

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, July 15, 2020**

Reference text: J. Carrón, *The Brilliance In Your Eyes: What Saves Us from Nothingness?* chapter 2, “How Can This Abyss of Life Be Filled?” and 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.

- *Luntane, cchiù luntane* [Farther, farther away]

Glory Be

Tonight we continue our journey addressing the second chapter of the book *The Brilliance In Your Eyes* entitled “How Can This Abyss of Life Be Filled?” Keeping in mind everything we have said so far, let’s begin to verify the attempts that each of us makes to answer the problem posed by the previous chapter: What saves us from nothingness? Willingly or not we all make attempts, with or without awareness, to escape nothingness, so deep is the need of our humanity that doesn’t leave us alone. We are thereby launched into a search for something that can answer the question of Miguel Mañara: “How do I fill up this emptiness in life?” (O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara*, trans. Crossroads Cultural Center, Comments by Luigi Giussani, p. 4, <http://www.crossroadsculturalcenter.org/booklets/>).

Often we think that the answer is to turn the page as soon as possible. One person writes to me, “This work on desire is opening my heart and my mind. Today we had an assembly on the second chapter and I was impressed to see that there is a temptation to speak a lot about Christ while skipping the topic of desire, taking it a bit for granted, and so we don’t understand who Christ is.” Yet, to some it may seem that to speak of desire, of our need, is too limited.

Hello, Julian. Having attended the School of Community on June 17th, some questions and thoughts have arisen in me that I would like to share with you. The point you insisted on the most was that if man feels the question, the need, powerfully in his heart, that implies that there is an answer to it. I think you consider this need to be our constitutive need, representing the very fabric of our humanity. Your reasoning, reinforced by the beautiful quote of Karen Blixen, is logically correct. Blixen says, “God does not create a desire or a hope without having a reality ready to fulfill it.” Yet, I thought about myself, about my experience, and I wondered to what extent the issue of this need is descriptive of the whole human itinerary. Since I was a child, I have lived the environment of the parish and my parents, although nonbelievers, always left me the freedom to adhere first to the sacraments and then to certain post-Confirmation paths, until I reached the age of eighteen. Then I went to college. In those years I began to really know myself and I also understood what the path for my desire to be loved was, that is, education. This didn’t happen because of an inner reflection on my desires, which were quite confused, but because I met friends who lived the charism of CL and took seriously studying, relationships with colleagues and professors, free time, their affectivity, all of life. As I got very close to them, I realized that I wanted that fullness of life. So they were the answer (a carnal answer) to my even more hidden expectations that lifted the veil and gave me to myself. This dynamic continues unabated even now, filling me with gratitude even in the dramatic circumstances that adulthood hasn’t spared me. The life of Christ, which reaches me through the companionship of the movement, uses me, my

intelligence, my creativity, as long my freedom adheres to it. Someone has taken hold of me and continues to bind me to Himself, fascinating me with the beauty and gratuitousness that only He knows how to generate, and that I see flourishing in my life and in the life of my friends. Having a companionship of “risen” people around me, people who are happy and at peace even in sorrow and in the face of life’s unforeseen events, has been and is the only possibility to avoid being devoured by my need. Christ told his people to be with Him and to follow Him, and in being with Him, the tumult in their hearts found a relationship to fix on. I always remember that verse from Hosea—“My people are hard to be converted: called to look up, no one knows how raise their eyes”(cf. Hos 11:7). For me, this need is discovered and clarified in the face of a Presence that makes me raise my eyes, eyes that when focused only on myself sometimes lead me to withdraw into myself and crumple. I believe that you want to accompany us on a step-by-step path—we have always seen this, especially at the Exercises. However, I felt the need to tell you that I perceived the last School of Community as being too limited a segment of the path, without a view on the open and always new horizon of the whole Christian experience. I felt a little suffocated and wondered if—as a method —presenting only a part of the path, not the whole thing, can really help. In my experience, everything happens together—there is no analysis of the parts. Those who find the path hard may find it even harder with this method. I wanted to tell you this so that I can be helped to follow the path you want us to take. If I have misunderstood, please have the charity to accompany me toward understanding. I hope you have understood the reasons for this personal initiative I took.

I understand them perfectly. That is why I am happy that you had the freedom to pose your question about your perception of things in front of everyone. It is true that last time I didn’t describe the complete human itinerary—it wasn’t my intention to do so—because I wanted to emphasize a decisive aspect of the journey, starting from the realization that sometimes we are too hasty to move on to speak of Christ. And that has consequences, as we will see later.

