

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, May 21, 2014

Reference text: J. Carrón, The essential for living, in “PRESS ON TO MAKE HIM MY OWN,” Fraternity Exercises 2014, First Lesson, Saturday Morning, pp. 15-44.

Song *Ojos de cielo*

Song *Aconteceu*

Glory be

We had given ourselves, as the text to work on, the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises, where the crucial question – getting to the heart of the matter – is what is essential for living. For this reason, everything that we say is meant to help us understand what the essential is and how to recognize it in our experience, in order to avoid becoming like loose cannons – pulled in all directions, without having something truly fundamental in our life. Therefore, we will start from that question.

For some weeks, I have had a question that won't go away. In the first point of the Exercises on Saturday morning, we were asked: When was the last time that, in looking into the eyes of the people whom you love, you experienced that leap of the heart? When did we see, in their eyes, His eyes, which erase all of Hell? Some moments, even recent ones, in which this happened come to my mind very clearly: in the way my husband looks at me and in the way some friends treat me, with a gaze that is impossible with their own strength, but that is a reverberation of the only gaze that has filled my life and led me to be here today. I realize, though, that what I see does not bring forth a new stance in me for facing life's challenges. Hell returns, and once again I am lost in front of circumstances. Because of this, I started to have a doubt: either what I see is sentimental, or I am inconsistent. However, I am not interested in being consistent, but in having an original position in front of things! In the second point of the lesson, you asked: “What has emerged, what have I said of myself, what have I discovered in myself as essential?” (p. 23). I realize that, in front of the circumstances, I am ultimately bewildered – and saying that circumstances are for my maturation and are willed by God according to a good design for my life becomes almost something to appease me, a reason to silence these questions, to not get to the bottom of them, instead of becoming a sincere hope and a certainty on which to lean. The point is that, lately, this problem troubles me deeply, and so I am asking for your help with this. Which means, what is truly the essential? Because – as you were saying – we often live with the doubt that what happened was purely sentimental or that we are inconsistent.

I found the question about the essential at the last School of Community (and also at the beginning of the work on the Exercises) very fascinating. Therefore, I lived the days I had before me in the grip of this attraction. As I was observing myself and some of my friends in action, and also as we talked to each other, I realized that the first challenge of the question about the essential that you threw at us – this is what I noticed personally – is not to reduce it. In fact, I noticed that my position often was: Well, I know what the essential is – let’s just say it – the essential is Jesus, and so I have to try to live my day by becoming aware of this. But in doing this, after a while you get tired of things, and also of that attraction. Instead, the attraction is reawakened when I live what I have to live by trying to recognize what I am affirming as essential for me. So, it is not an effort based on a correct idea in which I believe, but a surprise with regard to how I relate to reality, loyal to what I am and loyal to what reality is. When I live the day with this second attitude, that attraction seems to increase, because I am who I am and reality is what it is, and no effort is required. Even when I discover that, for me, the essential is different from what I claim in theory, this becomes an opportunity to look at myself again according to what I am, and not what I think. Instead, in the other case, the only effect is that the initial attraction weakens until it disappears, which then makes us go on to the next matter.

This is a crucial question of method. The problem is to live, the problem is that I really start to respond to what I have to live. It is there that the essential appears as a surprise. Otherwise, we have already defined what is essential, and then it is no longer a fact that happens again in front of my eyes. Then, at a certain point, I get tired of repeating it; the amazement for the continuous discovery doesn’t grow, and the surprise in front of what is really essential doesn’t happen again.

