

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, May 23, 2018

Reference text: L. Giussani, *Why the Church?* pp. 189-200 and J. Carrón, *Introduction to “See, I Am Doing Something New: Do You Not Perceive It?” 2018 Fraternity Exercises of Communion and Liberation* https://english.clonline.org/cm-files/2018/05/16/jc-introduzione-esfrat_270418_ing.pdf

- *Amare ancora [To love again]*
- *Aconteceu [It happened]*

Glory Be

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Welcome everyone! Let us begin our work on the pages of *Why the Church?* and above all on the Introduction to the Fraternity Exercises. In the contributions we received it was clear how many of you were struck by the theme of familiarity with Christ. It is the beginning of the adventure of knowledge to which Fr. Giussani has invited us. What does this familiarity consist of, not as a definition, but as an experience?

I too have felt the provocation you mentioned for some time, a provocation that has become more acute after some points you highlighted at the Exercises. To speak of familiarity with Christ for me has always coincided with a familiarity with those who were and are most fully communicating a different humanity; with being attracted to those whom I saw living what everyone is living with a different accent, a different passion, to which I was educated as a child (due to a positivity passed on to me by my family and by many people I met) to give the name of Jesus. This familiarity has over time passed through faces and forms that are different from when it happened at the beginning. When at the Exercises you spoke about the value of the companionship, recalling Fr. Giussani, you underlined, “Our companionship must go deeper, more to the core, and must concern ourselves, it must concern our heart,” it must [...] propel us to “a personal relationship [...] with Him.” In this nuance—“a personal relationship with Him”—it seems to me that I have to grasp some traits that, however, I cannot distinguish from the traits of the companionship. What are the signs showing that through the familiarity (made of flesh) I live with the companionship my personal relationship with Jesus is growing? I cannot quite distinguish “familiarity with the companionship” from “familiarity with Christ.” A text you mentioned at the Exercises stated, “If at some point His personality weren’t autonomous, [...] an ultimately unique face, some unmistakable traits even with respect to those that He created as a sign of Himself [...], it seems to me that they do not seek Christ.” I do not want to miss the best, can you help us get to the bottom of this?

The first way in which we can help each other is to become aware of this question, because this is the challenge we have before us now. It is evident that familiarity with Christ passes through the traits of the companionship, but Fr. Giussani helps us realize that this is not mechanical and that it is possible for us to remain at the level of appearances. Looking at the traits of the Christian companionship more deeply introduces us to familiarity with Christ, but, as we have seen on many occasions in the Gospel, this step is not automatic. The disciples even had Jesus in front of them—think of the episode of the boat and the loaves of bread we mentioned at the Exercises—yet this

did not determine by itself a different way of being in reality on their part. Evidently, with his humanity Jesus makes himself present to us in a way that opens us wide to something beyond. Listen to what the Gospel of St. John says, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me [the road is the carnality of Christ]. If you have known me, you will also know my Father: from now on you know Him and have seen Him” (Jn 14: 6). Everything would seem clear, but a moment later Philip, as if he hadn’t heard those words, asks Jesus the question, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus responded, “I have been with you all this time and still you do not know me, Philip? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?” (Jn 14:8-10). There is an evident bond between the humanity of Christ and the Father. Yet, in spite of this bond that He reaffirms—He doesn’t tone it down, He doesn’t diminish it—Philip doesn’t realize what Jesus is introducing him to. That’s why he asks that question, which is a little like yours. Jesus insists: “The words that I speak to you I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing His works. [...] I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or else, believe because of the works themselves” (Jn 14: 10-11). That is, the fact of being in front of Jesus in the flesh pushes us to go beyond. Jesus wants to introduce His friends to a familiarity with His origin, which is the Father. The disciples can remain at the level of appearance or enter into that familiarity which introduces them to a personal relationship with the Infinite. As Christ's traits could not be seen without being referred to the Father, so we cannot look at the traits of the companionship without arriving at Christ, at that “ultimately unique” face, as you said. It is very beautiful how Fr. Giussani describes it on a memorable page from a meeting with people of *Memores Domini*, “[This] music is really very beautiful [...], both the way it is sung, and as a feeling [...] of friendship and of fraternity and companionship in an adventure [it would seem that everything ended here]. Yet, if things could be listed as I have listed them now ending there, and something else were taken for granted [since he knows us well, he warns us: pay attention!]
—something that is accepted and recognized (mind you!) [everyone quotes Jesus], but taken for granted—and His name was not brought forth by an emphasis of dialogue, by the desire to be heard, by the desire to hear it; if He did not have [a] personality at some point autonomous, if He did not have an ultimately unique face, some unmistakable traits even with respect to those that He created as a sign of Himself ...” (*L'attrattiva Gesu`* [The Attraction of Jesus], Bur, Milano 2001, p. 148). How can we see if this isn’t happening? How can we verify whether we have stopped at the whole world of beautiful familiarity—of singing, of music, of friendship, of companionship—and have not arrived at the recognition of this autonomous personality, of this “ultimately unique” face? What is the sign showing that so many times we do not get to that point?

