‘Mysterious as it may be, the answer exists. It is implicit in the question. [...] If there is a cry there is an answer.’ I struggle to understand this sentence as a category of reason: Why is the answer implicit in the question? Couldn’t the question go unanswered?” Since we cannot resolve this problem, we end up thinking of the “You” as pasted on and of the embrace of the You as something sentimental (the same is true of the encounter, the companionship). That is why we cannot skip this step. The contribution continues, “Furthermore, if, as you wrote, the ultimate answer lies beyond the experiential aspects of existence, does this mean that I have to look for it in something supernatural, not of the world that can be experienced, and therefore not tangible [that is, outside this irreducibility]? I ask you this also because, in the difficulty of finding an exhaustive answer to my desire for happiness, I think I have suppressed the question.” Our friend who spoke before added another question to the contribution that she had prepared and I will read it now: “The entreaty for meaning is implicit in the answer.” Many times I experience the existence of need as irreducible, but the fact that this already guarantees the existence of the answer is for me a contradiction.” Since we think it is a contradiction, in the end what happens? That the “You” is perceived as pasted on to life, that the embrace of the “You” is perceived to be sentimental, that we don’t understand what “to always live the real intensely” truly means. Then we seek our fulfillment elsewhere and a moment later we succumb to our plans.

Focusing our work on the relationship between the question and the answer made me understand much more the importance of what is really at stake in your insistence, in this historical moment, on the question of our desire, of our need. In fact, the question shows the structure of our humanity and brings with it, implicitly, a demonstration of the existence of the answer. Furthermore, the unlimited nature of the question in a limited being is the indication of a limitlessness that has been placed in him by another, from beyond, by the answer itself. This is the origin of the infinite structure or nature of reason. In this sense I understand the purpose of dwelling on some of Houellebecq’s phrases, not so much because they reveal a generic religiosity, but because they

demonstrate the structure of reason proper to man, and thus the reference to the answer. In fact, one cannot help but wonder about the origin of the question itself; that is, the reason for the input that sets it in motion. It is necessary to have a continuous awareness of who man is, of his greatness and God's predilection for him in creation ("What is man that you care for him?" and "You care for him now?"). The fact that Houellebecq comes to ask a certain question, to express this need, is for me a sign, also in him, of an ongoing grace, to which in a certain sense he responds through his question, which makes him fully human. I realize that we must learn to truly understand the issues we deal with, at least as striving to (of course, this is also a gift, but it asks us to use our attention and reason), so that our answers do not run parallel to them, disconnected from them.

The thing we take most for granted is the most obvious of all, as all of those who have contributed so far have documented: you could not have said what you said (perceiving the insufficiency of our performances, grasping a possible sentimental reduction, realizing that any answer is not enough), if you didn't have this irreducibility in you, this urgency that makes you cry out. This urgency, so tremendous, so unique, that many times it leaves us stunned because it is so huge (as Leopardi said, "All is small and insignificant compared to the capacity of one's own soul," *Pensieri, LXVIII*), is the clearest sign of the greatness of man. It is necessary to be aware of this, it cannot be taken for granted because it is absolutely the most elementary fact — we cannot speak about anything without implying it. This irreducibility, this cry, are the documentation, the demonstration of something else. Why? Because we cannot give to ourselves this ultimate structure, since we are all limited. Why is there something so unique in the structure of our "I," seeing as we are all limited and therefore unable to give it to ourselves? Anyone who could find something worthy of man's irreducibility would have discovered not just the vaccine for Covid-19, but the answer to the problem of life! Yet this goes unnoticed by us. We all studied — as our friends said: years and years in the movement! — *The Religious Sense*. Everyone can count how many times he has read it, but it is as if this point couldn't get through to us and become an experience in us. For this reason, when Fr. Giussani says something like he does about the existence of the answer being implicit in the question, it makes us reconsider what we think. That is why I am surprised on the one hand by our difficulty in understanding, but on the other, positively, by what happens when people discover the scope of that statement in their own lives, as our friends said before. It matters to me that the existential level of the question emerges. Fr. Giussani's reflection is not abstract.

