

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
via video connection from Milan, November 18, 2020**

Reference text: J. Carrón, *You Only See What You Admire*, Beginning Day of the Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation, Sept. 26, 2020, and J. Carrón, *The Radiance In Your Eyes: What Saves Us From Nothingness?* HAB, 2020, chap. 6, “Children in the Son,” pp. 123–49.

- *L’iniziativa [The initiative]*
- *Como llora una estrella [How a star cries]*

Glory Be

Good evening everyone. Jesus, we have said, had a true relationship with reality because He was defined by his awareness of the Father. Jesus was able to introduce the disciples to this relationship to reality that He lived. What about us today? How are we introduced to a relationship with the Father?

Chapter 6 of The Radiance in Your Eyes addresses a crucial question: “Who teaches us about it today? Christ is always the one who introduces us to the relationship with the Father. How does He do this?” (p. 123). The text states that Christ breaks into my life by drawing me to Himself through a precise flesh, a presence through which I can have the same experience of relationship with Him as the first people who encountered Him. Then comes the question of faith, baptism, the Holy Spirit, through which we become children in the Son, then the hierarchical and charismatic gifts. I was raised in a Catholic family, I got married in the church, I am the mother of four children who have received all of the sacraments, I am a teacher and a catechist, I have been part of the movement since I was a young girl — we can say that everything is in order, I lack nothing—and yet I lack everything. In fact, although I want to live only for Christ, that remains just words; He doesn’t break in, He doesn’t attract me to Himself. It is a bit like for the woman whose witness is reported a little later in chapter 6. She was already immersed in the Christian life, but something had to happen at a certain point, something unforeseen, an event, to make her perceive the presence of Jesus, to make her experience the living Christ. That brought up the question: What did that unexpected event add to that woman’s life? The unexpected event is clear and the encounter with people or moments in people’s lives also happened to me in my life; but what ensures that, in the face of something unforeseen, an event, I have the right disposition of the heart to recognize Christ? And what is this right disposition of the heart? I think that I have it. So, it is a grace that it happens and then happens again, and yet, even if it happens again that isn’t enough—it takes a disposition of the heart that recognizes and receives Him in order to feel that Jesus is alive. So, what is the problem? Is it the way I am made? Does it have to do with my own affective psychological disposition? With my circumstances? We have always said no to all that! We have always said that Christ can happen in whatever condition we find ourselves! This time of the pandemic has brought us so many witnesses of how Christ can happen again even in such a

dramatic circumstance! So, it seems to me that it is just a grace, a gift, that there is no strategy, and that all that is left to us is to keep asking that He happen again and wait.

Thank you for sharing with us your story of belonging from when you were a young girl, and your inner turmoil. Each of us, if we are minimally aware of ourselves, can recognize himself in your description: “I lack nothing, and yet I lack everything.” For us, many times, Christ’s response is understood to mean that we no longer lack anything. “Although I want to live only for Christ, that remains just words; He doesn’t break in, He doesn’t attract me to Himself,” you said. But are you sure that if Christ didn’t constantly break into your life and continue to draw you to Himself, you would be able to feel that you lack everything despite having everything? How could you wish to live only for Christ if He hadn’t reached you and didn’t continue to reach you? What if the opposite was true? That is, precisely because you lack nothing, you lack everything. It is through this boundless desire of yours that Christ is calling you to Himself, not from outside yourself, but from within, as if He was saying to you, “Friend, don’t you miss Me?” I have always been struck by these words of Fr. Giussani, which I have repeated thousands of times, because they address that need that you described, and help me to look at the sense of lack in the that way,: as if God were telling you, “I am the Mystery you are missing in everything you enjoy” (L. Giussani, *Avvenimento di libertà [The event of freedom]*, Marietti 1820, Genova, 2002, p. 149). Then I found a phrase in the father of the church St. Gregory of Nyssa, which echoes these words: “The soul is struck and wounded by the despair of never getting what it wants. But this veil of sadness is removed when the soul learns that the true possession of the one she loves lies in never ceasing to desire Him” (quoted in L. Giussani, *Un Avvenimento nella Vita dell’Uomo [An event in man’s life]*, BUR, Milan, 2020, p. 216). This is what you need to learn—otherwise you couldn’t get up in the morning with a desire to go and look for Him. Don’t stop—ever!—desiring Him: the event of the relationship between man and Christ is the source of a continuous and incessant desire. It is the encounter that reawakens this desire and that constantly awakens the capacity to desire Him, always. That this happens is always a grace, and we can only ask and wait to be surprised by the Lord as He happens.