The work we have begun on the Introduction to the Exercises is causing me to ask many questions on the point of the companionship. In the second paragraph you ask the question, “How many of us today have said “You” to Christ with the familiarity with which one treats every presence that is truly dear to him?”

Perfect! Let us pause for a moment to think about this: how many of us—present here or connected by video—have today said “You” to Christ with this familiarity? We are all here in the companionship and in the course of the day we met someone, but how many caught themselves today saying “You” to Him? Having identified this—as you did—helps us begin to answer the question: What are the signs that reveal that I have not stopped at the appearance? You said: beginning to say “You” to Christ.

In fact, this question has opened a wound in me, which, however, I often try to close. I will tell you something in order to explain myself better. I go to college, and a few weeks ago I came home to be with my brother who has difficulty studying. In those days I strove to be with him, convinced that by studying with me he would improve. I motivated him with many beautiful words, thinking that they would help him. But the more I did that, the more I realized that those words were right; they were beautiful, but they were empty even for me.

We can say sentences that are right and yet empty.

Exactly. Yet, I needed to hear them again in order to rediscover that they were true for me. Then, during a dinner with my parents, my father told us about the Exercises and about his gratitude toward the companionship that helps him live a familiarity with Jesus and that expresses itself also in a gesture like the common fund. Instead, in many gestures we propose to each other, I see my objections returning. I am thinking about a public sale of Traces we undertook, and how I stood still in the crowd thinking only of my prejudices: “But why should I do this?!” “What do I need it for?” The evening before the sale, in talking with a small group of friends, I had recognized again how that tool was helpful for me. But the day after all that work had been swept away by my objection, by my impression about things. Why is my objection, my impression of things, something wrong if it is the first thing that arises in me? This often happens to me with my girlfriend or my friends in the community; in fact when I’m at School of Community or with my girlfriend I always have the problem of what to say and what to do, reducing everything to the usual phrases, correct but empty. I realize that all this leads to the “de-moralization” you are talking about, because I am more in love with something other than Christ. But if I treat people who are dear to me like that, if this familiarity isn’t even present with them, how can the companionship help me fight against this “de-moralization,”; that is, to say “You” to Christ?

What does what you said show? Even if there isn’t familiarity with the companionship—as you said—how does the companionship help you? With what does it challenge your “de-moralization”? With its irreducibility! What did your parents do, as you related to us? Regardless of your attitude that day, they challenged you at dinner, so much so that it affected you. A certain impression is the first reverberation that coming across the irreducibility of a presence causes in you. The point is that this impression must help you to go to the core of things and not to stop at your first reaction. The impression that arises in you is not wrong, it is the beginning that makes you interested in a certain thing. As Fr. Giussani said in the premises of *The Religious Sense*, the feeling attracts you to the object to arouse your interest, otherwise you would remain indifferent. The problem arises when you stop at the appearance and do not follow the impression that wants to take you beyond. So, how does the companionship help you? It challenges your impressions with its irreducibility, as your father did, it pushes you not to stop at the impression, otherwise you would miss the best, as you can see. You constantly come across a difference even if it is full of limits, but “other” from you, different. This is what challenges the “de-moralization”—if you don’t find an irreducibility in front of you the “de-moralization” would win, it would spread into your life. Instead with all our limitations, with all our fragility, we see how our “de-moralization” is challenged. It is enough to re-read the letter mentioned in the Introduction about the lady who goes to the Way of the Cross: that gesture didn’t affect her in a special way—so much so that she didn’t participate for years—and perhaps she didn’t know many of the people who were with her in Caravaggio, but what challenged her attitude? The irreducibility of a fact: that is what set her in motion. So, why are familiarity with Christ and not reducing the sign to our impression so important?

