

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
In video connection from Milan, October 21, 2020

Reference text: J. Carrón, *You Only See What You Admire*, Beginning Day of the Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation, and J. Carrón, *The Radiance In Your Eyes: What Saves Us From Nothingness?* HAB, 2010, chapter 5, “The Relationship With The Father,” pp. 101–21.

- *Le stoppie aride (The arid stubble)*
- *Be Thou My Vision*

Glory Be

Hello everyone! Let’s start our journey of School of Community taking place in video connection. In order to face the challenge of Covid-19 in a fully human way, nothing is more relevant than addressing the issue of how to increase our familiarity with the Father. “What way did the Father choose to introduce us to a deep and familiar relationship with Himself? He sent his Son, making Him a presence that we could perceive, so that through the Son made man by the work of the Holy Spirit, we might ‘see’ the relationship of intimacy to which we are called and the newness this brings to our way of looking at and treating all things. How did the man Christ enable those who heard and saw Him to become aware of belonging to the Father? Every gesture He offered, everything He said, every gaze of His was filled with, shaped by, and documented His awareness of the Father. ‘Christ, as a man, was totally determined by this consciousness, such that He could say, “The Father and I are one” (Jn 10:30)”’ (*The Radiance in Your the Eyes*, pp. 104–5, quoting Giussani, *La convenienza umana della fede*, 128–29.).

Yet, in order to live a relationship with reality as Jesus lived it, it is necessary to see it happen, and, as we know, we don’t always see this. That is why a very powerful question that came from Beginning Day is “Why don’t I see?”

At Beginning Day, in a passage from his interview when he was recounting what had happened to him, Mikel Azurmendi said, “This was always under my nose; why didn’t I look at it?” (You Only See What You Admire, p. 16). This made me wondered why I too don’t often see what happens to me in reality as something that comes from God, but instead quickly attribute it to “chance.” Reflecting on the examples given to us — the man born blind and Azurmendi — it is natural for me to think that both men were in a position of total openness, the first when he gained eyesight that he didn’t have before — and this is a huge evidence!, t The second when he was in the hospital, certain that he was going to die, and heard someone who awakened him completely and suddenly, so much so that when he spent time with him later on, he was able to find in his experience the answer to the question, “Is it possible to live this way?” Why doesn’t the same happen to me? As with Azurmendi, I realize that I too am full of layers of prejudices from living the experience of the movement in a formal way for many years that prevent me from having a genuine position in front of reality. That is, I “know” many things that don’t help me to face what happens with the openness and loyalty that are typical of those who are “hungry and thirsty,” of those who have a desire to find out what lies beyond appearance. So I ask you: How can we help ourselves get rid of all these

layers that don't help our human journey? You spoke of "looking" as an essential starting point for beginning this human journey. How can we get back to looking with simplicity, without prejudice? Thank you very much for the journey you are helping us make.

Thank you for this question, which Azurmendi also asked himself and which struck me so much: "Why didn't I look at it?" Many times, despite having lived the experience of the movement for years, we may not see, as you said, because we have sort of built up our defenses against newness; we have become accustomed to things developing a "crust" — a "scheme [...] in our minds," says Fr. Giussani in the first chapter of *The Religious Sense* (p. 4) — that is superimposed on our way of looking. But the surprising thing is that, whatever this crust, whatever this accumulation of prejudices is, if one is really struck by what the Mystery makes happen before his eyes, he sees all the layers of it pulled away.