It is really true that I discover the essential by living life. With regard to this, I was very struck by a passage of Giussani that you quoted at the Exercises, “The most beautiful thought to which I have been abandoning myself in these months is imagining how Mary Magdalene’s heart leapt the first time, and how this first leap for her did not mean ‘I’ll leave all my lovers,’ but it meant falling in love with Christ. For Zacchaeus, when his heart leapt for the first time, it didn’t mean, ‘I’ll give away all my money,’ but it meant the lovestruck surprise at that Man.” (p. 18). I discover what the essential is because it is what keeps my heart awake, that is, what makes my heart feel alive in everything that I live. When I read these words, when I heard them and then re-read them, I realized what the difference between Christ and all the rest is. Because all the rest is asking me to change, and I also ask myself to change. Instead, I recognize that my need is not for a change (like Fr. Giussani says of Mary Magdalene, “I will leave all my lovers”), but for this leap of the heart that gives me life. This is the essential for me, because it contains everything. I was struck by the reference to gratitude, because I recognize that when I don’t live, when this leap of the heart is not present, when I am not vibrating, then I ask life, the circumstances, and people for ‘the check,’ that is, I live by measuring and demanding. In other words, when my heart is not vibrant, I am not grateful. However, what precedes gratitude, what comes before change, what precedes everything is this leap of the heart – while instead, I often

start with the idea that I have to change, and I work very hard at it, thus wasting all of my energy.

Fr. Giussani's very acute observation, which makes us shift radically if we take it seriously, is that the first concern is not our inconsistency, or our fixations; that is, the first thing is not that we have to change something. It is like when you are in love and that thought comes back, that presence becomes the most important again, calls again and again, and you cannot shake it off. Then, it is precisely there that we realize that something different, unique, happened, because all the rest is a variation on the theme: "What should I do? What should I do?" For this reason, I think that it is crucial that we take this passage by Fr. Giussani (which was – let's say – the origin of the Exercises, the point from which I started to develop the path) as the criterion for judging any attempt we make to identify the essential. Because, in saying these things, he makes all of us shift. So much so, that – without noticing it – we tend to return to the question of whether or not we are able to live it, and not to the amazement. For this reason, I am going to reread that passage. "The most beautiful thought in which I have been indulging for months now is imagining the first leap of the heart experienced by Mary Magdalene [...] which was not: 'I will leave all my lovers,' but it was her falling in love with Christ." It has to do with being glued to Him, fascinated by Him. Because the first thing that a person understands when something meaningful, significant, happens – unlike with anything else – is that this fact keeps returning, and one can no longer leave it behind – not because it requires an effort, but because it imposes itself. That is why Fr. Giussani discovered – as he says – that he had been indulging for months in this thought. If you compare what has happened in you since you heard these words with Fr. Giussani's experience, you will start to understand what it means to do the work of School of Community. I am surprised to see a person in front of me who says these things, and I compare them with what comes to my mind, with what I do, with what worries me, with what blocks or defines me. Without abandoning ourselves and letting this Presence prevail, everything is reduced to our own attempt. If we are in such bad shape, how can we think that we will get out of this predicament with our own effort? That is why this text struck me immediately: because it explains the nature of Christianity better than anything else. This is the same content that we recalled in the two initial songs: if I let Him in, Hell disappears. Here Fr. Giussani offers us a criterion by sharing an experience with us, as the suggestion of a path that prevents us from letting ourselves be distracted by other concerns. And even if we let ourselves be distracted by other concerns, we can remember and abandon ourselves again, so that, eventually, He can prevail. This text is valuable as a method, suggesting a path that is crucial, as one of you writes to me: "What struck me the most is the point about Peter's journey. On Saturday morning, you described the leap of the heart that Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus must have felt, which is identical to the leap of the heart that I felt at the beginning, and then many other times, as well (for example, precisely on Saturday morning when I heard you speak). Then, suddenly you started to describe Peter's journey: it is necessary to make a journey. I felt myself shift, because it is true that the leap of the heart that I continually experience needs to be constantly

reawakened. I feel the friction between the experience of the leap of the heart and facing something starting from the ideology of Christianity,” that is, from a reduction of Christianity to – let’s say – a discourse. Therefore, the question is: What is this journey? Fr. Giussani answers with his witness: abandoning oneself. Whatever point one starts from, he returns there – to go deeper, to become more and more aware – otherwise he is not able to change his attitude. The change in attitude is not the result of a lonely attempt on our part, but the prevailing of this abandonment.