The point I am interested in highlighting is that every time we look at one aspect of reality, that detail contains everything. I will give you an example. If you see a person who has powerful sense of longing, who never stops talking about how much he feels a lack, if you see him agitated by an uncontrollable nostalgia, how do you interpret this? Is that longing, that nostalgia, just an isolated fragment of life or is it something so unique that to explain what you see you have to appeal to something you don’t see? How do you explain that longing? What provokes it is present within it. And even if it doesn’t say anything about the object to which it is addressed, that nostalgia is not too insignificant, because it wouldn’t exist without the one who arouses it with his lacking. That’s why if you meet a person who is in the grip of a powerful nostalgia, you can’t say it is separate from the whole, because it wouldn’t exist detached from the whole.

True.

This is fundamental, so much so that last time we said that our problem is that we often fail to see “the depths as if they were everyday things” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen’s University Press 1998, p. 90). Why? Because we detach the usual things from the core that constitutes them. We will see this as we continue the path of *The Brilliance In Your Eyes*, as we attempt to offer the whole proposal.

The question you ask should have been clarified by what we have already studied in the first chapter of *Generating Traces in the History of the World*. When Jesus refers to a piece of reality, such as the flower of the field, one might object, “But it is only a piece!” Yet, in His eyes that detail has everything inside it, because, as Fr. Giussani says, “creation is an event; [...] the flower

in the field which ‘the Father clothes better than Solomon’ is an event; the bird that falls ‘and the Heavenly Father knows it’ is an event; ‘the hairs on your head are numbered,’ they are an event” (*Generating Traces*, p. 12). The flower is an event, you are an event, your desire is an event. How many people are surprised by not taking this desire for granted! “What is this lack a lack of, / heart?” wondered Mario Luzi (*Sotto specie umana*, Garzanti, Milan, 1999, p. 190). Now we want to insist on this. Why? Because “if we do not understand and use the term ‘event,’ we shall not even understand Christianity, which will thus be immediately reduced to a word” (*Generating Traces*, p. 13).

Precisely because in experience everything happens together, each of us verifies whether the Christian event sets in motion his reason, pushing it to go beyond the level of appearance. It is true what you say, that the important thing is the Christian event, but you verify the Christian event if you begin to look at reality as Jesus looks at it, who sees that nothing is detached from its origin. If, on the other hand, you contrast the Christian event with the piece of reality you see, and if the Christian event does not rekindle your reason by allowing you to relate to everything and everyone (your family, work, pain, desire), you will not be able to grasp His happening in every aspect of reality. Because Christ—we have said this many times—did not come to erase the religious sense, but to awaken it, to reawaken reason with all of its need for totality! Therefore, when one lives, as you say, focused only on oneself, stuck in one’s own measure, one remains at the level of appearance. Instead, Fr. Giussani, as we recalled last time, perceives in the “I” the whole company that constitutes him, the whole mystery of the Father who is generating him. Do you understand? It is crucial to realize this. If this is the case for all people—because all of reality refers to something else, because creation is the first event—how much more should it be normal for us who have encountered Christ to perceive desire or need as the most obvious sign of the existence of the answer.

But let us return to our haste to say “Christ,” a temptation that often assails us.

I have been living in a gloomy state of sadness, a prevailing state of mind, for a long time, well before Covid-19. The time of the lockdown has passed quite quickly, and if I have to say briefly what characterized it, I would say it was fear, not so much of the disease, but of the economic consequences. In fact, I did my best to contribute to the company I work for, yet the return to the office was marked by some disappointments arising out of the projects I worked on during the lockdown. One morning I called a friend and after letting off some steam we got to the topic of vacation. I told her, “With my family we booked a place, you know, I am a guy who is ‘adaptable’ to the needs of my wife and children,” but she said, “That is where you are wrong—being adaptable—why don’t you fight for what you need?” It was enlightening. I don’t fight because it’s uncomfortable, because you have to work at it and that can be tiring. Later, one afternoon I saw on the table the notes of the June 17th School of Community with my wife’s highlights. I wondered, “What is she finding so interesting? I didn’t understand anything on the 17th.” So I picked up the notes and read them all without stopping: it was a discovery! My life becomes sad because of the great haste I have to close matters, when I anticipate the conclusions of everything in my great haste to say “Christ,” and in the process skipping life. In this way life becomes boring and unbearable even when there aren’t any serious problems. But the fundamental consequence is that one doesn’t love—when we don’t take our needs seriously we don’t take care of ourselves and of the reality around us. For this reason, I can’t complain if I don’t make any progress at work or if

my children don't take some steps, because I am the first one who doesn't walk. What I find hard to understand is that in my need there is everything; it is made of the things of life, the biggest and the smallest, all with the same dignity: eating, drinking, sleeping, work, vacation, friendship. I have had confirmation that recognizing and taking desire seriously is difficult. Thank you for having insisted for quite some time on the need to live the real intensely, something that I am only beginning to grasp now, about which I am a little late.