I arrived at Beginning Day strangely calm. I say this because I am usually restless and full of questions, and so I was amazed and at the same time concerned about my state of mind. When I look at things calmly it usually means that I have created a sheet of ice around myself to avoid being affected by anything. In short, I was prey to the nihilism that we have been facing lately. I sat down and the title appeared on the screen: "You only see what you admire." Seeing this was the first nick in the ice. The phrase came like a bolt out of the blue and I was helpless, unable to shield myself. Although helpless, my curiosity was provoked, but I also had the vain hope that that flat calmness could continue because I didn't really want to face what my reawakened curiosity usually brings. Then you, Carrón, appeared on the screen and said, "God can do nothing without our willingness, without our openness." I was ready to run! For a few weeks I had been living without this openness: every time a sign appeared in front of me, something that provoked me to look and act, I took refuge in a thousand things to do and in many discourses that would have confused even the best minds. But the ice sheet was still thick, so I could go on. Then came the conversation with Azurmendi, who at one point said, "Emptying oneself means being ready to hear just about anything, and not say anything in response. You are there to receive something. If you don't empty yourself, you don't receive anything. [...] Emptying yourself means being open to being loved" (You Only See What You Admire, p. 24). That was like a full flame melting the ice cap. Yet, even being aware of the impact of this didn't make the wall collapse completely. At a certain point, quoting Fr. Giussani, you said, "'For the Lord works even through whispers. [...] Even in a whisper, [...] even just for a moment, man notices a kind of attraction, a suggestion; he has the intuition of something more beautiful, more correspondent, something better' [...] This is how the battle against nihilism is fought, by being open in that moment to perceiving and following that 'whisper.'" (ibid., pp. 33–34). I thawed and was disarmed! My life is constantly saved by that whisper, by those moments that pull you back from the hole that have dug for yourself and fallen into, that help you to keep walking. In this regard, I would like to ask you one thing: Why, despite these moments that save us from nothingness, do we insist on not looking at them or looking at them only long enough to recover? I am not shocked by my forgetfulness or by being continuously taken hold of again, but rather by the stubbornness with which we continue to flee despite always feeling the warmth of this great embrace that saves and frees us, every single day. Thank you for never getting tired of repeating these things and pulling us back.

As you have seen, one can come to Beginning Day in the state you have described: with a "sheet of ice" around herself, unavailable to being affected. Yet, what happened? As we heard throughout

Beginning Day, the Mystery didn't stop reaching out to you. First there was the title — “You Only See What You Admire” — to which you were not indifferent (the “first nick in the ice”). Second was my statement that “God can do nothing without our willingness, without our openness.” Third, we heard about emptying oneself, which means “being open to being loved.” And finally, the words, “The Lord works even through whispers.” All the layers of ice couldn't resist this continuous initiative of the Mystery toward you, up to the point of making you feel “thawed and disarmed.” So, we must not worry because in the end it is always a grace, it is always His initiative; when it happens, we must simply let ourselves thaw, let ourselves be disarmed. In fact, what our friend experienced, as she beautifully told us, was a dialogue that the Mystery had with her during Beginning Day. The Mystery continues to interact with each of us in the same way. But why — she asked at the end — do we insist on not looking at those moments that pull us out of nothingness and why don't we always credit them? Because we are free. God, in fact, doesn't want to impose Himself on us, He doesn't want to trample on our freedom, and therefore He runs a risk, He waits and gives us time, so that little by little we may surrender — freely — to the evidence that takes hold of us more and more. The point, as we saw, is that every time we experience something like what our friend described, the story doesn't end there. But how does this experience remain alive in everyday life?

At Beginning Day I immediately had a negative reaction to the title “You Only See What You Admire.” It annoyed me, because it seems to me that there is little to admire in the things I see around me at the present time. The new phase of the pandemic seems worse to me than the previous one; the lockdown was difficult before, but everything seemed more far away; now, instead, the people who are starting to get sick, even if not seriously, are people near me, in my neighborhood. Then there are my children who go to school and participate in distance learning (they spend one week in school and then one completely at home, online — it is very hard). Each of them bears his own hardship, and as their mother I feel like I have to shoulder all of the difficulties. The list is long. How do I get up in the morning and encourage my children to look at the day in a positive way when I myself don't completely look at it this way? Last week I met two dear friends from abroad; we saw each for lunch and talked to each other about how life was going. I recounted the things that have happened to me and, speaking about Beginning Day I said, “I don't see anything to admire in this period, only burdens,” and I asked, “What must I do to feel ‘admiration?’” One of my two friends said to me, “The question is not, What should I do? but rather, What do you admire?” and continued, “From the things you have told us, it is clear that you ‘admire’ at least four facts — think about it and tell me what they are!” Then I began to remember what I had just told them. The first thing I had recounted about that morning was that my husband, in order to help one of our daughters who was struggling to follow her online classes from home, had taken her to his office to let her participate in her classes from there, and afterwards they had lunch together and she returned home very happy. The second fact is this: I teach at the university, but very few students are coming in person to class. Most are connected from home or other places, but the faces of those few who have come to class have really struck me. When I was teaching a class, I thought of Azurmendi, who in the end is loyal to what reality puts in front of him and adheres to it. At that point, my friend said to me, “You are forgetting about two more facts!” Those friends were my special “tribe” (to use one of Azurmendi's terms): they helped me see something I couldn't see, they made me enjoy reality more. That's it — we need to help each other to look;