My husband and I have been impacted by Covid-19 (thankfully not seriously) for a couple of weeks: he became ill and I, as a close contact, am in quarantine even if I am well. The discomfort, increased by various setbacks and issues with the public health service regarding our case, the anxiety, the sorrow for having had to interrupt (or significantly change) our work activities, the difficulties in communicating with the outside world (but also the gratitude for not having run into more serious problems), our closeness to relatives and friends—in short, all of the experiences of these days have generated in me a strong desire for change, have rekindled a desire for a truer life more focused on the essential, more meaningful also in witnessing Christ present. This need and this desire are strong within me, but—let’s say—I don’t know how to live them: I don’t want to fall into the moralism of “I will do,” “I will be,” “I will succeed,” in which everything depends on my effort to change and the consistency of my “I,” which, in any case, is a bit down and fragile. What do you think? Where should I look? If it is true that a crack is enough to let the light in, what do you think is being asked of me at this time? I don’t want to waste another opportunity in my life. Thanks for everything.

Thank you. Everyone can be determined by the discomfort, the anxiety, and the sorrow of having to stop working—as you said—or they can be overwhelmed by a gratitude that awakens a desire to change, the desire for a truer life. That’s how we continue to be reawakened, friends. It can pass through the coronavirus, through any circumstance that awakens in us a desire for something more, because even our good health is not enough. What is needed is attention. You asked, “Where should I look?” Let’s see if this evening, you can by looking learn something about the method by which He introduces us to the answer.

I will tell you about two episodes that happened one after the other and whose historical significance has been shown to be inversely proportional to the impact they had on my daily life. First of all, after months of great difficulty at work, during which the need to change became evident, came the work offer “of a lifetime,” the only one for which I would have left my current job because it fits with both my professional aspirations and my need to address family issues. However, apart from a brief initial enthusiasm, the news did not actually change my daily life, leaving me trapped in all my ridiculous attempts to be happy. I began the quarantine in this mood, and after three days in which I tried to organize our days by proposing entertaining activities to my children, I was exhausted and upset. On the fourth day, I realized that my children’s requests were irritating me and I could no longer look them in the face. After a couple of days, when the best proposal was watching cartoons and having video calls with the grandparents, as my tiredness and frustration grew, at one point my daughter said to me, “Mom, how nice it is to be with you!” Her words, so simple but at the same time so clear, immediately reminded me of the method: all I have to do is to be open to welcoming Christ, who comes back into my life and turns it around through the words of a three-year-old girl. Comparing these two events struck me very much because they put me back in front of the fact that I live waiting for happiness to come through a change of circumstances, while Christ comes to get me out of my hole in every situation, even in the most tedious moment of the day.

That is where we have to look: at how and where this happens. “I live waiting for happiness to come through a change of circumstances, while Christ comes to get me out of my hole in every situation,” even through the youngest of the family: “Mom, how nice it is to be with you!” So what is the method? You said it: “All I have to do is be open to welcome Christ” in the way He reaches out to us and surprises us. But sometimes that doesn’t seem to be enough. And then a temptation arises.

I tried to answer the question you asked at the end of the SoC last month: “How is the event of the charism documented today, for each of us, in the particular situation in which we must live?” If I think of our charism, I think of Fr. Giussani, who communicated to me a way of life completely unknown to my experience. I am sure that over time this has not simply survived in me, but it has shifted my path, the direction of my life for over 40 years. Lately, the question that comes back to me is, “What would my life have been and what would it be like now if I hadn’t met particular people and particular faces?” It is easy for me to answer that I would be living my life like the majority of people and that I would be defined only by the common mentality, involving a certain way of judging, thinking about, and looking at things. At least in this sense, I can say that my life has followed a different path or, better, within the reality I share with everyone, I was given another way of thinking, judging, and looking. I have never left this path—I didn’t look for

anything better and above all I didn't find one. Yet I feel that over time the experience of the beginning can wane, desire may become less alive, and the faces around me might affect me less, which appears to mean that it is up to me to reawaken the promising beginning that my encounter with the charism aroused. So I wonder, if it all started with a gift brought by people, by specific faces—something I didn't will—how does this beginning persist, and what is my part in keeping it alive? I ask you this because sometimes it seems to me that the newness and enthusiasm of the beginning depend on my effort.