At the last Diaconia you challenged us with this question: "What does it mean that the certainty of the answer is implicit in the cry of our need?" I was very impressed by your persistence in pushing us not to skip the connections, not to take our answers for granted, even the right ones. On the evening of the following day, I met with two friends. I put your provocation on the table and a heated conversation immediately ensued that revealed how unaccustomed we are — I am the first, I admit it — to using reason. For example, there are those who say, "It is impossible! I can't say that the answer is in the cry, the encounter must happen for the answer to emerge."

Do you see how one skips steps, the constant shifting? If we do that it is impossible to understand Fr. Giussani's words.

That night I reread much of The Religious Sense. I read those pages as if it were the first time in my life. Everything surprised me and spoke to me more, questioned me, and the irreducibility of

the “I,” the experience of our limits, and the need to affirm something “other” emerged as the cornerstone of everything.

The cornerstone! Here is the point. “This is the cornerstone of everything.” Fr. Giussani grasped a crucial point, and if we detach ourselves from it we will end up in nothingness. If we skip a point so consonant with our nature — the irreducibility of the “I” — we will reduce the Christian experience, the “You” of which we speak.

However, I needed it to become mine in my experience.

This is the point; that phrase must become mine in my experience. For this reason, those who contributed tonight were right: someone needs to help me to make things become mine step by step, needs to help me understand in daily experience what it means “to always live the real intensely.” That is the only way in which it can become mine. It is not enough to repeat words that aren’t rooted in experience, as we said before.

The next day, still not at peace, I told my wife what happened and I asked her, “What do you think: Is the answer already inside the cry?” She answered, “Of course! My math colleague, who is an atheist but also a genius, confided to me, “I have clear in my mind the moment in my life when, not finding a mathematical axiom that would answer the questions I had, I had to stop asking them because otherwise I would have had to affirm the existence of something other.” I was floored.

Do you understand? That person must block his questions, otherwise he would be forced to “affirm the existence of something other.” That math teacher understood the significance of what Fr. Giussani said: the answer is so implicit in the question that, to deny it, he must turn his head elsewhere! But when he uses reason correctly, he cannot fail to perceive as implicit in the question “the existence of something other” that is, the answer.

I am starting to understand why you say that you get excited about questions. You are right. For this I thank you.

This is the first fruit of an education that arises from the charism, an education that can generate a united subject. That there is an answer is implied in the cry. The fact that it enters history is a different thing. We must not confuse the two. A friend of mine who grasped the scope of this point of the *Introduction* from an existential point of view wrote to me, “That the ‘very existence of the question implies the existence of an answer’ is one of those statements of Fr. Giussani’s that has always surprised and fascinated me. To tell you the truth, though, I have never been completely convinced [this not being completely convinced is exactly what lands us in trouble, what makes everything end up in nothingness] of this, neither rationally, nor above all in my experience. A small crack opened a few weeks ago when I reread a contribution of yours in which you explained (I am summarizing it in my own words) that if we only have the experience of the ephemeral and of the particular, why do we have a need for the eternal and the total? [Finally someone who asks himself this question, one who doesn’t take this irreducibility, this need for totality, for granted!] It must have been placed in us by One who is eternal and total. But then I thought that my desire is not just an emptiness or a lack, but rather the sign of the presence of this Other in me, it is a spark of His fire which — in a relationship with each piece of reality (which is also all His) — calls me to Himself. It is from this realization that I find myself with a desire to know and be with this Other, with this You [once he has discovered it as real because implicit in his question, he wants nothing more than to know and be with this You], who is simultaneously present and missing. But isn’t this love? [When one is in love and is full of nostalgia for a loved one, isn’t the