You just said, “The essential imposes itself.” This is precisely what happens to me, and what happened to me while I was reading these first two points of the Saturday morning lesson. When you speak of the leap of the heart and of Peter’s journey, I have no doubts in identifying what provoked a leap of the heart, the uniqueness of this experience that strikes me because it is not dimmed by the passing of time, it is not confused by the many things that happen in life, by all of the problems, all of the challenges, the whirlwind of circumstances, people, satisfactions, or difficulties. I was struck, in particular, because it is truly something that imposes itself. A phrase of yours explains well what happens to us when this leap of the heart is real. It says, “A presence must happen that not only does not extinguish longing, but inflames it, revives the desire to be with it. [...] [not just any gaze is enough] Neither the gaze of your spouse, nor that of your friends is enough. What is needed is the gaze of a presence capable of staying before all the challenges [...] What is needed is a relationship that does not extinguish the fire of longing, but fuels it.” (p. 17). I think that this is precisely the experience and the method that you indicate, that is, that we live among things, we even get distracted a lot, like at the amusement park (to recall the example that you gave), but there is a nostalgia that emerges again, and with which the essential imposes itself again.

Nostalgia is the first sign of the fact that something essential happened to us. Why? Because I cannot live without it, because I return to it – not because I am better at something, not because I am able to do everything well, not because everything suddenly works out according to my desires, but because none of these things is able to move me from what prevails. This is recognizable in the nostalgia that doesn’t go away, but is inflamed instead. Every blow dealt by reality, every circumstance, every experience of solitude, every misfortune and tragedy, everything is like gasoline on a fire – it ignites nostalgia. It is not true that difficulties quench nostalgia – on the contrary, difficulties are opportunities to recognize the truth and the significance of what happened. Anything that happens ignites, inflames the nostalgia for that Presence even more. Therefore, it is pointless to fight all of the difficulties of living as the sign and the reason to prevent that presence from prevailing. In fact, when such an encounter happens, any blow, any difficulty, good or bad, has only the effect of igniting, of inflaming, that nostalgia. It is truly something else; Christianity is something else! Then, we start to recognize that that Presence is totally unique, has an unmistakable trait that cannot quench nostalgia, but that constantly inflames it, no matter what happens. That is why one becomes more and more

attached. It's not that the difficulties of living quench it, but that everything ignites it, ignites it even more. A person writes, "You tell us to look at where the essential is in our experience. This is what is happening to me: it is already the second year that I have been living abroad, spending most of my time among people who are not interested in who Christ is [which could be a reason to let it go, even with a justification: "I am alone, who reminds me of it?"]. I spend my days with them, and I notice that often there is no difference between us [she doesn't delude herself: often there is no difference between them]: we do the same things and we worry about the same things. In this whirlwind, I almost forget Jesus [almost: everything is in this "almost"]. Jesus is not the essential, but comes after – after the university, after dinner, after all of the things that I have to do; then, at the end of the day, I say my prayers. However, even so, He always remains. Even if I am often distracted or afraid of speaking about Him in front of everyone, I [I!] have the perception of being physically the only person who knows who Jesus is in the midst of a world that doesn't know Him. And this won't leave me in peace [that this is real is shown by the fact that it never leaves her in peace]. This is the most essential perception that I have in my days; even in the most distracting moments, this is what prevails – that my life cannot be torn away from Jesus." Another friend writes, "I just wanted to tell you how important it is for me in this moment to discover, more and more clearly, God's faithfulness in my life [which is another way of saying what the characteristic of this unique event is]. I understand that He took hold of me at Baptism, and that He brought me here through the history of the Movement, which means that it is undeniable that He made that seed of grace, which is faith, grow. However, it is as if now I were at a standstill, as if everything were more difficult, obscure, less immediate, so that it requires all of my energy to rediscover it. After all, I was thinking – like Saint Augustine – that after having received the mark of faith, everything would be easy. Instead, I say, 'Thank God that it isn't' [thank God that it isn't – because if everything were easy, the impact with reality and the challenges with which life provokes me would not contribute to making me become aware of what the difference is]. After an initial moment of total bewilderment, I realized that what makes me go forward is first and foremost His unceasing faithfulness [His, not ours. He is the One who can claim to be faithful, Him!], which for me is a judgment that I can no longer shake off. I will give a banal example, but for me it is striking. I work in the operating room, and one of my relatives was about to have a serious operation. My first move was to arrange everything as well as possible, in order to make sure that he was cared for by the best possible people – but the more I did this, the more I realized that it wasn't enough, that I was not at peace, but that instead my anxiety was growing. Then, I wondered what could possibly be missing in all of this, and I realized that I had a terrible nostalgia for the gaze full of peace that I have always seen in my dearest friends. So I asked them to pray, first of all for me, that I would not be alone in that circumstance – that is, that I could experience the companionship of Christ, which is the only one that gives peace [a person can be overwhelmed with anxiety, but cannot rid himself of that nostalgia that he has experienced, that shaped him]. I didn't call them out of camaraderie, but due to an ineradicable judgment, a nostalgia [what seems to be the most fragile thing, the