You are never too late!

I don't know why, but suddenly everything seems simplified and real to me; the sad fog has thinned out, and I am more and more grateful because the charism exists and I can follow it.

“My life becomes sad because of the great haste to close matters, [because of] my great haste to say ‘Christ,’” like a hat placed on the surface of life, which thus becomes “boring and unbearable.” This is the verification that each of us must make. It is because of what you say, my friend, that Fr. Giussani stated, “The reason why people do not believe [...] or believe without believing (it reduces believing to a formal, ritualistic participation, to gestures, or to a moralism) is because they don't live their own humanity [that is, because our humanity is missing], they are not engaged with their own humanity” (*Vivendo nella Carne* [Living in the flesh], Bur, Milan 2019, p. 66). Therefore, if Christ, who came to awaken our humanity, is not experienced as being able to truly awaken it (that is, to arouse a commitment to our own humanity), a formal, ritualistic faith will not be able to overcome boredom. This is the reason why many people of faith perceive life as unbearable. Fr. Giussani insists that Christianity needs our humanity: “Christ proposes himself as the answer to what ‘I’ am and only an attentive, tender, and impassioned awareness of my own self can make me open and lead me to acknowledge, admire, thank, and live Christ. Without this awareness, even Jesus Christ becomes just a name.” (*At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, p. 6). It is the risk we often succumb to.

Good evening everyone.

What did you find useful for yourself by taking everything that has happened to you seriously?

We don't know each other, and I follow the movement only with difficulty; for me, the movement has been both a cradle and a prison. Yet, I am still very grateful for this experience, because it has given me some crucial faces that still accompany me today. I don't find it so useful to do the work of the School of Community, to read and reread texts, ending up, without realizing it, sticking words onto experiences. So I usually don't read many of the proposed texts, but this time, at the suggestion of a friend, I read the introduction first and then the second chapter of your new book. I was very surprised by the topic, which is absolutely real and concrete in my experience. In a sense I was waiting for the arrival of the coronavirus—I am always waiting for something to shake me up, to transcend the nothingness I am constantly faced with. Some days I am steeped in this heartbreaking experience, a burning anguish that began wearing down my existence as soon as I entered adulthood. Even the most pleasant moments, with someone or alone, often contain a subtle unhappiness, a sense of dissatisfaction. Nothing lasts, relationships do not hold, everything flows to the bottom without a meaning. This is the nihilism that you described well in the introduction and that I find myself carrying structurally without asking for or wanting it. With great difficulty I learned to look at it, even if it re-opens wounds that are difficult to heal. The quarantine didn't upset my life. In fact, I thought: let's see what happens in this new “adventure.” It was a tremendously dramatic adventure, but one that was good for me. At last I was with myself, alone

before God. No more having to adapt to others, having to pretend to be functioning when I am not. I realized that life can't just be an anxiety to reach a goal that seems to move further and further away in time that is fleeting, relentless, and petty: everyone has their own path, their way, their own time. I started my quarantine with a view to my own project, but after less than a week of taking care of all the things I had to, I got injured at home and couldn't do anything. I felt I was a burden to everyone. I realized that that circumstance could be an opportunity for me to overcome a thousand expectations. For years, in fact, I had lived holding a kind of grudge against God because one of my plans had not gone as I had imagined, and I persisted in not wanting to see how He had made it flourish in another way. In the quarantine my children and my husband were the greatest sign of His love for me: with their presence, He asked me to stay true to reality, to respond to their needs and to enjoy their company. I realized then, in this dialogue made of small things, that I have a dignity even in my frailty, that actually He calls me precisely through it. The light I experience is sometimes dazzling, pervading me with a love that my heart struggles to contain. The Way of the Cross proposed by the pope on Good Friday was a very touching moment; I felt somehow close to the experience of those who because of their own evil are rejected by society. What I want most is a gaze that welcomes me with no reservations, full of unconditional love. What I find around me, even among us, is instead a world of appearances, where the most insidious prison is not being able to communicate, the impossibility of finding a single soul in the world with whom I can share my deepest struggles. I hold this suffering close, however, because it makes me go deeper into myself and things: tearing the veil of appearances, it allows me to experience that I am "You who call me, who take me, who love me." Then, life for me takes place in this waiting for Him to reveal Himself to my eyes. It is not an effort to understand, it is not a meticulous work of research, but rather a dialogue conducted through a cry. And the only thing I can do is to stay. I can say that what has remained with me most from this time is the awareness of myself—that tenderness of which you speak—and of the dialogue, sometimes silent, at other times joyful, and at others cried out, with an Other who calls me, for whom I am fine the way I am, even with my fragmented and incoherent self, seemingly meaningless.