beloved present and missing at the same time? Who could deny that nostalgia, as I always say, is a sign of another?] ‘From the morning, O God, make us feel your love for us,’ says the antiphon of Lauds on Thursday [you see that something happened because our way of praying also starts to be different]. This was the explanation of what had just happened to me: as almost always in my now-long life, on Thursday I had woken up with a malaise, with a fear of starting the day [how many times the fear creeps in already when we first awake!], with the nihilistic desire to go back to sleep. Yet, that morning, for the first time, I realized I was telling myself that all this is not a negativity to be overcome, but it is He, my Love, who calls me.” This friend didn’t reach this point by virtue of some reasoning, but because he began to realize that this desire — as well as all the other points that emerged this evening — “irreducibility,” “need/entreaty,” “to always live the real intensely” — is not just a word; for him it has become experience leading to the point that the You is no longer something pasted on or sentimental. When a person realizes that all of this is really happening, “for the first time” in his life, it is the sign of a crucial change. So, friend, I care a lot about this question; otherwise, it is impossible to recognize that we still have an anchor in us, almost despite ourselves, despite all our issues, all our being tossed back and forth, all our emotional swings. There is something deeper, more structural in us that shouts “Other.” This cry is precisely the sign of the presence of this Other within me, a spark of Him who calls me to Himself, “Don’t you miss Me?” God doesn’t send us an angel to ask us, but cries out from our own depths! That is why I was surprised by a phrase of Karen Blixen’s which expresses this concisely, “To date [...] no one has seen migratory birds heading towards warmer places that do not exist, or rivers diverting through rocks and plains to run into an ocean that could not be found. In fact, God does not create a desire or a hope without having a reality ready to fulfill them. Our desire is our certainty, and blessed are the people who feel nostalgia, because they will return home” (see K. Blixen, *Anecdotes of Destiny*, 1985). This is what vibrates in us. What happens when a person lives life with this awareness?

Your Introduction overwhelmed me, making me feel that my life was seen in its depths. I have always perceived the wound of a burning lack in the experience of everyday things too sharply, so much so that I have never been able to fully enjoy them. In some moments this dissatisfaction has totally blocked me, immobilizing me almost pathologically, so much so that I took it as confirmation that I was wrong to have these questions.

Do you understand the problem?! We even think we are wrong because of this “burning” lack that we find within ourselves!

How can this desire for fullness be looked at without reaching the disappointed conclusion of not finding anything that is commensurate to it? How can we look at this uncomfortable desire as a resource, without it becoming a sadness that closes us, but rather opens up to a relationship with Him? Sometimes it seems that, not finding full satisfaction, we must postpone our need, waiting for a future fullness beyond life. The fact that the reality that never satisfies sharpens our need seems to lead to the conclusion that nothing is enough, and therefore that nothing is worthwhile, thus making me lose even the things I have in my hands. I want to be able to enjoy all the beauty of reality right now, not beyond it, not later. Sometimes I have even looked at my friends and my husband, who are a sign of His presence, expecting that they could fulfill my enormous need to be loved, totally, here and now, while in all their fragile humanity, they are just a sign of the huge

love that I aspire to. I need concreteness; otherwise, it seems that I have to imagine the presence of Jesus who fulfills me abstractly.

“Imagine the presence of Jesus who fulfills me abstractly.” Do you all understand? It is not that she didn’t find Jesus, but He is perceived as abstract.

I see that for you it is real, while for me it risks being an abstraction. However, the experience of these months of lockdown has made it clear that, within this dramatic worldwide situation, I was not abandoned. Things were there for me that might not have been there. Everything has become more precious — my husband, whom lately I have been taking for granted, was a sign of the profound company of the Mystery who was close to me, and our fourth child being born at the height of the pandemic was a clear sign of His free grace for our lives. I turned 40 without parties or friends, but each greeting I received took on a weight as never before. My husband’s work stopped, and that made it clear to us that having a job before had been a grace. How can you preserve this way of looking infused with grace, which, in the easing of the emergency is already in danger of declining? How can this period be a point of no return, how can it dictate a new beginning? Thank you.