least concrete, is actually the most concrete, the most crucial aspect of living], the same that I felt in Rome in front of the Pope, which made me understand how, at the age of 40, I had in me this impressive desire to learn, perhaps more so than when I was 18. I was there because no one needs to learn to understand reality more than me, and the instrument for doing this is precisely a school, the School of Community. I found that I was grateful in a way that I had not been in a long time. These are moments of light that are mentioned when people talk about conversion, that don't take away the hard work – which is still a lot – but that make the journey interesting, certain that everything is full of His faithfulness. I can truly say: What would my life be if I could no longer hear His words each time?" For this reason, when faced with challenges, we need to return here, as another person writes to me: "At the last School of Community, the first people who spoke witnessed that for them the Exercises had been an event. For me, it wasn't like that. What I brought home from them is that a person can recognize Christ as the answer to his need only if he goes all the way to the core of his need. My first reaction in front of this is that it is hard work, because I understand that I have to do some work on myself, and I don't even really understand in what it consists. Forgive me if I am slow! I know that you have been telling us nothing but this for years, but I still don't understand it. In commenting on the first witnesses, you said, 'Christ makes Himself powerfully present not as a thought [...], but for the event that He is [...]. Christ is something that happens [...]. There is no other method. We have to ask for that event to happen again [...] and we have to constantly recover the awareness of this event in our memory' [so it isn't first and foremost hard work, contrary to what she said!]. That is why I am asking you to help me understand what the awareness of this event in our memory is. I would like you to help me to understand this point better – because this happened to me, but if I understood more clearly what it means to recover the awareness in our memory, I wouldn't always be back at the same point." What does it mean to recover the awareness of the event in our memory? What does Fr. Giussani do? Where does he constantly return? "The most beautiful thought in which I have been indulging for months now..." Memory is this, to return to something that came into your life, to the Presence that never quenches the nostalgia. That is why it's not an effort. Only this doesn't quench the nostalgia, doesn't quench the desire. It's not our attempt that increases the awareness of our need in us, but He who makes us become constantly aware of the need, He who awakens the nostalgia in us. The difference is precisely this (as someone said earlier): that He awakens my heart. If I understand this, I have nothing else to do but live the memory, where saying "memory" is another way of saying that the nostalgia prevails. The fact that the memory of the Presence prevails doesn't mean remembering things from the past. It is accepting, recognizing, letting yourself be swept away each time by that nostalgia that not only is not destroyed by all of life's circumstances, but that is instead inflamed by every element of living. Instead of getting angry with things because they are not enough, we have the possibility to return to that nostalgia time after time.