As the beginning wanes, we are tempted to change the method. You described it very effectively: “If it all started with a gift brought by people, with specific faces—something I didn't will—how does this beginning persist, and what is my part in keeping it alive? [...] Because [...] it seems that the newness and enthusiasm of the beginning depend on my effort.” Let's return to the point from which the Christian event liberated us with its reversal of method: “No longer is the focal point the striving of the intelligence, the drive of the will to construct, the stretching of the imagination, the weaving of a complex moralism. Rather, it is simple recognition.” (L. Giussani, *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998, p. 31). Instead of this, we succumb to the temptation to move away from God's method, moving from a willingness to accept the gift to the illusion that the newness and enthusiasm of the beginning depend on our effort. This is our dilemma. How can we get out of it?

On page 138 of the sixth chapter of The Radiance in Your Eyes, you say that “authority [...] is an indispensable factor for the growth of the ‘I,’” and, quoting Giussani, that “in a certain sense, authority is my truest ‘I.’” From these words, I understand that the words “authority” and “following” (which on the journey I have made in the last few Beginning Days and during many years in the movement, I have always looked at with attention and, I think, openness) are returned to me increased a thousandfold and are fundamental for me. I would like to understand more, to be even more aware of their importance for my happiness and fulfillment, in order to know who I am! It seems to me that they change the starting point with which I begin my day. Thank you very much.

Perfect! Because of your journey in recent Beginning Days and during many years in the movement, you have always looked with attention and openness at the words “authority” and “following.” But now you want to understand better, you want to have an even clearer awareness of their importance for your happiness and for your fulfillment. It is in “authority,” according to Fr. Giussani, that we can find help: “Authority is the place where the battle to affirm and the verification to confirm that Christ's proposal is true, meaning that it is a response to the perception, to the needs of one's heart, is clearer and simpler, it is more peaceful” (L. Giussani, in “Who is This Man?” *Traces*, n. 10/2019, p. 10. <https://english.clonline.org/traces/page-one/who-is-this-man>). Yet, we must understand it from within our experience: only by meeting an authority does the meaning of this word become evident, a meaning that is given back to us, as you say, increased a thousandfold. Who has discovered the importance and value of authority in their experience?

Working with my School of Community group on chapter 6 brought up the difficulty of dealing with the sections on authority and obedience. As long as we talk about real life, about friendship, everything is okay, but when we get into these two terms, which immediately make you balk just thinking about them, that's another story—they are something unfamiliar that make you a little

*uncomfortable. That is to say, since I have the typical experience of having hard time grasping these two words, because they seem to me abstract and schematic categories that likely have little to do with everyday life, I can do without them, and I gladly skip over them, I just give them a cursory glance. How is it possible that, after going through the whole compelling narrative of The Radiance in Your Eyes, the solution to the question of what saves us from nothingness consists of authority and obedience? It seemed a little unrewarding, almost a given, reductive. So I asked my friends, “Do these three paragraphs really have anything to do with life? For what reason did Fr. Carrón put them here?” The shift in my perspective came last Sunday through something that was seemingly trivial: a hike in the mountains with some friends (before the beginning of the “orange area” Covid restrictions). The hike had been described as easy by our friend who was driving. Instead, it proved to be a tiring and challenging hike for those who are not used to the mountains. Everything bothered me, but we finally arrived. Taking in the amazing view was something out of this world, and I said gratefully, “Thank you, it is incredibly beautiful!” In light of the School of Community, that was no longer a trivial event for me. I had understood through experience the meaning of the passage on page 138 about obedience: “In a certain sense, authority is my truest ‘I.’” But today it frequently happens that an authority is perceived as “something external, that is ‘added on’ to the individual.” (p. 138) Following, within our companionship of friends, something that to me seemed inadequate made me discover something that was much more adequate to me than my thoughts and reasoning. It is true that the antithesis “between a search for your own satisfaction” and “a search for your own conversion” (p. 140) is constantly present as a temptation. I had already experienced this tension days before when I asked Fernando de Haro—during the presentation of the book *L’Abbraccio* [The embrace] organized by our cultural center—whether anything had changed in him who, through his broadcasts, had been the means of Azurmendi’s transformation. He had answered me that this had only led him “to a serious correction of my knowledge of who we are and to reject possession as a way to affirm oneself.” After my initial reaction to these words, I had moved on, “closing the file.” He corrected me, but just for a moment. It took that hike to “reopen” the file. So, I ask you: I have experienced that there is no “once and for all”; this concept doesn’t hold up and everything collapses again. How is it possible to continue? Is it really enough, as you say, to look carefully?*