for me, this is the value of our friendship, and I am grateful to the Lord who introduces me to a relationship with Him through them (as the Father Himself sent the Son so we can meet Him). This is the same thing I see in the method and continuing work of the CLU diakonia, in which you help people see that “something more” in what is recounted. The challenge is to learn to see, to learn together from these small cracks that open in reality, to learn to live the real intensely without remaining at the appearance of things. Azurmendi, at one point in the interview, says, “There is only one explanation for that fact [the lives of the people he describes]. [...] Truth produces life. This lifestyle is produced by something: they say it is Jesus Christ. If I need that life, if it is an object of admiration for me, I have to look with admiration at the motor that animates this life” (You Only See What You Admire, p. 29). That is what I want for myself: to look at the motor that animated this life. I remembered that lunch every day afterwards, trying to recognize the gold in the mud during each day. Then, the priest who celebrated Mass on my birthday reminded me that my life exists and is given to me for a good, and that reality is a good.

Thank you. Do you see? This documents what we read in *Generating Traces in the History of the World*: “What intensity of life is promised to those who grasp, instant by instant, the relationship of everything with the origin! Each instant enjoys a definitive relationship with the Mystery, and so nothing is lost: this is what we exist for, and this is our happiness” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, p. 14). As you said, when we realize what we have before our eyes we begin to enjoy reality more, as you enjoyed it more when your friends opened your eyes to what you had told them in the first place, but which — as so often happens — you had not recognized. This is the value of our friendship: to help us to look. It isn’t about convincing each other of something that isn’t there; it is about introducing us to reality without staying, as you said, at the level of appearance. Only if you do this will you be able to help your children, your students, and those with whom the Mystery will put you in touch throughout the day.

Yet, sometimes these signs seem small when compared to the drama we are experiencing (coronavirus, job insecurity and economic crisis, world situation). Isn’t it too little to listen to a radio program or to see signs like the ones our friend told us about in order to face these challenges? What value do these little “shoots” have in the face of the huge dramas facing us? They seem like a small thing. For example, what value would we have given to the healing of the man born blind if we had lived in the context of the Roman Empire? It seems like nothing. In the face these challenges, these signs are often not able to affect us or offer an answer to the dramatic situations that present themselves. As a friend writes to me, “After a very busy day at work, I took my children to the park and met other mothers of the movement who had the same idea. A young woman I had never seen before arrived and one of my friends suggested, “Let me introduce her to you! I met her here at the park a few months ago. She always came with her children; we met by chance, but after a few weeks of seeing each other, we exchanged phone numbers. She started asking me why I knew so many mothers and children; she asked me a lot of questions about kindergarten and the fact that we all belonged to the CL movement; from there a great curiosity arose in her because she is a member of our parish and was very interested in meeting people who had faith and wanted to educate their children in a certain way.” I approached this woman and introduced myself. She is a fantastic person! We spoke about many things and the subject of school

came up; she had a desire to enroll her children in the school where we send ours and was willing to make financial sacrifices because her children's education is very important to her and her husband. I was very impressed; we said good-bye and exchanged phone numbers with a desire to see each other again. Other moms who are my friends were at the park that day, and I went to say hello to them before I went home. They were all very upset and concerned because another parent had spoken about Covid-19 and the catastrophic consequences that awaited us in the coming months. Instead, I was very happy because I realized that the young mother I had met had opened my eyes: the incredible thing was that she was not dominated by fear. She had started from the fact that she had glimpsed a different way of living from some of the mothers and, despite the need to make financial sacrifices, had decided to move her children to a private school in this historic time when Covid-19 might force another closure and the economic crisis is bringing us to our knees. But what did she understand? At Beginning Day you said, "Where can [...] any of us find some clue that enables us to recognize the victory of Being over nothingness? [...] [The man born blind's] choice was not ideological; he was not repeating the party line. His acknowledgement of the evidence that he could see brought him to recognize Him [Christ]. [...] When we are in front of something able to change life (as it changed the life of the man born blind), no comparison is possible" (*You Only See What You Admire*, pp. 8–9). For me, the meeting with that young mother was the grace of this evidence: when we are faced with something that can change our life, there is no comparison possible, this recognition wins out over everything."

Is it possible that facing this dramatic situation, we are giving too much value, we are overestimating the impact of these little signs (the man born blind, a radio program, a friend who helps me see, a young mother met at the park)? No, because all these facts, even if they are small, are the sign of that Presence of which Azurmendi spoke. There is only one explanation for what happened, and that is Christ. This can truly challenge any situation, even the one we and the whole world are now facing. So, I understand well that our friend who spoke earlier is grateful because the Mystery introduced her to a relationship with Him through two friends who had returned from abroad. Through these little facts, we enter into a relationship with Him. In fact, it is necessary that the Word has become flesh and dwells among us for those events to happen, such as the encounter with that mother in the park. These are not just occasional events that happen by chance, and inside this modality there is something that needs to be grasped, that we need to recognize.