Lately, I have had an immense need for meaning, and it was so dramatically present that it left me breathless. I actually understood well what Leopardi said in his poems, that when one faces his human experience, he finds a gap in himself between what he desires and a reality that is not enough. I had all of the tools to rediscover what had seized my life, that is, School of Community, some relationships dear to my heart, etc. However, everything looked like small consolation, so – perhaps for the first time – I let go and wallowed in my limitations and forgetfulness. But each evening it got worse; I was sadder and sadder. Then, it happened that one evening I got together with my boyfriend and, seeing that I had been so sad for a while, he asked me, “What is happening to you? Why are you no longer yourself? Where do you start again?” I answered provocatively, without saying what was troubling me, and I was expecting his usual speech in which he says all of the right things. Instead, it happened that he looked at me and asked, “Why don’t you let yourself be loved?”

“Why don’t you let yourself be loved?”

I was taken aback, because that was all he said, and I answered, “You’re stopping there? Don’t you want to know what is happening to me?”

“You aren’t going to beat me up a bit?”

Exactly.

“You aren’t going to give me a lecture?”

I was shocked, and then he surprised me by saying, “Yes, because it is much truer to love you like Jesus loved Peter after he had betrayed Him.” That moment was like Mary Magdalene’s leap of the heart, because I immediately thought of Peter when Jesus asked him, “Peter, do you love me?” and he, full of limitations like me, answered, “Yes, I love You.” In that moment, I discovered that what wins out is the love of another, which – in one second – turned my way of thinking upside down. The next day, I read the first lesson for the first time – and it was incredible, because it described what had happened to me better than I could ever do, when you quote the song and you say, “If I forgot what was true, [...] what would I need? I would need your eyes to remind me.” (p. 16). This is what happened to me. I returned to Christ like Peter, because in front of me there was one who witnessed to me what fills life with meaning: Christ present. I understand well that – as you said – what is necessary is a moment of loyalty in order to let that gaze, which I have already seen and discovered in my life, enter again. In fact, when we say that the gaze of your husband or wife, or of your friends, is not enough, but that “what is needed is a relationship that does not extinguish the fire of longing, but fuels it” (p. 17), I understand it well, because my desire, my need, is not quenched – on the contrary, it is even stronger. Then, gratitude also prevails in me: “The most wondrous gratuitousness is that God has become my companion on the road” (p. 18).

How did God become a companion on our journey? “I am writing to you, having just finished reading the beginning of the first lesson of the Exercises. It is moving to read the description of an experience that touches so deeply what I perceive as crucial for me, especially lately. I am a university student, and I have spent the last few months abroad, working on my Master’s thesis. I

left in order to follow my passion for what I am studying, and because of the encounter with some people as signs indicating a road for me. After a while, I struggled with the fact that all of the passion with which I had left was not enough to sustain my life here. Every morning, I woke up with a strong desire to discover something great for me, to work well, to be able to fully enjoy the time and the encounters that I had, but after a few hours of work – often arid – I was finding myself as tired and sad as usual [the religious sense is not enough: “I understand your attempt, noble but sad”]. I felt as if, among the many things during the day, the crucial thing had not happened, and that time was flowing away, leaving no mark except for my tiredness. Even when I was making a new discovery in the lab, after the initial amazement, doubt prevailed: In the end, what is the point of doing all of this? Is it worth it? [he gets to the radical questions, even if he started with all of his passion] Isn’t this interest that I have [what looked like the most concrete thing] perhaps a dead end? I understood that the problem was not in the circumstances, but in the impossibility of looking at things with truth [the meaning of things is not something added, like a hat that you need to put on top of things, so that they become adequate. No, it is that, without the meaning, I don’t look at things. When we say that “education is the introduction to total reality,” it is because, unless you get to that point, reality has no interest]. Everything that happened was a series of events, but no effort or intention on my part was able to find in them something that could give me peace. As I talked to a friend on the phone, she challenged me by saying, ‘You have to find what you really need right there. It is something beyond what you already know; you have to get to the bottom of it.’ My situation didn’t suddenly change, but I started to enter the day with the desire to be able to recognize if and where something helpful to me would happen. Little by little, one point started to become more and more interesting. Every week, on Wednesday evening, I used to go to the assembly of School of Community with the other university students, something that up to that moment had raised many objections in me [when one is not aware of the true need, everything is an objection]. I always used to arrive feeling very tired, but each time something unexpected happened: a person who recounted his experience, a question asked, something highlighted about the text – there was always something that touched a deep interest of mine. One fact was particularly clarifying. One evening, at the usual dinner together, a girl asked me, ‘How are you?’ I decided to be honest, and I said that, in the previous week, I had felt completely flat, with no sign of the need, of the asking that Fr. Giussani always spoke about; I was working mechanically, I didn’t say a word while at lunch with my colleagues, I was indifferent at home. She answered very calmly, ‘It’s not true that you are flat – at most, you are tired. Otherwise, why would you say this? Don’t you realize that you are already asking?’ I had to acknowledge that the gaze with which she was looking at me was truer, more complete than my way of looking – it captured who I am deep within. I didn’t experience any particular emotional euphoria, but what struck me was that, soon after, as I was going home on the subway, I observed a person who was leaning against the window – one of the many people one crosses paths with daily – and I caught myself thinking: How beautiful it would be if this stranger could discover her value, too – if she could realize that she is a creature wanted right