Do you see? First of all, you need to realize that no one would have changed your mind about the importance of authority if you hadn’t taken that hike: it is from within your experience—not by sitting in an armchair thinking about it, but through a trip to the mountains—that you discovered the value of a person who guides you. So, we discover the true value of authority only along the way. Then one returns to the question of how it is possible to persist. Just by looking carefully? I address the question to Fr. Pino because of the contribution he gave at the Diaconia of the Fraternity last Saturday, referring to Beginning Day. Fr. Pino, what did Beginning Day and Azurmendi’s witness bring to your life?

I will answer your question with three observations. The first is the surprise and gratitude I felt when you pointed out a fact, a person, Mikel Azurmendi in fact, who was happening in your life and in ours. I continue to feel this as a newness, as an example for me and for everyone of what responsibility means: it is the witness of following like this—you first—what happens again, and of indicating it to everyone as an authority. Second observation: the provocation — which I would define as a method—that the Beginning Day represents in such a difficult and uncertain situation

continues to vibrate in my life. I quote a phrase by Fr. Giussani that you quoted in The Radiance of Your Eyes, “Having a father [fatherhood] is a permanent attitude,” but “generation [...] is something in the present” (pp. 132–33). I notice that sometimes, both in the church and among us, and I say it also about myself, it is as if the preoccupation—almost exclusive although legitimate and derived from duty—about the structure, about the stability of or changes to the structure, have prevailed. The risk, then, is to reason by category, reducing the charism to an abstract universal entity already known to me, and to which I mechanically refer both small or large events. I wonder, whether the charism has become an abstract universal entity or whether it is a particular history that, in the history of the church and of the world, continues to happen and thus opens us up to totality?” Azurmendi asked, “Why should you look to the universal?” (You Only See What You Admire, p. 17) and observed, “The universal is a fabrication. You cannot find a universal anywhere” (ibid.). Third observation: I believe that the nature of the charism is continually deepening. We are moving forward, we are walking according to the dynamics of looking, recognizing, and supporting a generation that is happening for each of us through the occurrence of many events in which the experience of authority is truly born from an encounter with people, with moments in people’s lives, people in whom we see the victory of Christ. I believe both Azurmendi’s contribution and how you first pointed it out are very valuable, and also how you brought it up again in describing the method. I say it by referring to an expression of Azurmendi himself, who summarizes his journey in these years by noting that “I wanted to identify the causal and temporal links for my wonder” (ibid.). At first glance, it seems strange to associate such a rational, technical expression—“causal and temporal links”—with the word “wonder,” but I find it brilliant because it describes the experience of generation in action, acting through facts and people, of which, not coincidentally, he makes a specific list: the first fact is called Fernando, then came Javier, and then Macario, and then... and then... I think that this dynamic in progress not only testifies to the grace of the living, present charism, but also indicates to us the great question of method, which you insistently continue to remind to us: recognizing that the event remains because it continues to happen. This seems to me the greatest help for us in avoiding getting stuck, fossilized over definitions, worrying too much about the structure as opposed to that flow of life in which, despite such difficult circumstances, we are all participating together in our guided companionship. I thank you for everything.

Thank you. What you just said helps us understand something that Fr. Giussani says; namely, that the first task of authority is to identify other authorities. How did I identify Azurmendi’s authority? Because of the sudden experience of correspondence I recognized within myself when I watched the video the first time. It was from there, as I said at Beginning Day, that I wanted to follow that sudden sense of correspondence by proposing the video to everyone. This is liberating because I don’t have to generate the event; we don’t have to generate it with our effort, we just have to recognize it when it happens. And the task of those who are authorities is to point it out, following firsthand the person one is referring to. This is the method of the charism, and it is up to us to recognize this. Listen to what Fr. Giussani says, “The initial phenomenon—[that is] 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” (L. Giussani, “Something That Comes First,” *Traces*, no. 10/2008, p. 2), if it isn’t a continuing occurrence. God takes care of

making it happen again, as we are seeing now. It is up to us to follow it. It is in the face of that happening again that our willingness to follow the charism is revealed.