The movement can be a "cradle" or a "prison," it can be a place where life is embraced or a prison that suffocates our "I." The circumstance of the coronavirus, which would seem to be totally negative, is a tool that God used to help you become aware of yourself, so that you would not skip over your humanity, including all your difficulties and fragility. In fact, you began to perceive that it was through your fragility that another called you, and you began a dialogue with Him, not in spite of your cry, but through it. If this does not happen, in the end faith remains unrelated to life, it doesn't reach it, and therefore we cannot experience its human correspondence. In contrast, when we do not skip our humanity, we begin to have an awareness of ourselves, to feel a tenderness for ourselves, which marks the beginning of a dialogue with the Mystery. Yet, many times our humanity is perceived as an obstacle. How can we love it?

You say that experience in order to be such implies a judgment, and the criterion according to which this judgment can be formulated is our humanity. My question is: How can I love this humanity of mine if I often see it as an abyss, as a burden to be carried? I try to overcome this burden with all my might, but I soon realize that I can't do it. Then I try to reduce its claims—I adjust my desire by saying to myself, "Okay, I have to be content, after all I have so many things, a job, a family, children." Yet I soon realize that I am cheating, that all of this is not enough to fill

*the abyss. In short, reality blows up all the barriers and barbed wire that I have arranged all around, and then I am left there in front of this abyss. How do I truly love my humanity when it seems that my everyday reality is hanging by a thread? There is a song by Guccini, “Incontro” [Encounter], which together with “Vedi cara” [See, my dear], has always struck me. “Incontro” at a certain point says, “Dear friend, time takes and time gives... we always run in one direction, but who knows what it is and what sense it has [...] we are something that does not remain, empty words in our head and a heart full of symbols” (from the album Radici, 1972, © EMI). So how do I love, have tenderness—as you said—for this humanity of mine, which is so limited that I am not able to protect even the greatest, most important things, like my wife and daughters? I can’t defend them. Sometimes I am really afraid of the limits of my humanity. Thank you for everything. I am grateful that you wanted to share your deepest concerns with all of us, and I am grateful that there is a place where everyone can do so freely. We all have faith, but sometimes we don’t overcome the abyss, and the burdens of life and our frailties weigh us down. If the faith we all have doesn’t affect our existential situation, at some point we will say, “I don’t care.” For this reason, Fr. Giussani stressed that “unless faith could be found and located in present experience, and confirmed by it, and useful for responding to its needs, it would not be able to endure in a world where everything, everything, said and says the opposite.” (*The Risk of Education*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019, p. xxxii). A faith detached from life will not last long. So we keep these questions open, without rushing to resolve them with speeches.*

*Good evening. I will read the contribution I sent: “Dear Fr. Carrón, I am writing to you while sitting at the entrance of the hospital where my wife must have a CT scan. Tomorrow my little son has to see the eye doctor. In these days I have read and reread the notes from the School of Community, trying to give myself reasons to face these circumstances. Those who know me know that I am a very apprehensive guy. I have finished reading the second chapter of *The Brilliance In Your Eyes* and I felt described by your words: neither a speech nor a system of ethics is enough to face the questions of reality. I understand that it is not a matter of reasoning. I sense that everything is present in that tenderness that sprouts on the tree of my indomitable desire, in looking at my self with tenderness and consequently looking at everything with tenderness. I sense that this is the truest gaze I can have on my ‘I’ and the circumstances. I say that I sense it because recognizing truth and adhering to it does not happen automatically. It is here that I discover that I need support to take this step, which is called prayer or offering: ‘You who make me, reality, my wife, my children and all the circumstances, give me the strength to answer yes to You.’ Now I also understand the insistence on praying the Angelus every morning. Dear Fr. Carrón, as I write to you, this anxiety and worry of mine don’t go away, but my whole self feels embraced and understood by a loving Presence, which makes me eager to experience the fruit of my ‘I’ inhabited by Christ, here and in these circumstances. Thinking about this moment, about myself and some friends, I have to admit with extreme sincerity, almost with shame, that sometimes my trust in God is not total. I say, ‘Be it done to me according to Your word,’ but it is as if in the background I said, ‘But only if Your will coincides, in part, with mine.’ One last step was missing, one last leap. I understand that trusting Christ 99.99% is not enough because the consistency of my ‘I’ cannot be partial.”*