Thirteen years ago I met a guy for my work who was in the military and we developed a friendship in the course of my visiting him in his town and my invitations for him to participate in this School of Community with you and to the Rimini Meeting in the summer, and so on. He was faithful to this friendship, but it seemed as if it never gave rise to stability and fruitfulness, becoming a point of encounter for others as well. Then, years ago, a family moved to that town for work. The husband and wife had met the movement as kids, but had long since abandoned it. After several years, the husband had rejoined the movement and after a while his wife had also come back. My military friend and this family got to know each other, and their relationship slowly but inexorably became a meeting point for the whole town. They started a School of Community that always involved an invitation to dinner for all those who wanted to join (Covid permitting), an invitation that was extended to the people in the town, including the mayor. They also undertook other initiatives like a dinner prompted by a presentation on the Meeting, Portofranco [a free afterschool tutoring initiative] for the kids of the town to which the teachers and a social circle that offered its premises

for free were invited; the Food Bank. Faced with all of that, I began to admire what I saw happening. First I saw, then I realized that I was seeing because I was admiring, and then I decided to follow and participate in what was happening. After more than forty years in the movement, I saw clearly what Beginning Day had made me aware of as the method: Azurmendi's description of his encounter is not only the start of everything else that follows, activities and works included, but rather it is the method of God; without this continuous amazement and admiration, I don't see what Christ is making happen in front of me, or better, I don't see Him happening. Thus, activities and works are not consequences or specific indications that follow afterwards, but as happened for the people I have been talking about, they are instead born from the same possibility of seeing, and involve a creativity that can't be taken for granted.

For years you went to see that friend and it seemed useless because no fruit came from it other than your friendship with him. Then suddenly, with the arrival of that couple, a friendship began to flourish and led to certain works. This is the process we talked about at Beginning Day: first one sees because he admires, and then he follows. This is the method, which doesn't affect only the beginning, as was true in different ways for those who have contributed this evening. Christ continues to be present in history by taking the initiative and documenting in our lives the method by which He makes Himself present — in this way, His relationship with us gradually becomes familiar — so as to bring us to the Father, as He did with the disciples. It is only by sharing life with Him that we live a relationship with the Mystery as the disciples lived it, and little by little a new humanity begins to flourish, which leads to works. In the case of the friends you have told us about, these works are not something that remains limited to them: they begin to propose the School of Community to others, to do Portofranco, to involve others, and so on. A newness begins to happen that affects the whole town. What happens goes from seeing because you admire to following, up to the works.

Yet many are wondering, how can we move forward now that we are facing new restrictions imposed by the pandemic? Also in this situation we move forward by following the method of God, a method that can become flesh in the most varied forms.

My period of lockdown, like everyone else's, was not easy, especially since my situation is rather complicated. One day I was on the phone with a dear friend telling her about the difficulties of that period, and she invited me to connect to School Community via Zoom without even explaining to me what it was. I agreed, but I connected without video or audio because I am shy and felt uncomfortable. I heard about the radiance in the eyes, the nihilism, the nothingness ... I didn't understand much. Something, however, intrigued me, so much so that as soon as the meeting was over, I began to wait for the next one with anticipation. The more I participated, the more I felt part of something, of a group. The last person to join always has the hardest time in groups, but from the first connection I felt welcomed, even though I didn't know anyone. One day I saw a meeting with Fr. Carrón on hope ["Where does hope come from?" Rimini Meeting special edition, August 20, 2020], and it opened my heart. How beautiful it was to hear about hope because without hope and without faith what can we cling to? I feel privileged, despite everything that has happened to me in my life. I feel loved, as if someone had placed a hand on my head to protect me. This happened after I met you on Zoom. Then I saw Azurmendi's video. Wow! What a fantastic guy! I saw a little of my story in him. He met the movement while listening to the radio; I met it on

Zoom. But the same thing happened to both of us: we were privileged. I feel more serene after listening to all of you, many things in my life are changing, including my relationship with my children. Sometimes I don't recognize myself! I am usually not like that. I have always been the crazy one, the wild one. Not now. In the past maybe I put on a mask, but now I am showing the real person.

Thank you. You just met the movement and — as you all can see — via Zoom.

Yes.