now, precisely the way she is, even with those glasses and that nose; all of her being present here cries out about One who makes both her and me in this very moment. I was at peace in front of the evidence of a Presence greater than all of my emptiness [I can look into the depths of your clear eyes, and all of Hell disappears if I discover Being there. I can look at a person whom I had never seen before, and in front of the evidence of His presence, which is making her now, my emptiness disappears]. If, for weeks, none of the efforts that I had made had let me see reality with a shred of this truth, what was making it possible in that moment? I couldn't help remembering the dinner with that friend, and the gaze that was so correspondent to what I am. There is a point in reality where I go back to being myself, a point that is not reducible to my ability or to the ability of certain persons, but that happens, that is unmistakable: it is Him who happens. I thank you for the journey that we are making. Answering the question, 'Who is Jesus?' means that, at every moment, I can recognize in reality that point that is essential for living with all of my need, the point that allows me to look at myself once again and to look at things as full of meaning, as the place of my relationship with the Mystery. Little by little, feeling scandalized by my inability is being replaced by gratitude for a real Presence to whom I can return, to be seized and educated once again. I am amazed to see that the desire to share this life with everyone is growing, starting with my colleagues. I find myself living with them more and more, sharing the same needs, the same questions, and at times the same darkness, and I recognize more and more the newness of Christ's gaze in the relationship with them [the difference of Christ's gaze is enhanced], which doesn't reduce any aspect of our humanity. I discover that what I have in my hands is not a flag to be waved in front of everyone else as if I were on a pedestal, but instead it is the opportunity to beg – within the challenges that reality offers, within the confusion in which I find myself at times – for that unmistakable gaze that embraces all that I am, and that reveals the positivity of circumstances. This is a source of newness, even through small signs. More than becoming perfect, I need to be able to live with that restlessness that is the great resource for seeking His gaze." A person who sees the reawakening of restlessness, the reawakening of desire, discovers that the great resource for seeking His face is this relentless nostalgia. For this reason, the more we live like this, the more everything becomes a true companionship, even the elections.

The flyer about the European elections brought an attitude that I have to the surface; it exposed an attitude that I always have. In particular, when you remind us that "He is, if He changes," my great objection is that, if the change that I see in me – which is real – doesn't also produce a change in reality, then in fact it didn't happen, because otherwise it could be seen. When Christ happens, it can be seen. For this reason, I am living an ongoing struggle – but, in the meantime, I realize that the personal, social, and political challenges that reality proposes to us don't wait for me to be ready. Therefore, I find myself trying to strike a balance between activism and asceticism. Activism, because in the face of certain situations, in front of the violent imposition of a certain mentality, I would like to go out in the streets and tell everyone that they are wrong, to

make noise, not to submit to certain injustices – I would like to organize meetings, to create groups in order to spread what truth is, what the Church says. While on the one hand, I would throw myself body and soul into social commitment, on the other hand, I tell myself that my hope cannot be placed in a revolution, in a political commitment, or in cultural initiatives. So I put on the brakes; I get involved, but not too much, in order to avoid falling into the risk of activism, and in the meantime I strive toward what salvation should be for me – not doing, therefore, but trying to live my life, to live Christianity firsthand, because – I repeat it to myself often, but without believing it – this influences history more than the great battles, and I use this as an excuse not to get seriously involved. I think that I am really trying to strike a balance between the two positions in order to be happy, and as loyal as possible to the Movement. Instead, I am absolutely not free, but I actually feel stuck, whereas I would like to live by keeping all of the factors in mind, without excluding anything of myself and of the world.