So great is our need for totality! But it is a totality that we approach moment by moment. Why? Because we need the tenderness of His presence to embrace all of our humanity over time. As you

said, recognizing the truth is not automatic; there is a path to be taken so that that Presence becomes more and more ours, so that it emerges from our way of being in reality. If I begin to intuit and experience that my whole self is embraced in whatever situation I find myself, if I find an answer to the situation of my humanity (for example, to the lack of meaning that I sometimes perceive), if I realize that such an answer is able to encompass everything, then I can truly love my humanity. I love it if I feel that it is deeply embraced, and if I entrust myself 100%, totally. But this path is dramatic because it demands that I put my reason and my freedom into play.

When one feels that one's whole humanity is embraced, how is he surprised by what has happened within himself? One person writes me, "A deep gratitude is born, even for wounds and pain, for the cry of disappointment, because only through them can I experience life in its entirety."

I thought that the last School of Community was closely related to the chapter we are working on tonight. You said in one passage, "Though at times, out of lack of sincerity or attention or ultimate morality, we follow what is not true [three things I know well] and allow ourselves to be dragged along by these attitudes, and sooner or later [sooner or later that moment comes!] our humanity makes us realize we have followed a great illusion" (The Brilliance In Your Eyes, p. 4). What a relief! I don't even have to wait for something to happen to me, but only need to pay attention to my own humanity, which gives me signals and shows me that I am irreducible. This very "irreducibility, this cry, are the documentation of something else," you said at the last School of Community in June. That is to say, it is from within, it is in me that I have evidence of something else. I thought for a long time about the path you took us on that Wednesday night, and although I immediately breathed more freely after listening to you and to the witnesses, I later found myself stuck thinking that my feeling better was the result of logical reasoning. So I got lost and confused because I wasn't able to reach that point by that means. So many times I went back to the witnesses of our friends who spoke and to your words. I began to look at the existential implications for my life of what you introduced us to in what seemed like a real revolution to me. It is a revolution! I will tell you something that happened to me. I went for an MRI because I got sick during the quarantine, and as I was going to the doctor's I started to get anxious, and I tried to dismiss the fear, diminishing it in my mind. Yet when I arrived in front of the "tube" of the MRI, the anxiety came back, to the point that I thought of stopping everything and saying that I wouldn't go ahead with it. I was in a panic. While I was in this situation, a cry came from my depths, "Lord, stay with me! Stay with me!" What surprised me was the moment after that cry that had come from inside me when I recognized, "Lord, but You are with me!" This happened in a second, and it was not a cerebral thought—also because in those conditions that is impossible—but a recognition. In a second I went from panic to being totally at peace. This surprised me so much that for the next fifteen minutes when I was in that "tube" I was relaxed. At one point, I realized I was about to fall asleep, so much was I at peace. And the more I was surprised because this was beyond my ability—since I had just experienced something that had told me otherwise—the more I said to myself, "But this is You! You are in me." At the last School of Community you said, "There is something deeper, more structural in us that shouts 'Other.'" That MRI was an opportunity for me to realize that and to understand what it means to live the real intensely.

Explain the difference between saying, "Lord, stay with me!" and, "Lord, but You are with me!"
The first was the cry that came to me from inside the panic...