This helps all of us because there is nothing predictable about how the Mystery can reach us. Therefore, the only issue is that we be available, as you witnessed to us. Even though at first she knew only her friend, she immediately clung to that place from which the faith and hope she needs to live and face her life, which is not easy, powerfully emerged. The point is whether we are truly available to be surprised by the Mystery — we simply don't know the “how” in advance. The Gospel documents this in many ways: Jesus could be met by a person in a tree, by another near a well, by another on a road or in a temple or synagogue, by another at a wedding banquet. Any means or place or situation can be used by God to converse with us, to knock on our door. We hope that, like you, we can be so available to become more and more sons and daughters.

I would like to ask you for help on the concept of being sons and daughters. How does this awareness of being sons and daughters actually help us to maintain a Christian consciousness? In my life, the awareness that God is my father seems to me something that doesn't really affect my days and my way of looking at reality, and I would like to understand more what it means to feel like children.

We have already heard something this evening about how entering reality with this awareness begins to change us. Let's continue to listen to how others have discovered what it means to be sons and daughters.

Hi, I am going to read what I wrote to you after the September CLU equipe titled, “Were Not Our Hearts Burning While He Spoke to Us on the Way and Opened the Scriptures to Us?” “I wanted to share with you, full of gratitude, how the Saturday I spent with the CLU struck me. A small introduction: during my university years my father, in the face of a series of difficulties I was having, said to me, lost in thought, ‘We can rest our whole lives on Christ because Christ is real.’ A few days ago, in the face of the usual difficulties I have in my relationships, difficulties I have revisited a thousand times, I suddenly remembered those words and realized that I was not challenging Christ at that level. It is easy to talk about entering reality, living the real intensely, the carnality of Christ, and Christ's love for me, but not actually live any of that: we think about living it, but we don't actually live it. Yet, to really let Him in — not in the moralistic sense of saying “Jesus” before an action, but by verifying in reality if He (made flesh!) is victorious! — is the challenge I want to face. When I realized what I had lost along the way, the words of the CLU assembly came alive: I went back to following, returning to the place where life is more alive (it simply involved starting to work again on The Radiance in Your Eyes). When I connected to the equipe, what a breath of fresh air, what a presence in the flesh, what a life! As you said to us, there is no victory in us yet, but we see it in the other: people who are vibrant and alive, whom I look at totally taken and amazed at the intensity of life that I have lost along the way and that they witness to me. All is vanquished. In front of Him who happens, the heart is filled with an unimaginable

and unthinkable fullness. All doubts and limits are totally erased, in the sense that it becomes evident that nothing, not even my evil, is an objection to this relationship of love, within which life takes on an unimaginable and unthinkable intensity. The relationship with Christ, God who becomes flesh, takes place in a story so concrete that it is made of faces and history. I am deeply moved, and I realize that this emotion — which is not sentimental but deeply real — is like a beautiful and very fragile flower that risks, even at this moment as I am writing to you, being broken by the wind of forgetfulness. Yet I am not afraid — I know He will take hold of me again like He always does. However, I want to look as closely as possible at what happened and pray to the Lord who does everything that He sustain this availability that opened up today as a grateful response of my heart to Him who was taking hold of my whole self. It is a life beyond imagination.”

Do you see? Being sons and daughters, much more than a concept to be understood, is an experience that one must recognize because it bursts out within oneself. In participating in that meeting of the CLU, she saw this breath, this life, this fullness explode inside her — “life takes on an unimaginable and unthinkable intensity” — and this moved her deeply. This is the sonship that becomes experience in us. What is the origin of this experience? How can you participate in this sonship? Just as she did: the origin of this life, of being sons and daughters, is following. At one point she said, “I went back to following, returning to the place where life is more alive.” It is simple and it applies to each of us. As our new friend said earlier, she continued to connect via Zoom; as soon as she finished the first meeting, she was already looking forward to the next one. It is as if she became a daughter of that place because it generated her, just like you and I can experience. Why? Because this sonship is humanly worthwhile. Who has discovered that it is worthwhile for them?