With regard to all the problems and questions you present to us, I wonder if what is most necessary for a true relationship with Christ, more substantial and as continuous as possible, is not basically the ongoing and sincere exercise of looking at one's heart and wondering what it really desires. In my experience my distance from Christ is helped by the fact that in the depth of my heart I look for many other things which prove to be insufficient. Instead, closeness with Him comes back when I have the courage to look at my deepest desires and needs with great simplicity. Even if I believe that this simplicity of the heart is definitely needed, I would like to understand if I am simplifying what is actually a bigger problem of going deeper into this knowledge.

No, you're not simplifying, you're not trivializing the problem; you are giving precedence to a fundamental factor in the dialogue between you, your heart, and Christ. The only question to understand is that the heart, my friend, is given to you to intercept the answer. The heart is not the answer, it is the criterion for intercepting the answer, for recognizing what corresponds to its expectation. That is why in the text I read earlier it says, "If [Christ] is not the object of our thoughts (memory), of what we say (invocation), contemplated with amazement [...] so much so that it translates into joy over a presence; if days and days pass without saying "You" except in the hastiness of repeated formulas [empty, said the person who spoke before]" (*L'Attrattiva Gesu`*), everything we do is not enough. What are the traits that reveal that you are beginning to experience this familiarity? What are the traits that reveal that you are becoming familiar with a person? That you cannot but think of her (memory), that you cannot but desire her (invocation), that you cannot but feel all the amazement before that presence, an amazement "that translates into joy over a presence." In one line Fr. Giussani described a series of traits of this familiarity. The lady who went to the Way of the Cross concluded by quoting the title of last year's Exercises, "My heart is glad because You live, oh Christ." You realize that you have truly recognized a presence, because it enhances your heart, because you are happy that He lives, as when one falls in love and says to the beloved, "How beautiful you are! Because if you were not there, or I hadn't met you, I could not live this enhancement of my heart, this joy. I'm happy because you exist!" The difference is not in formulas that we use as empty words, but in the fullness of meaning, in the intensity that the presence awakens in us so that we are able to say in a new way, "I am happy because you live!" What is the verification of this? A person can go abroad and find a perfect job, suitable to her, exceptionally satisfying, can be enthusiastic about it, yet it is not enough. It is not enough and she realizes that she cannot be as happy as when she was here, determined by the recognition of a Presence. This is why Fr. Giussani is keen to tell us: if there isn't a more intense knowledge of Christ, things can even go very well, one can find the right job, be enthusiastic and be recognized by everyone, have fantastic creativity, and people can "marvel at her contribution, at what she says: the people present there are like the beginning of the [new] world that notices her [Fr. Giussani describes it with all the details to show the grandeur of what happens] [...] But it is not enough for her" (*L'Attrattiva Gesu`*, p. 149). Our heart, friend, has such a need that the more it is reawakened, the more it becomes clear that the answer is what has been given to us, it is not what we can do. And the criterion for identifying the answer is the heart. As a friend of mine, who lives too far away to come in person, wrote to me, "The part of the Friday Introduction that struck me the most and didn't leave me alone was this: 'If everything we are waiting for cannot be totally satisfied within what was given to us, in the fact that was given to us, that is, in the Fact of Christ, then all our activities [however awesome and wonderful, with all the enthusiasm we have for them], all that we do, becomes awaiting *our* kingdom' [and this is not enough for us]. How can we keep our attention on the initiative of the One who makes me? How can I recognize whether I am building my kingdom or His?" Where can we see it happening? Because in one case your doing is

not enough for you, while in the other you build on a fullness; what you do is born from a fullness and not from an effort to fill the emptiness that is in you. It is born of a Presence that is so overwhelming that it makes you free in the present.

In re-reading the Introduction on Friday evening, I was struck by the realization that those words shed light on my experience. Living my experience paying attention to it made me understand those words, especially point three, where you quote Fr. Giussani and his insistence on, his not giving up in recalling us to, the only thing that can satisfy the heart. I remember that “centuries ago,” when I was going to college, this continuous moving of the center of attention in a certain sense annoyed me so much ...