It is like saying “uhm, if you happen to be there, come!”—an invocation that one may think will go unanswered. But when you find yourself saying, “Lord, but You *are* with me!” this is an acknowledgment, it is the sign of a faith that has religiosity within; that is, a conscious relationship with the Mystery, a relationship that, because of the path you have taken, has become so much yours that you immediately went from the cry “stay with me!” to the recognition, “But you *are* with me!” Prayer is not, as we often think, an alternative to reason (“Since I am in a panic and have lost my mind, I cry out”), but, as Fr. Giussani says at the end of the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, “To be conscious of oneself right to the core is to perceive, at the depths of the self, an Other.” [Lord, but You *are* with me!] This is prayer: to be conscious of oneself to the very center, to the point of meeting an Other. Thus prayer is the only human gesture which totally realizes the human being’s stature.” (*The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen’s University Press 1997, p. 106). It is proof of the difference between the one statement and the other. How do I know if I have used reason to the point of acknowledging the Other in my heart? How do I know if I have performed the only human gesture in which the stature of the human being is fully realized? You said it very simply: you were at peace, “relaxed.” It is this touch of reality that documents how faith, when lived according to its nature—not as an alternative to reason, but as the ultimate recognition of reason—is able to cause a revolution: “In a second I went from panic to being totally at peace.” This experience of yours corresponds exactly to the conclusion of the tenth chapter: “True self-consciousness is well portrayed by the baby in the arms of his mother and father [...] he can enter any situation whatsoever [for example, the MRI “tube”] profoundly tranquil, with a promise of peace and joy. No curative system can claim this, without mutilating the person. Often, in order to excise the censure of certain wounds [because they are often only an obstacle for us], we end up censoring our humanity.” (*Ibid.*, pp. 106-07).

A faith that censors our humanity would be a faith without the religious sense. Instead, a faith that contains the awakening of our humanity within it, the awakening of the use of reason up to a recognition from within me—right where I have the evidence of an Other, said our friend—is a whole other thing: it is not a pietistic and formal adherence, but a recognition full of reasons, a real revolution for you even though you have belonged to Christ from birth.

We can live the faith without this acknowledgment of Him with us, but when a person begins to experience this, he begins to understand what we are talking about.

I want to tell you about something that happened to me recently that surprised me a lot. A couple of weeks ago I accompanied my wife and children to the mountains. I was looking forward to this vacation, but as soon as I arrived some trivial things immediately changed my mood; for example, it was raining and the village was not as I had imagined. I was saddened and found myself a little apathetic and listless. While we were walking around the village, my wife went into a shop and I stayed outside with the stroller waiting for her and boredly looking at my cell phone. At that moment I realized with astonishment that my feeling of sadness was a sign of the infinite need that constitutes me. In the face of such moments in the past I often found myself making moralistic remarks, “I should read School of Community more often, I should pray more, I should observe silence more,” and so on. This time, however, I found myself looking tenderly at my dissatisfaction, amazed at how immeasurable my desire was, grateful that it continues to come to the surface. This way of looking at myself is absolutely new for me and is definitely a fruit of the journey you have been helping us make in recent months. When my wife left the store I was different—we went for

an aperitif and I spoke to her about myself, while during the whole trip I had been silent because I didn't have much to say to her. I want this way of looking at myself and this tenderness toward myself to become more and more common. Thank you for the path you are showing us.

Do you see? The trip there and the return were totally different. What happened? You didn't have a vision; rather, instead of scolding yourself again, you simply began to look tenderly at your dissatisfaction, marveling at how immeasurable your desire is, and being grateful that it continues to come to the surface. For once you weren't angry with the desire or the dissatisfaction you had. And this, you said, was totally new for you because you, who have belonged to the movement for a long time, are only now beginning to see that it is the result of the journey you have made in recent years. What does this make you want? That this way of looking may become more and more habitual in you.

A South American friend also witnesses to this: "In the last School of Community (after rereading it several times and comparing it with my life's twists and turns), I was able to see the tormented relationship I have had for most of my life between my basic needs (often intertwined with wrong desires and passions) and the You-who-make-me. This happens if I look inside myself well, but in the end this insistence of yours on the question that is hidden in our wound and in our demands, and which we reject out of shame, has lately caused me to see that there, in the inexorability of the "I," lies the treasure of the cry which has an answer. How long did it take me to consciously experience this! But what can I say, what can I complain about, if it is a gift to my humanity, something given? How could I object? Lately, discovering this spark has satisfied me because it keeps me company without me having to expect anything from anyone. Poor me, if I don't faithfully accept (not consistently, but faithfully) this great grace of discovering that God has nestled in the shadows and depths of my "I." How many times did looking at the bottom of myself make me feel bad! How could tenderness for my humanity be born from those dark depths? It was not a question of being purer or better, but of accepting and changing the way I look at my wound, and from that point on, never ceasing to wait for the answer, always redirecting my hope back on the spark."