Fifteen years ago, my mother died at the age of only 53, after a long illness. It was a very painful time: my life was turned upside down, all my plans and desires vanished into thin air. I found myself without a mother, with a house to manage and a father to take care of. Sure, I had many friends who kept me company, but none of them could fill my void. I have always been a believer and practiced my faith, but in the face of all that was happening to me and that I had a hard time accepting, I tried to find the solution to and the answer for everything. The result? I was dissatisfied, tired, and disheartened, and I kept asking myself: What does Christ want from me? Five years ago I decided to change jobs, and that’s when I met the CL movement. Out of curiosity, I began to participate in the gestures and meetings that the movement proposed to me. I even enjoyed just looking at some of these people, with eyes so radiant that I couldn’t forget them; in fact, it was through those eyes that day after day I found the renewed strength and courage to face my various difficulties. I began to experience how Christ was taking hold of me again, to experience His presence in the flesh through a companionship that I did not choose. Even if I have been in the movement for more than four years, only now have I decided to join the Fraternity. I don’t like to do things mechanically; I have had the desire to join a number of times, but I was also a little scared, and I wanted my yes to be mature, free. Nothing happens by chance, and in fact it was during the lockdown that I verified how important this companionship is for my life; although physically distant, by simply remembering what I had met, the faces and the conversations I had, at the end of the day I was happy. Only through a companionship that brings you back to Christ can you live this way. Surely, I will fall many times, but I am sure that I can get

up again only by remaining attached to this place and this companionship where Christ makes Himself present to me.

It is easy. Whatever happens, we can only face it by staying attached to this place. The fact that before enrolling in the Fraternity you gave yourself time for a verification, as you told us, shows the seriousness with which you have traveled this path, adhering with full awareness and freedom; you have experienced that by participating in such a place life acquires a taste you hadn't found before, so much so that you were dissatisfied, tired, and disheartened. Finding radiant eyes gives you an energy that you had never had before. This is the way, which you have recognized, through which Christ took hold of you and is taking hold of you now. But being a son or a daughter is a decision that one has to make.

For me, it has always been a drama to live in the present time, watching it flow, empty and meaningless, having the impression that I am a spectator. Since I look for meaning with my whole self, I try to fill my time with meaningful things. This summer was like that: I followed my passions and desires and did many beautiful things that definitely enriched me. Yet, there was one fact that tormented me all summer: a young woman from the Memores Domini house where I live had surgery, nothing serious, but it posed a question to all of us in the house. I lived it with difficulty, like a burden, even though little was asked of me. Why? Because it was summer, I had a lot of projects that filled me with great expectation. I realized that in fact what I have been and continue to be afraid of is not having life. It seems too risky to live suspended in the moment, waiting to receive life from the One who in fact, surprising me, can give it to me. Giving life to myself by carrying out my projects often seems safer, more concrete. I have experienced what it is like to live leaning on that Presence, which makes me free and makes my heart burn with desire wherever I am. My heart knows when it is living as if it suffices unto itself and becomes restless, crying out with an irrepressible cry. One thing that is helping me to understand myself, and at the same time is provoking me as never before, is the point about conversion at p. 91 of The Radiance in Your Eyes: "Not expression of self, but conversion of self." I have always thought, in good faith, that the phrase, "The glory of God is man fully alive," meant precisely that the glory of God is the expression of myself, of my becoming more and more myself, with all my interests and passions. Yet if that is true, why then all that sadness whenever I escape from my bond with my companions I live with? I realized that if I am not serious with faith; that is, with that Presence that has to do with my life, and with the faces that make it alive and cumbersome for me every day, I have nothing to say, I have no consistency, nothing I do has consistency. What an incredible thrill to find myself in front of this evidence(!) because my freedom is called into play in an increasingly dramatic way, and yet very often I only address the problem of feeling alive by affirming myself in some way, rather than deciding for, choosing, the One who really makes me alive. Often this decision of mine coincides with facing reality, and when by grace reality happens, then I really feel free and happy, much more than before, because I am waiting with certainty for Another, and not for myself, from whom I can't expect anything very new. What gratitude for having met the movement because for me — the way I am in our present time — there is a path! And what gratitude for having this ever-increasing desire to walk this road without measuring myself, but only happy that it exists because I see myself changing and believe that for me the best is yet to come. I thank you with a heart full of gratitude for your friendship.

“It seems too risky to live suspended in the moment, waiting to receive life from the One who, in fact, surprising me, can give it to me.” That is why we often seek our satisfaction in something more secure, at hand; that is, in the expression of ourselves. How different it is when, without denying anything, we experience that Presence that fills us a hundred times more: “What an incredible thrill to find myself in front of this evidence!” This made you realize how much being a daughter implies your freedom: “My freedom is called into play” because only in this way can God enter your life. God doesn’t want to impose Himself in spite of our wishes; rather, He wants to tiptoe into our lives. It is so crucial for you to let Him in because you have realized that deciding for the One who makes you alive is the road that you want to take. Fr. Giussani said in the passage we read at Beginning Day, “I’m unable to find an index of hope other than the multiplication of these people who are presences. The multiplication of these people, and an inevitable fondness [...] among these people” (*You Only See What You Admire*, p. 34). Once again, to us this often seems too little, and yet it is always the method of God, who challenges us in order to accompany us, as we have seen this summer.