Has anyone experienced something that helped him to become unstuck?

My residence is in southern Italy, and therefore, in order to vote, I have to make the long trip there. For this reason, since it is logistically complicated, also because of some circumstances in my life, I had set the problem aside and decided not to vote. Then, a flyer was distributed among the Memores Domini indicating that we should give precedence to voting over other meetings or commitments. So, although I had decided not to go and vote (not because of some commitment that I had, but for other problems), I felt challenged again. I re-read the flyer. Once again, I had not understood the connection to the point of voting. It's not that I wasn't convinced by the flyer – on the contrary, I had sort of turned it around: it is so convincing that the battle is over the foundations, that I can live it in any circumstance, even if I don't go to vote. But I still had one last reservation, and so I went and re-read the entire presentation that you gave in Milan on April 9th. I was surprised that, in all of the detailed points that you discussed, you ended up at the gesture of voting. And so I was able to make the connection that I hadn't been able to make, because I was amazed – as if in front of something completely new – by something that I have heard many times, that is, that man's ultimate desire is freed from its reduction and is reawakened in an encounter. So much so, that afterward I went and re-read Fr. Giussani's piece, L'io rinasce in un incontro [The "I" is Reborn in an Encounter]. I was amazed, because when I first read it, I didn't think of the elections, but of some things that I am living, so that this point of view, this perspective, suddenly placed me in front of some relationships in which – due to some dynamics that are in play – I am focused on the consequences rather than on the foundations. Instead, it seemed totally correspondent and true to start again from the foundations. I understand that it is not automatic, but that it is nevertheless the truest path, because it is what respects my nature the most – that is, to start again from the ultimate foundation. Therefore, I can risk such a criterion to the point of the vote in the European elections, as you were saying: "To defend this space of freedom for each and for all is the

definitive reason to vote in the upcoming elections,” because this battle over the foundations plays out in a relationship.

As the most authoritative players in the European debate acknowledge, what is at stake in these elections is so crucial that the first issue is to actually vote. We can contribute to overcoming the distance that many of us feel – us, in spite of what we live – and that many of our fellow citizens feel, by going to vote, precisely because the matter of the foundations is so crucial. Otherwise, we will not have the energy and the reasons to move and, therefore, we will look for a balance – as the speaker before the last was saying – between activism and asceticism, using it to avoid committing ourselves fully. The point is to understand that the real discussion is about the foundations – and then the issue will become more and more concrete, to the point of moving us deep down to go and vote, and to continue this dialogue in society about what we said to each other, what we have given ourselves lately as tools: the flyer on Europe and the text of Page One in the May issue of *Traces*. Once again, with these gestures, the Mystery doesn't let us decline – because often, when we listen to the announcements, we think that they are a sort of homework that we give ourselves as part of the CL organization. Nothing could be more wrong, because – as you can see – this is not enough. The announcements that we propose are gestures, gestures through which, by throwing ourselves into reality, we are generated. Only if one takes an announcement into consideration, can he then verify that it is totally relevant and concrete. The invitation to these gestures is the modality by which the Mystery prevents us from sinking into the nothingness and the total indifference into which we often see that many fall. That is why it is not first of all to help ourselves with the organization; this would be a complete reduction of the gestures that we propose in the announcements. All of the gestures that we propose have a different purpose, only one: the possibility to be generated, because they challenge us to think. It is a companionship that we give ourselves in order to be generated, because it is impossible that a person, if – as we said – he reads the flyer on Europe or Page One, doesn't find something that generates him. It is impossible! In doing some gestures together – if one then challenges you, asking you the reasons that you have to give – you are generated, and therefore you become yourself. If we don't recognize the connection that exists between the announcements and being generated, as the modality with which Christ remains present and faithful in our life – regenerating us, constantly imposing Himself, without leaving us in peace – then we don't grasp the value of the gestures. Because these gestures are the modality with which, each time, we recognize the mercy toward our nothingness of the One who generates us and says, “Look, if you don't want to sink into nothingness, I offer you this, I invite you to this.” Today it will be the elections, tomorrow it will be the Rimini Meeting, the day after tomorrow it will be the collection for the Food Bank, or the vacation. If one ignores all of this, how will he be able to see a flesh that generates him? It would be left to us to generate ourselves with our own attempts, with all of our efforts, with our energy. And we already know what the result of that is.