Yet sometimes, again, it seems that this flow of life is not sufficiently effective because it doesn't happen according to our timing—that is, immediately! The real challenge for us, then, is to wait and respect the times of Another. How have we personally experienced the value of this waiting?

Looking at the stories and lives of so many families like mine, what prevails is the wound. The wound of those who cannot have children, the wound of our adopted children, the wound of the families that live their adopted children's growing up in great rebellion and wrong choices. In all this immense pain and sorrow, there is a beacon of light: our companionship within the movement and in particular within the work of the Famiglie per l'Accoglienza [families for hospitality]. Through this "particular" experience we meet many people, even people not of the movement, who first of all feel welcomed and understood, not judged. Our grown-up children are a witness to that. In a recent conversation, my son, who recently became a father, told me, "My rebellion, my anger with myself and with the world, which led to negative consequences, started mainly from fear! Fear of what? Fear of being abandoned! But then I realized that looking only at my past and at my bad experiences didn't allow me to be happy, so I started a journey. I began to look at my present, at you two who are always present, who didn't hold me too close to you, but left me free to make mistakes and also told me, "Now it is good for you to take responsibility." Well, that allowed me to look at myself and think about my future too! Then I met the woman who is now the mother of my son, but I wouldn't have been able to recognize her as a good if I hadn't started this journey."

Your witness documents that "generation is a present act," as Fr. Pino reminded us. "You two who are always present," your son said, even when you thought that your presence was not effective enough to prevent him from making mistakes. Yet, it is your seemingly useless—judging by the rebellion, anger, and mistakes he made for years—"present presence" as parents that allowed your son to free himself from looking only at his past and at his bad experiences, which didn't allow him to be happy. This connection, a bit strange for us, between knowledge and happiness, is amazing. For us, knowledge is an abstraction that has nothing to do with happiness. There is a suffocating way of looking at things that focuses only on one aspect of life and therefore prevents you from really knowing. Only when knowledge is no longer determined by one's own analyses of the past and of one's wrongdoing ("starting from certain principles or criteria which we then apply," as the School of Community says), but by an event—the ever-present presence of the parents—was the son able to free himself from the cage of his past and able to think about the future. Then he met the woman who is the mother of his son, "but I wouldn't have been able to recognize her as a good" if it weren't for the presence of you parents. How many years did he have to wait to be able to recognize this, when he thought it couldn't happen! But above all, what struck me when I listened to you speak was seeing what was blocking your son's gaze: "My rebellion, my anger with myself and with the world [...] started mainly from fear! Fear of what? Of being abandoned." It is moving to discover that our "interlocutor"—in our dialogue with our children and with everyone else—is this fear of being abandoned. This fear is also ours, and is the fear of nothingness, the fear that, ultimately, nothing is worthwhile. That is the real question. Let's be careful not to confuse the symptoms (rebellion, anger, violence) with their origin; that is, with the fear of being abandoned. This fear was overcome only with time thanks to the present presence of

the parents (while they were thinking that it wasn't effective). How you parents must have challenged this fear with your own presence, even to the point of allowing your son to reach the certainty that he will not be abandoned! What certainty you must have communicated to him so that he reached that certainty, a certainty that we don't produce on our own because no one generates unless he is generated. Only if you parents and all of us allow ourselves to be generated by the One who overcomes this deep fear, will we be able to witness Him to others, waiting for and respecting the time needed for them to exercise their freedom. As it was in the beginning, even today the only thing that can pull us out of nothingness is the experience of something new that is happening now. As Fr. Giussani said in response to a question Angelo Scola asked him years ago—What is the most radical urgency for the mission of Christians today?—"That the content of this message begins to be experienced as hope in the present" (*Un avvenimento di vita, cioè una storia* [An event of life, that is, a history], Edit. Il Sabato, Rome-Milan, 1993, pp. 59–60).

What is able to generate this certainty in us, to the point of making us yearn to embrace everyone?