This can also happen in front of the breathing of your seriously ill father, as a person writes to a friend: "Looking at my father's dependence on the Mystery in every breath He gives to him opens my reason to realize that that is true also for me. This fills me with amazement and makes me attentive and expectant." Her friend replied, "It is a grace to see Him [God] happen in your father and in you," both aware of the breath that is given continuously. This is the fulfillment of what we read in the School of Community—to see the depths, that is, Who gives that breath, in the same way that we see the usual things (the breath, indeed). She replied to her friend, "Yes, it is a grace that exalts my whole humanity as it is, with all the questions, in powerful evidence of His Presence." It can be that way, up to the last breath.

Paragraph two of the second chapter reads, "What is this humanity of ours that does not let us delude ourselves, that we cannot fool, that we cannot give just any arbitrarily chosen answer? Self-deception and distraction cover over the unease, but they do not save us from nothingness. Even though our humanity is in a bad way, wounded and muddled, it does not get confused, does not let the first person who passes by fool it, and this is the sign that it is less muddled than it may seem." The Brilliance In Your Eyes, p. 4). For the last two months we have been taking care of my father, who is terminally ill, at home. His condition is actually very serious, although his spirit

(with ups and downs) remains strong. A few days ago I was accompanying him to sit down in the hallway of our house, and from the open door, one could see the dazzling light of the sun invading the morning. My father mumbled something; I asked him to repeat and he spoke more clearly, “What a beautiful day! What a beautiful sun today!” In the following days I thought about his words several times, and I retained this: first, it is remarkable that one can be in the most painful condition, even in some humiliating ways, but this cannot stop one’s heart from crying out when it intercepts beauty. Second, to us, to me, it seems that before we can say “how beautiful!” it is necessary to be physically healthy, to feel loved and appreciated, to have nonstressful working conditions, or to first be detoxified (for example) of nihilism, misleading advertising, the culture of the Enlightenment, malevolent thoughts, and so on. Instead, the heart demands its spaces almost regardless of us; there is no need for any preconditions for our heart to live, to drag us toward life. Third, the fact that the heart lives is not the precondition for something to happen, but it is already a victory over the slothfulness of our lives. I add a postscript: a few days ago, my mother (who is more saddened than my father by his condition, but who lives it too, albeit with ups and downs, with equal fortitude), at the request, a little modest and playful, of my father for a teaspoon of ice cream, with conviction and transport answered him, “But of course! Today is a celebration, every day is a celebration, so we must celebrate!!!” I thought: if we allow our heart to express itself, we infect others and allow them to live reality—even though it may not immediately correspond to us—with an open heart. Thank you.

Thank you. We too can reach the end of life and have the same way of being in reality as your parents, but only if each of us embarks on this journey. In fact, there is always a risk lurking. As a friend who couldn’t connect tonight wrote to me, although he never detached himself from what he encountered, he often lived the life of the movement as “dry, reduced to mere formalisms, without true adherence of the heart. The heart became empty and was inevitably filled with something else. Thus began the “driftings,” the infidelities, an adherence to the common mentality, even if there remained a distant and poignant memory of a time when happiness was true and friendship was real and selfless.” Gradually he abandoned all the gestures: the Exercises of the Fraternity, the meetings, the School of Community. Yet, at some point, in meeting with some old friends, he saw that everything was starting to change again. He puts it this way: “An encounter awakened and revived the first encounter.” When, for whatever reason, a person has broken away from the first encounter, only an event like the initial one can put him back on track. An encounter awakened and revived the first encounter, and then this friend of ours began to live again. In *Something That Comes First*, Fr. Giussani writes that “running up against the presence of a different humanity comes before, not only at the beginning, but in every moment that follows the beginning—a year or twenty years later. The initial phenomenon—the impact with a different humanity, the wonder born of it—is destined to be *the initial and original phenomenon of every moment of development*; there is no development if that initial impact is not repeated, that is, if the event does not remain contemporaneous.” So, he continues, when a “discontinuity” with the beginning forms, when the beginning becomes for us a “pious recollection,” how do you bridge the discontinuity? “They need what happened to them in the beginning to happen again—not ‘how’ it happened in the beginning, but ‘what’ happened in the beginning; they need the impact with a different humanity that renews the same event that moved them originally.” (L. Giussani, “Qualcosa che viene prima,” in *Dalla Fede il Metodo* (“Something that comes first” in *From*

Faith, the Method), Coop. Edit. Nuovo Mondo, Milano, 1994, pp. 40, 42; see *Something That Comes First*, <https://english.clonline.org/traces/page-one/something-that-comes-first>.)