I want to tell you about the experience I am having while reading Azurmendi’s book L’Abbraccio (The embrace). Since I was young, I have always devoured books. For the first time, in reading this book I can only consider a few lines at a time because it powerfully places before me all the greatness and beauty that I met 36 years ago and that I have in front of me now. I need time to look, to savor, to become acquainted again with this “strange companionship” that I thought I knew. What transfixes me as I read about it is how the Mystery is now giving me back the gift of what happened to me, making explode in my heart an unexpected desire to know and communicate (only now do I realize how these two things are united!) what happened to me and to which I gave my life. Let me give you just one example, on charitable work. For some time now I have been wanting to start it again. Reading the part about Bocatas (the charitable work of our Spanish friends, of which Azurmendi speaks), this desire exploded within me moving me deeply and setting me in motion, to the point that I planned with some neighbors to offer help — during the continuing Covid emergency — to the many elderly people who live in my large apartment building. I don’t know whether or how it will be feasible, but I have realized that this desire is unstoppable. It really shifted my gaze from myself (from how to face my the uncertainty of my job, my faltering health, everything I am not capable of) to the need I have to communicate to everyone the beauty I have met (as Xiao Ping witnessed to in Traces) and that this book is making me admire the unexpected details, so much so that I am finding again the beauty that I met in a completely new and contemporary way. It all started during the Meeting, after the testimony in Mikel’s video, so imagine my surprise when it was repropounded on Beginning Day: you helped me to understand a little more the origin, the method, and the path that this admiration is asking of me (as was asked of the man born blind), and also how the fight against nihilism, which is always lurking to the point of preventing me from seeing, is played out in me. Thank you, Julián, for not tiring of supporting my yes to Christ, having all my destiny at heart!

This is the grace that the Mystery gives to us by giving us friends like Mikel, who we all have before our eyes, just as others had the man born blind before their eyes. We have many of these people among us who are presences. The multiplication of these presences — said Fr. Giussani — is a sign of hope because this has always been the method of God.

I would like to conclude our School of Community by rereading some passages from the Gospel of John, in which we can see that the works of Christ — we have heard about many of them this evening — are not just small facts for people more or less naive or devout, but rather are a testimony to the presence of the Mystery, of the Father. Jesus says, “If I testify on my own behalf, my testimony cannot be verified. But there is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that the testimony he gives on my behalf is true.” What is the testimony that God the Father gives through Jesus? “The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.” (Jn 5:31–32, 36). Those facts, however small (for example, for those who lived with Jesus, the man born blind; for us, the facts recounted tonight), are the documentation of the testimony that the Father gives through the work of Jesus in our midst, by the work of the Holy Spirit. “The works that the Father gave me to accomplish, these works that I perform testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.” This is what increases the trust we need to deal with the distressing situation in which we are living. We are not only in front of certain facts, we are in front of a Presence that is documented through these facts and that we can touch firsthand. These facts make us more and more aware that it is Christ who testifies to the presence of the Father through them, and thus makes the Father familiar to us. “The man Jesus of Nazareth” said Fr. Giussani in a phrase that has always struck me, “invested by the mystery of the Word and therefore assumed into the very nature of God (but his appearance was completely identical to that of all men), they didn’t see this man do one single action whose form didn’t show His awareness of the Father” (*The Radiance in Your Eyes*, p. 109).

Many of the things we heard this evening in the various witnesses document that they wouldn’t have happened, and we wouldn’t have been able to intercept them, if not for the fact that precisely in the form in which they happened they demonstrate in those who lived them the awareness, albeit just beginning, of the Father. Insisting on what characterized the self-awareness of the man Jesus, Fr. Giussani introduces us to the mystery of these signs. Jesus was aware that all his value depended on his relationship with the Father and that outside of this relationship nothing would have lasted or had consistency. I think we don’t have anything more interesting to hear than what we heard this evening, most especially in the time in which we are living.