*Since the first lockdown started in March, something has really amazed me, especially since it isn't my own thing but a gift, and I want to share it with you. Since the lockdown began, I found myself objectively more tired, with less energy, with many more mood swings, exhibiting some bad aspects of my personality, made worse by the circumstances. Online teaching at the university is a heavy burden, and some colleagues and students have been overwhelmed by mental health problems, causing the administrative and pastoral workload to double. On top of that, I no longer have the opportunity to travel for conferences, which is something I liked very much. At home we no longer have friends for dinner as we used to, and our close coexistence causes more tension between us than usual. In addition to all that, we can't go back to our home country to see our grandparents and our family. I could go on with the list of things we are all finding difficult at this time. All of this—from a purely human point of view—would be enough to strengthen my nihilism and lock me even more in my shell. Instead, I have to admit and recognize with amazement and gratitude that this is not happening. In fact, the opposite is happening! My heart has not stopped desiring and my desire increases day by day: my desire for love, for true friendship, to embrace the world, for greater knowledge. How is it possible that, despite an objective increase in my limitations, my heart has expanded like this? Certainly, it is not due to my ability, but rather, is the fruit of Christ's presence here and now within this reality that is so beautiful and so not mine. Christ reaches me through my husband and my children and through old and new friends (like the books of Van Thuan and Azurmendi and the Taiwanese woman ill with cancer who wrote in *Traces*). Christ appears in the pain of so many students who trust in me and who are waiting unawares for His embrace. In the morning, as I ride my bike to my department, I find myself deeply moved as I observe the people I come across on the street, wondering if they are aware of the destiny of glory that awaits them and of how much God loves them right now. I am so moved that sometimes I can't control the tears and people think I'm crazy. Thus, on days when I don't even have a short break between work and my children, I find myself thinking about the families who are living the drama of domestic violence, about the elderly alone in nursing homes, the homeless, our Christian brothers and sisters who are persecuted, those in the hospital alone, those who haven't met the Lord and don't know what they are living for. My heart burns with emotion as I ask the Lord for the ability to spend my whole life, to consume it, for everyone, to be able to embrace everyone and offer everything for this world that He has created. In short, in a situation*

in which I can barely take care of the people closest to me, my heart wants to embrace everyone, the whole world, the whole universe. Obviously, His company has broken through the limits of what is possible and relaunched my heart toward the impossible. This infinite horizon makes me look at my finite daily life in a whole new way, restless but vibrant, in pain but also in truth. I ask myself, "But who are You who lights this fire in my heart?" Thank you.

Thank you. Only seeing the victory of Christ in ourselves makes us want to embrace everyone. This alone makes us see everyone as brothers and sisters. Paradoxically, at the same time, this changes our finite daily life (where we often suffocate), making us look at it in a whole new way. This newness can happen in the most mundane daily life, in everyday life. So, what overcomes fear and what does that unleash in us?

In recent weeks I have realized something that is crucial for me. Toward evening, I became overwhelmed by fear. Wondering what this fear was a symptom of, I realized that actually—deep down—it was nothing more than a way of expressing needs that I have had for a long time, that life may not end, that life may have no end both in duration and in present intensity. All of this exploded within me with an unexpected and, at times, very painful force. With these questions erupting inside, I noticed a lot of small, significant events in my days. I will recount some of them. A fellow university student, at one of our Schools of Community said, "I have a great desire to live the university as a place where I can be educated, and so do you. What does it really mean to live it as protagonists in the face of all these restrictions, without escaping or becoming too content? Why do we have this desire? What is its origin? It isn't the result of our ability. I would like to share these questions with the entire university." I was so happy to see that a different life was winning in one of my companions, and you could see that it was happening because of the difference with which he looked at the usual things, including the university. Through this flow of life, the promise of a good, of a life full of meaning and lasting forever (in which I don't lose anything!), which is my existence, becomes concrete before my eyes and can be experienced. This happens through the faces of friends, but also of new people who become a companionship to our destiny through events like the one that happened to that student. From this point was born my desire, and that of others, to really share with everyone the challenge to our "I" that is played out at the university. So, we wrote a flyer and shared it with the whole academic community, from the provost to the deans to our fellow students. We titled this flyer "The University Is Not Closed as Long as We Live." Very interesting conversations were sparked among people at all levels. What struck me the most was that some of my classmates who are normally a little shy about going beyond appearances, discussed their real issues with me after reading the flyer. One told me, "I don't want to live as a slave in this situation, without feeling anything anymore," and another said, "If the situation with the pandemic permits it, I want to see you; I need to speak with you about why it is worth living in this moment." It strikes me, because it is the factual proof that the One I have met, who sometimes uses us and a simple flyer, really brings out our humanity, both mine and that of my classmates. In short, I realized that the more this life goes on and the more I live my questions in relation to it and not alone, the more my humanity comes out and the truer it becomes. Everything becomes the call of Someone. I am also seeing this very strongly in my studies. The desire to communicate it to the world—even with courage—is born in a simple way, not as activism, but as something that overflows and then deepens in the encounters I have. In this regard, the two friends I have referred to and I had another interesting encounter a few days ago.