Thanks to you because you have connected all your “burning lack” (so sharp that she feels as if she is wrong) with your urgency to live now without postponing fulfillment to the afterlife. In fact, this postponement doesn’t correspond to our experience because we are made, as you said, to enjoy now, now. You are right: now, not only in the afterlife, but right now! If in some way we don’t enjoy the answer right now, who can guarantee that it can be experienced in the afterlife? “I want to be able to enjoy all the beauty of reality right now, not beyond it, not later” you said, because you don’t want to postpone your need only for a future fulfillment. What is the sign that we are postponing the answer to our need; for example, in our relationship with people? The most obvious sign — as you have identified acutely — is our claim on reality. When you don’t live in the present something that truly satisfies and fulfills you, then you make claims on friends, your husband, everything. This is inevitable, it affects us all, it is not just your problem. If this issue is not addressed, it is inevitable that we will constantly make claims, generating more disasters than we would like to solve, for us and for others, because the other not only doesn’t fulfill us, but also perceives all the claims we have on him. Instead, what have you discovered during the lockdown? That you can live in another way. When one begins to realize that the other is the way in which the Mystery makes himself present — how He makes himself present in our cry, how He makes himself present in our desire, how He makes himself present in your newborn child — the whole of reality becomes different, so much so that you ask yourself, “How can I preserve this way of looking infused with grace that in the easing of the emergency is already in danger of declining? How can this period be a point of no return, how can it dictate a new beginning?” Many wonder the same. This new way of looking at everything that you have perceived can become stable and ultimately familiar only if we are introduced to it through an education.

The question of this evening’s first contribution now finds its complete answer. “To always live the real intensely” means not to remain at the level of appearance, to live the relationship with your husband or your son without stopping at appearances, but rather by arriving at the Mystery to which they refer, of which the cry, the irreducibility, the newborn baby, everything, are signs. Then we no longer make claims on our husband, because it is not the husband who can fill the abyss that only an Other, One greater than us, can fill. The irreducibility that constitutes us and our need for

totality are not satisfied with anything but an exhaustive response. When we do not perceive the other as a clear demonstration of the existence of the You, “to always live the real intensely” — how many times have we repeated it! — will remain an abstract statement and we will talk about the You in a “devout” way that is pasted onto life. How many times in the past years have each of us said, “I am You-who-make-me,” or “In order to say ‘I,’ I have to imply another”! But why does the fact that I exist imply a You who makes me? Why is irreducibility a sign of an Other? Why are a child and a husband signs of an Other? Because no one makes himself! Then you can relax, our friend who contributed at the beginning: His embrace is not sentimental because you cannot invent it by yourself, nor can it be reduced to sentimentalism. You are embraced by the fact that you exist. That is why I brought up — to conclude — an expression in *At the Origin of the Christian Claim* that we often found strange. Fr. Giussani says, “The company is *in* our ‘I.’” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s 1998, p. 90). This Presence is the only one that can eliminate loneliness because the irreducibility of the cry finds an adequate response only in the discovery of Being as a love that continually gives of Itself by giving life to me. Pay attention to what Fr. Giussani says: “Every human friendship is the reverberation of the original structure of being, and if this is denied, its truth is in jeopardy” (ibid.). Fr. Giussani concludes this passage by saying that when one becomes aware of this, then he truly prays. We often think of prayer as an alternative to reason, and vice versa. Instead, in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, Fr. Giussani follows the entire path from amazement at the existence of things and the self, to the You — this is what it means “to always live the real intensely” — and only at the end does he speak of prayer. Prayer is not the negation of reason, but rather the ultimate recognition of reality by a reason which, having discovered the You, can turn to Him not as to something it has imagined on its own, that it has invented, of which it persuades itself, or something sentimental. There wouldn’t be this You if I didn’t document with my own life that He is making me now. I am You-who-make-me. “For this reason, the height of prayer is not ecstasy, that is, such a profound consciousness of the depths that one loses the sense of the ordinary. Rather, it is seeing the depths as if they were everyday things” (ibid.).

This is our wish for each other this summer: that “seeing the depths as if they were everyday things” become truly familiar.

School of Community. Since this year we are unable to have community vacations, we have decided to accompany each other this summer by adding a School of Community in July. The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, July 15th, at 9:00 p.m. through a video link like this evening. It will be on the second chapter of the book that I am finalizing (the *Introduction* of which we have worked on this evening will correspond to the first chapter of the book) based on the contents of the Fraternity Exercises on which I had begun but that we had to cancel because of the lockdown. This chapter will be available on the CL website starting next Monday, June 22.