It annoyed her, do you understand? It was something “irreducible to herself” that bothered her. It was what challenged most her “de-moralization.”

I remember that when I obeyed and did something, Fr. Giussani used to say, “That’s not it.” And I would reply, “What do you mean, it isn’t this?” Then over all the years, staying in the Church within our companionship, I saw growing around me, little by little, in school with the kids or in teaching Religious Education in the parish, very nice friendships with people who slowly became involved in our life, fascinated by the friendship among us. Like the friend who came with me this evening. Somehow, I have been for these friends and for my husband only a cue and yet a true companionship through our good Lord. Since now I feel responsible for myself first of all and for these friends as well, I realize how Fr. Giussani’s concern is very true: if we stop at the surface of this beautiful experience, it soon disappoints, it is no longer useful to us, it doesn’t overflow into everyday life (children, health, all the vicissitudes of living) and it becomes a closed club. But we have no time to waste. So, I thank you so much for continuing to hammer us with the only thing necessary for living.

This is the true companionship that makes us continually go to the core of things, because the only thing Fr. Giussani desired was to accompany us on the journey. What does Fr. Giussani do with us? What Jesus did with His disciples: he doesn’t give up—“But don’t you understand?” Not giving up, but for what purpose? So that we do not stop at the surface of things, otherwise sooner or later we will be disappointed. That is why Fr. Giussani says that we can even find ourselves at a wonderful, fantastic party, but if the awareness of what we are experiencing does not become, at a certain point, the awareness of an “ultimately unique” presence, we will go away disappointed. Because it is not the things we do that can fulfill us, but only His presence. I have often thought: how many people in that situation, or in many others where we find ourselves living similar experiences, have felt the urge to say His name, not stopping at the beauty of what was happening? Pay attention, because it isn’t that Fr. Giussani was being mystical, as we often think when faced with certain things that he said, “Eh, it was Fr. Giussani!” No, no, no! This can also be said by a person in love. Because if they invite you to a corporate party in the most romantic place in the universe (with candles, a lake, everything perfectly organized) but your wife is not present, everything is beautiful, but without her it is not enough for you. At that party you do not “have to” remember your wife; the problem is that you cannot forget her! The thought of her arises from the depths of the experience you are having: the more beautiful the experience, the more you realize she is missing. This is why, from a very human experience like that, Fr. Giussani’s yearning is born: that everything may be an occasion to remember. A man would never think, “Since I am married, then I must miss my wife.” Since he is truly involved with a presence, he cannot help but feel the urgency that she be with him at the party. I repeat, it is a very human experience. That is why Fr. Giussani tells us, “Let’s be careful because Jesus among us can be the origin of the whole world of humanity, full of joy and friendships, of formally unexceptionable reasons, of formally

but also materially concrete help that He is ready to give us [...], but Jesus could be reduced to the ‘portrait of a beautiful woman sculpted on her gravestone’” (*L’Attrattiva Gesu’*, pp. 150-151); that is, to something empty. The fact that Fr. Giussani didn’t give up—something you reminded us of from your personal experience—is a testimony of what the true companionship is that makes us go to the core, irreducible in the face of all our reductions. This emerges clearly, as one of you writes to me: “In front of my hesitation about whether to come to the Exercises, in a brief moment of clarity returning from Mass, as I looked at our son [what does looking at her son have to do with going to the Exercises?] I suggested to my husband, ‘Why don’t we go to the Exercises? I know this would involve leaving him with his grandparents, etc., but [pay attention to the connection she makes] really what can we leave to our son, if we do not pass this on to him?’ I was moved, even my husband was moved [and decided to go]. I asked myself: what moved me (in fact: us) to tears? Something that was breaking something in me, my measure. I really had the feeling of becoming a mother right there [it was clear!]. What legacy, what can I give my son if not a Good so great that it goes beyond being a good mother?” She overcame all the difficulties about whom to leave her son with because she understood that her adherence to this was what made her really become a mother. When we find ourselves in situations like this we are often blocked. For heaven's sake, if it is necessary to stay home because there is no other choice, one doesn’t go to the Exercises; the Mystery will think of how to reach us in another way. It is a different story if we use difficulties as a justification for not going. Instead, when the moment of clarity occurs, all objections are reduced to nothing and one begins to identify an answer. In fact, the letter continues, “My day is full of this: I am at work and I think I should go home, I am home and I think I didn’t do some things at work, but in this case it was clear that there is One who says to you, ‘I don’t care how much you perform here and there, I want you like you are,’ and makes you be a mother more than you know how to be one. [We see that a familiarity with Christ is growing due to the fact that we begin to perceive ourselves in another way.] That is why after the Exercises I came home to my daily routine and things remained the same: there’s work, home, you think about the house and you think about work, but you are sure that there is a place where you can breathe again because you can meet Him. So, I resumed doing School of Community with a little more seriousness due to this intuition that keeps reappearing in my life but that I will forget again many times, as I have previously forgotten it. However, fortunately, it reappears.”