Struck by an interview given by the provost of another university because of the humanity that it revealed, we wrote to him, even though we didn't know him, to thank him and share some questions we find urgent, some of which were contained in the flyer. He offered to meet with us and we had a wonderful conversation full of humanity in which we shared things that had occurred during and questions about this period. It amazes me, beyond the possible future consequences of this conversation, that the more I am generated by this life to which I have been giving witness, the more I have an opportunity to engage my whole self with the lives of everyone; that is, to explore more in depth the flame of truth that I see burning in each person, even in a provost I didn't know. I realize that living like this makes me enjoy life infinitely more. In conclusion, I continue to experience a lot of feelings (not to mention the mistakes I have made), ranging from fear to joy and pain and anger and enthusiasm, but what prevails is the realization that I can really say "I" only in relation to someone who generates me. Fear itself, when it takes hold of me, becomes an opportunity in the evening, to become aware of this again, so that I can go to bed very tired, with all my questions, but at peace because I am not alone, shouting against nothingness.

Thank you. As we can see, your fear—like ours—has been challenged by facts, both small and large, like that of the fellow student who wants to live the university as a protagonist in this situation. Starting from that, you found yourself with a desire to share with everyone the challenge of living the university in this way. In reading the flyer, some of your fellow students saw a desire not to live as slaves trapped by circumstances reawaken in them, and they started talking to you about why it is worth living in this moment. These are the deep questions and needs behind the symptoms. Sometimes a gesture like this flyer (“The University Is Not Closed as Long as We Live”), in which someone might risk sharing his desire, is enough to challenge the deep fear of looking inside ourselves, to the point that it makes the desire to understand what makes it possible to live, what makes life worthy of being lived, explode. Then you discovered that the more this kind of life continues on, the more vivid your questions and needs become. It is only in a relationship with that life that everything becomes more and more true, that everything becomes the call of Someone. It is Christ who calls us through every circumstance. This is the end result: “The more I am generated by this life, the more I have the opportunity to engage my whole self with the lives of everyone,” as our friend who spoke earlier said.

This is the grace of the charism, as it has emerged from many of your contributions this evening. As the pope reminded us at the beginning of his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* [All brothers], St. Francis “sought to embrace everyone. Francis’ fidelity to his Lord was commensurate with his love for his brothers and sisters.” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 3). The grace received from St. Francis, like the grace we have received, was and is for everyone. Only by following it do we find ourselves eager to embrace everyone, to share it with everyone, to make everyone share in this gift that we have received freely. That is why I concluded *The Radiance in Your Eyes* with these powerful words from von Balthasar: “The Christian grain of wheat [something as small as we are] possesses a genuine formative fruitfulness only if it does not encapsulate itself within a particular form set alongside all the forms of the world, an illusory form that thus condemns itself to sterility, but [...] following the example of Jesus, squanders itself and offers itself up as a particular form—without being afraid of the dread of being abandoned and of letting go of oneself. Indeed, for the world, love alone is credible” (p. 149). We saw this tonight. This is what the world understands.