The book, titled *The Brilliance In Our Eyes: What Saves Us from Nothingness?* will be published by Editrice Nuovo Mondo and will be attached to the July/August *Traces*. In early July, it will also be available for purchase both in paper format (4.00 euros) and in e-book format (1.99 euros). We have chosen a book format because we have clearly seen that what we are living and saying is interesting and useful for others (and not only for us, as we are seeing with *Reawakening our Humanity*). A book format will allow us to make the text known to everyone more easily.

Summer vacations. As we said last time, the current situation doesn't allow us to propose the gesture of community vacations, and also for other meetings it is necessary to take into account the directives of the authorities to not hold large gatherings.

We hope that this summer can be an opportunity for each of us to take advantage of the experience lived in the months of quarantine, during which we set out to “live the real intensely,” a proposal that also applies to the next few months when we will probably have more free time. Fr. Giussani spoke to the GS kids (but his appeal is valid for everyone, young and old) of vacation as a time of freedom: “Vacation time is the noblest time of the year because it is the moment when one becomes as involved as he likes in the value he recognizes as dominant for his life, or he doesn't get involved in anything at all, and then he is [...] a fool. This means that vacation is important.” He offered two significant indications for how to live this time: “First of all, it demands attention in the choice of companions and place, but above all it concerns the way one lives: if vacation never reminds you of what you should remember more often, if it doesn't make you better toward others, but makes you respond more to instinct than to reason, if it doesn't teach you to look at nature with profound intention, if it doesn't make you make sacrifices joyfully, then your time of rest has not achieved its purpose. Vacation should be as free as possible” (L. Giussani, “Vacations: The Time of Freedom,” <https://english.clonline.org/news/current-events/2019/07/08/vacations-the-time-of-freedom>).

If we accept this proposal, I am sure that it will be a human gain for each of us and for those who will encounter us.

We propose two books for the summer.

The first is **Un Avvenimento nella Vita dell'Uomo** [An event in the life of man], by L. Giussani (the fourth volume of the Bur Rizzoli series, which collects the Exercises of the Fraternity from 1991 to 1993). In this volume, Fr. Giussani helps us to understand the scope of Christianity for human life, even in an era dominated by nihilism like ours. Fr. Giussani prophetically grasped many of the specific traits of our era. In this context, he shows us the event of Christ, who proposes himself as a newness that reaches the people of our time through a human encounter that illuminates and radically changes life, transforming it into an experience of irreducible positivity and, ultimately, of joy.

The second book is a novel, **The Robe**, by the American writer Lloyd C. Douglas. The novel tells the story of the Roman tribune who helps carry out Jesus's death sentence and wins his tunic in a dice game. This fact will be a provocation for him. He will begin a long journey in search of the places and friends frequented by Jesus. His story is intertwined with the history of the first Christians, with whom he will begin a friendship. Faith in Jesus, a hypothesis he had always rejected previously, becomes reasonable when he begins living with with Jesus's friends in a human journey in which all the stories he hears and what he sees are subjected to the examination of his reason, a reason that flourishes in his relationship with them. This text reminds us of how Fr. Giussani describes the experience we live in the book *L'Uomo e il suo destino*: “The community of the Church [...] is the garment of that Presence, like the garment of Jesus for the young children who were close to Him. [...] Likewise, Jesus makes himself perceivable to us in

the ecclesial community as if she were the dress by which our smallness enters into a relationship with his real presence” (L. Giussani, *L’Uomo e il suo destino* [Man and his destiny], Marietti, Genoa, 1999, pp. 38–39).

The novel is available in paper version for 14 euros.

Beginning Day will be held on the afternoon of Saturday, September 26, exclusively via video link. It will not yet be possible to have the gesture of a great assembly in at least some Italian regions like in previous years. If the rules allow it, you can follow it together, but only in small groups. At the beginning of September we will provide you with the details for the connection.

The Rimini Meeting will take place on August 18–23 with the events broadcast on digital channels. Everyone can contribute to the preparation and realization of the Meeting in a new form, either by collaborating with the various departments or by helping with communication via social media. To engage in this collaboration, you can register on the Meeting website by June 30th.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening everyone.