What we have said to ourselves today is crucial to faith. I was always struck by a phrase that Fr. Giussani uttered in Chieti in 1985: “We Christians in the modern climate have been detached not from Christian formulas directly, not from Christian rites [we can continue to participate formally as well] directly, not from the laws of the Ten Commandments [...]. We have been detached from the human foundation, from the religious sense. We have [therefore] a faith that is no longer religiosity. We have a faith that no longer responds as it should to religious sentiment [...] that is, a faith that is not conscious, a faith that is no longer intelligent about itself [which is precisely why it is so often pietistic and does not reach the details of life, according to the expression of Reinhold Niebuhr, “Nothing is so incredible as the answer to a question that is not asked”]. [...] Christ is the answer to the problem, to the thirst and to the hunger that man has for the truth, for happiness, for beauty and for love, for justice, for the ultimate meaning” (L. Giussani, *La coscienza religiosa nell'uomo moderno* [Religious awareness in modern man], in *Quaderni del Centro culturale Jacques Maritain*, Chieti 1986, *pro manuscripto*, p. 15). That is why having such a reawakened religious sense is the test of faith, as we have said at other times. We think of defending Christ by speaking about Him or about our companionship. But the most striking way to defend Christ is to see Him shine in a living humanity: in the radiance, in the brilliance of someone’s eyes. This will always be the verification of faith that will convince us and others.

That is why we continue our journey with the next chapters of *The Brilliance In Your Eyes*. The situation in which we find ourselves, defined by a void of meaning, by nothingness that continues to advance, can be answered only by something historical and carnal that is able to take hold of our humanity—often so damaged, so busy, so reduced—and give us back all of reality and our whole person, allowing us to look at all of our wounds without excluding anything from participation in that newness of which we spoke before.

So, after identifying the problem we all have in front of us—“How can this abyss of life be filled?”—we begin to see the journey we need to make so that the verification of faith becomes more and more ours, and therefore the place where we are constantly reawakened, encouraged to walk, to not go back, to the point that we can live all of reality as Jesus lived it. Jesus also lived reality with all of its limits; He did not live in the stratosphere, He lived His human life like us in a reality identical to ours—but how did He live reality without ending in nihilism? This is the path we must take because Christ came to pull us out of nihilism. Only if we learn to live reality in the way He looked at it and lived it will we be able to see how correspondent faith is to life.

The work of School of Community will continue throughout the summer on the text *The Brilliance in Your Eyes*, as follows:

- until mid-August we will work on chapters 3 and 4.
- after that, until Beginning Day we will work on chapters 5 and 6.

The book is attached to the July-August issue of *Tracce* and can also be purchased both as an ebook and in paper format [the next chapters in English will continue to be available on the CL website].

Because the work of School of Community is first and foremost personal, even if you can't meet as a group, you can still do the work by reading a few pages every day, talking about what you discover with your wife or husband or friends. Summer is not a break from life—if we don't want to get tired of summer too, we need School of Community to help us live it.

Rimini Meeting. “Devoid of Wonder We Remain Deaf to the Sublime.” The program of this special edition is available on the website and on the app of the Meeting. It will take place on August 18–23 at the Palacongressi in Rimini in a predominantly online mode. The objective limits imposed by the health emergency will not lessen the heart or change the nature of the Meeting, which with its heritage and history is proposed as a place of dialogue and sharing of existential questions that, especially this year, have emerged in a new way. Everyone can connect from home or on vacation, an act that will make participating more deliberate and less automatic.

Beginning July 31, it will be possible to book your participation in the meetings via website and app until all the spots are sold out, and you can also book a virtual tour of the exhibitions led by their curators. Live participation at the Rimini Palace will, pursuant to current regulations, be allowed to a very limited number of people.

We invite you to promote the Meeting by circulating the program and following the appointments during the week. Perhaps this can be an opportunity to expand the audience of the Meeting everywhere because no one can stop us from inviting friends with whom we are on vacation, even in the most remote mountain village or by the sea. Perhaps we can reach more “visitors” than in the past. This is a great opportunity to share with everyone what has happened to us.

The Meeting informs us that in some cities there will be gazebos or connection points to follow meetings and shows and share them with others.

Finally, according to the Meeting's website, it is still possible to register as a volunteer “ambassador.”

I remind you that Beginning Day will be held on the afternoon of Saturday, September 26th via video link for everyone. If the regulations allow it, you will be able to follow it together, but only in small groups. At the beginning of September we will communicate the details for the connection.

Good summer to everyone, dear friends!

Veni Sancte Spiritus.

Thank you, and good night!