Thus we are introduced to the time of Advent because whatever influence the dominant mentality may exert upon us, and though our motivation may fade away, there always remains something in front of which it must stop; this “something” is “the nature of man, which is defined by the religious sense”; that is, that structural disproportion which we can define with the words “expectation” and “waiting.” Fr. Giussani said, “Not only can this nature never be completely atrophied, but it will always be, with more or less sensitivity, in a position of waiting” (*Un Avvenimento di vita, cioe` una storia* [An event of life, that is, a story] Edit. Il Sabato, Rome-Milan, 1993, p. 41). Advent is the time of this waiting, to which the church introduces us once again. Christ responds to this waiting—which no one can eliminate, as we have seen—by means of a presence that speaks through facts, in the beginning and today. The method is always the same, as the Gospel constantly reminds us. I am always amazed at that phrase of Jesus, “But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear. Amen, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it (Mt 13:16–17). This also applies to us who always, every time we meet, listen to all of these stories and see all of the facts they feature day after day. The facts are what He uses to call us to conversion now. We are part of the lucky, blessed ones mentioned in the Gospel. In front of these events, each of us can check our availability today, as did those who saw the events of two thousand years ago. It is possible that we refuse to recognize them: “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty deeds done in your midst had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would long ago have repented” (Lk 10:13). For this reason, let’s accompany each other—witnessing to each other—in following these events so that we don’t have to hear that “woe to you!” said to each one of us. Who is calling us through these events? Jesus continues, “Whoever listens to you listens to me. Whoever rejects you rejects me. And whoever rejects me rejects the one who sent me” (Lk 10:16). It is through the witness of someone present that Christ calls us today; it is He who still has mercy on us and knocks on our door at the beginning of this Advent season, so that He can take hold of our whole selves and so that He can reach everyone through us. So, have a good Advent season!

School of Community. The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, December 16, at 9 p.m.

We will start working again on the book *Generating Traces in the History of the World*. We will work on point 7 of chapter 2 entitled “Responsibility and Decision.” The content of this point goes hand in hand with the question of how we are responding to the events we have in front of our eyes.

In the “School of Community” section on the Italian portion of the CL website you can find the audio files of this part of the text and the previous ones.

Traces. A special subscription campaign for *Traces* entitled *Chi ha un Amico Regala un Tesoro* (*He Who Has a Friend Gifts Him a Treasure*) continues—and is enjoying considerable success. We hope this continues and that it will spur into action those who have not yet taken any initiative. Subscribers are offered the opportunity to give a gift subscription to a new friend at the very

attractive price of only 15 euros. For information, contact the Traces subscriptions office, abbonamenti@tracce.it.

Book of the month. For the month of December, we propose reading Mikel Azurmendi's book *L'Abbraccio: Verso una cultura dell'incontro* [The embrace: Toward a culture of encounter]. I remind you that the text can also be purchased in e-book format.

Christmas Poster. Let's take a look at the [video](#) that was prepared to go with the text and image of this year's poster.

The text is a phrase of Fr. Giussani, "He is present here and now: here and now! *Emmanuel*. Everything flows from this; everything flows from this, because everything changes. His presence requires flesh, something material, our flesh. The presence of Christ, in the ordinariness of life, increasingly involves the beat of our heart: being moved by His presence turns into being moved in our daily lives. Nothing is useless, nothing is extraneous. We start to have an affection for everything, everything, and the magnificent consequences of this are respect for what you do, precision in what you do, loyalty to your concrete work and tenacity in persevering to the end; you become more tireless. Really, it is like as if you were outlining another world, another world within this world."

The image is *Winter Evening* by Jean-François Millet. Why this image? As the text of Fr. Giussani that we have chosen says, "being moved by His presence turns into being moved in our daily lives" What we are waiting for and what everyone is waiting for is that our daily life is filled with this emotion—as our friend said at the beginning—that our daily life is illuminated by His presence: this is the unprecedented event of Christmas. Commenting on the image, our friend Giuseppe Frangi writes, as you will read in the December issue of *Traces*, "The scene is real, but it assumes a metaphorical force. It isn't a Holy Family, but it looks as if it has taken hold of that sure connection between daily life and the eternal, which the family of Nazareth itself experienced and brought into the world. The light of the oil lamp, a point irradiating light that is placed at the center of the composition just above the child's cradle, echoes the iconography of the Nativity."

The video poster we just saw is available today on the movement's website and social media, and in the coming days will also be available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, and French. It can be a useful tool for those who might have a problem getting the paper format due to the current restrictions. Let's use the poster among ourselves and with the people we meet, including friends, relatives, and coworkers, as an opportunity to remember and bear witness to what is most dear to us in life.

I wish to everyone a Happy Advent and a good journey!

Veni Sancte Spiritus