The first announcement is about School of Community, precisely in order not to degenerate, but to be introduced, as we were today, to this gaze on things, on reality, starting from that event, from that essential that imposes itself and makes you look at everything in a different way. That is why, in sharing our life with this – as Fr. Giussani said, “The most beautiful thought in which I have been indulging for months now...” – is what generates us. School of Community is sharing our life with this, not just reading; it is a sharing of our life to which we abandon ourselves, in which we immerse ourselves. For this reason, we will continue to work on the first lesson, because we are still at the beginning of this work.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, June 18th at 9:30 pm.

European elections. Let’s take advantage of these few days before the elections on May 25th to meet people and introduce them to the judgment that we expressed, precisely in order not to miss this opportunity to be generated, as we said before.

Special collection for the Food Bank. The Food Bank, together with other institutions, is organizing a special collection of food on Saturday, June 14th, in order to deal with a particular poverty emergency. What is the reason for this special collection? Why did we adhere to this appeal? Since there will be a gap of several months in the distribution of the aid provided by public institutions, from now until October, the poorest people are facing a situation of real famine. Pope Francis has already mentioned it publicly, asking for an extraordinary commitment to help the poor and those who suffer from hunger, and it wasn’t a general exhortation, because it referred precisely to the situation that I described. Let’s make this appeal ours, because it seems imperative that we participate, since we are aware of the urgency of the situation. So I invite you to adhere to the special collection for the same educational reason, with the same commitment and passion with which we live the collection that usually happens at the end of November. This collection will probably be held in fewer supermarkets, due to its hasty organization, but we will definitely need all of you to be available, and therefore I invite you to contact our friends at the Food Bank immediately. For information and additional details, you can contact Federico Bassi: bassi@bancoalimentare.it.

Corpus Domini procession. All of our participation in this simple gesture is the way in which we show our belonging to the one Church. It is a simple gesture that has a great educational value –public exposition of the Eucharist, in front of everyone – that each of us is called to live in his Diocese, led by the Bishop. It is a proposal that helps us to have a greater awareness of our belonging to Christ and to the whole Church.

Community vacations. Concerning the community vacations, first of all let’s not take them for granted, as if they were a ritual that is repeated every year. The worst that can happen among us is that this formalism creep in and make us take everything for granted. Let us always remember

that everything that has to be answered by our freedom is always a new beginning! Those who worked on the topic of the elections can understand why voting is absolutely not a given. For this reason, challenging us with a circumstance like the elections, or the issue of Europe, educates us not to take the vacation for granted. Let's not take it for granted, because it would disappear from our awareness. Then, let's ask ourselves why we go on the vacation. This is also a question for those who have difficulties, objections, financial problems. Why? What do we want to communicate? What do we want to live together? Why do we think that this moment is crucial? The point is whether we take advantage of this gesture in order to communicate something of the beauty and gladness that we live, and whether we also help each other to live it. What would we like to show to a new friend who is coming with us? What would we want him to find out and what would we want him to experience? Then the hikes, the moment of a witness, a book presentation, a conversation about something that interests us, Mass, Morning Prayer, the *Angelus*, all become an occasion in which one can see the vacation as a model for living.

Veni Sancte Spiritus