School of Community. The next School of Community will be held via video connection on Wednesday, November 18, at 9:00 pm. As we have already announced, we will be working on the text of Beginning Day and on the sixth chapter of the book *The Radiance in Your Eyes*. This chapter is particularly crucial for us because we are invited, as we have already begun to see this evening, to become aware of the charism we have encountered and of how crucial this is for the experience of being “children in the Son” to become a daily, carnal, historical experience for each of us. At Beginning Day, quoting Fr. Giussani, we said, “The extreme modality with which you can be struck by Christ’s continued presence in history is that according to which the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, causes us to encounter someone, and by following this person faith becomes more easily clear, and affection for the faith more easily intense, and the desire to spread the kingdom of Christ [to communicate it] more aware and more easily creative. This is called *charism*: it is *the event of the charism*” (*You Only See What You Admire*, p. 37). Without it, none of us would have been here this evening.

But how is the event of the charism documented today, for each of us, in the particular situation in which we must live? We have this month to intercept this as it happens.

Pandemic and community life. We are all seeing the spread of the Covid infection in Europe and around the world, and we need to follow the rules that are gradually returning to determine our daily lives. Therefore — as we have always said in recent months — I urge everyone first of all to scrupulously observe the rules issued by the authorities without exception, with an attitude of great caution and attention. Many times the temptation to think that we are above these rules, or to act superficially, hides an unexpressed judgment: “If certain ways of doing things are missing, then it is no longer possible to fully experience the movement or, at best, we live, but a little less.” Yet, as we heard this evening, life doesn’t fade away; in fact, the Mystery may surprise us, giving us life in a way that is absolutely unpredictable. Therefore, let’s not impose any measure on His creativity in reaching us, something we continue to see. As we said at Beginning Day, we need to challenge and help each other on this point. We told each other that respecting the rules cannot be an objection for a life that is vibrant and alive, but rather a great opportunity to express in new ways the creativity and originality that comes from the experience we live. With regard to our gestures, we asked, if a gesture is something that has the ability to touch me and change me, what can allow this change to take place? What can move the core of our “I”? Is just a physical presence, by itself, able to do that? I leave you with these questions so that everyone can test the method of experience to answer in a truly human way. In fact, the Mystery constantly exceeds all of our measures.

Traces. *Chi ha un Amico Regala un Tesoro (He Who Finds a Friend Gifts Him a Treasure).* This is the title of *Traces*’ new subscription campaign. *Traces* is a very simple way to witness to and communicate the treasure, the grace that has happened to us. After having experienced in recent months how worthwhile this treasure has been and is for us, we now want to offer to as many people as possible the opportunity to know *Traces*. That is why we have launched a special initiative to increase the magazine’s circulation, offering all current subscribers the opportunity to give a new subscription to a friend at the special price of only 15 Euros.

The movement proposes that everyone support two gestures in the coming months. First of all, the National Food Collection Day, which will be held on Saturday, November 28. Given the situation, the proposal that the Food Bank makes this year will necessarily be different from the one to which we are all accustomed — as you can see, you need creativity to continue carrying out these gestures. It will not be proposed as in the past that you should “double your shopping list,” but rather that you should buy gift cards at the supermarket checkout that can then be used to buy food items that the Food Bank will distribute. On the website www.bancoalimentare.it, you will find all the information needed to get involved. Everyone can become involved firsthand — creatively, and in compliance with what the regulations allow — in so many small gestures that increase people’s awareness of what the Food Bank is and of its origin. You will be able to tell people about it, explain this year’s proposal, and involve neighbors, schoolmates, co-workers, etc. The needs are evermore pressing.

The second gesture is the AVSI Tents Campaign, which this year will be entitled: *Allarga lo sguardo. La speranza accanto a chi ha bisogno* (*Broaden Your Vision — Hope Near Those in Need*). It will support projects in Burundi, Lebanon, Mexico, Cameroon, Syria, and Italy (with respect to the latter, in order to help 3,400 Italian families experiencing difficulty due to the Covid emergency). Those who want to organize events in support of the Tents Campaign should contact AVSI to verify whether the event you wish to plan meets all the requirements of current laws and regulations. To ask for information about this, you can write to retesostenitori@avsi.org, or call +39 3493093100. Despite the limitations on this year's campaign, I invite everyone to get involved, in suitable ways after consulting with AVSI, so that even in this year the Tents may continue to be a great opportunity of encounter for everyone.

The Food Collection and the AVSI Tents Campaign are two simple gestures that can help us to become more aware of the scope of the encounter we have had — and of the need we, not only others, personally have for these gestures to educate us in charity — for us and for the whole world. Only the surprise of this discovery can push us to get involved with our whole selves and to involve people around us, so that from the radiance in our eyes, a desire for truth and the glow of true hope may be reawakened in everyone.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Good evening everyone!