I was very struck on Friday evening, when in recalling something that Fr. Giussani said, you told us that the criterion for verifying whether Christ has entered our life, that is, if He is more familiar to us, is if the event of Christ affects my way of living, of being in front of reality, of facing daily circumstances and challenges. If this is not the case, that is, if we don’t have this familiarity, we face reality like everyone, that is, starting from the impressions that things arouse in us, and we end up suffocating in a life that “cripples us.” This is a great provocation for me. In this dramatic period due to some hardships my parents are going through, I realize that when I do not begin from Christ, from the fact that He exists and embraces everything, and that not even a single tear is wasted, anguish assails me and I cannot even speak on the phone with my parents. Only Christ makes me free from every project and every impression. Starting from Christ doesn’t mean eliminating the question of meaning with respect to my difficulties, it doesn’t make me feel right, it doesn’t make me feel settled; starting from Christ means entering into a relationship with Him, placing in Him all the need for meaning that I have, with the certainty of not being alone. This also changes the way I can accompany my parents. I will give you an example: the other day, talking to my mother, I tried to find the positive elements that provided a little respite in the day.

Afterwards, working on the Exercises, I realized that the point is not even this, the question is not to find the positive things that give an apparent satisfaction within the drama of living. The point is to be sure of a relationship, to be sure that He who gives me what I am living gives it to me for myself and for my journey, and that this is good and positive, that there is no need for anything else. It is the path the Lord is giving me. This week my wife reminded me that the One who is allowing these hardships is the One who some time ago gave beautiful things to my parents. I am discovering that familiarity with Christ doesn't change the circumstances, but gives full satisfaction within the dynamics of living with all its apparent contradictions. Perhaps more than ever I am asked to remind my mother of this love: that in life, even in hardship, one is loved. Honestly, I do not really know how to accompany my parents —I always thought that parents supported their children and not the other way around. For me all of this is a continuous discovery, because I unfortunately find myself still very fragile, despite all the miracles I see happening around me. I am grateful to this companionship that supports me and helps my gaze to remain fixed on Christ.

This is the task of our companionship. And it is clear when this task is fulfilled: when it is not, “anguish assails me”; instead, when it is present “it frees me from every project.” Then, “starting from Christ means entering into a relationship with Him” again, in relationship with Him and with that presence that has unmistakable features, “ultimately unique.” “I am discovering that familiarity with Christ doesn't change the circumstances, but gives full satisfaction within the dynamics of living.” It is impossible to say this if one doesn't live it, if one doesn't experience it. Only when one discovers this path does he find himself doing things that he believed were impossible. I am very much amazed at what you say: you can accompany your parents in this moment of hardship for the journey you are making; otherwise, you would propose to them solutions that are destined to fail both for you and for your parents, and for your children, your colleagues, and your friends in your Fraternity group. We can become a true companionship for one another, a companionship that doesn't give up, only if we are on a journey, if we continually discover what brings familiarity with Christ into our lives. Then one wishes to communicate it, to his mother or to the neighbor, as someone who lives abroad writes, “Last month our neighbor, a 97-year-old man who lived on our street since he was born and was a reminder of its past history, died. We often saw each other in our backyard and our talks always revolved around gardening, with him making fun of how our garden looked pitiful, while his was always lush and well-maintained. About a year ago, when he was aware that death was approaching and that his legs no longer held him, he suddenly said to me, “But what is the point of being born, if then everything that is alive ends up in nothing, in the ground?” At that moment I was so moved and felt such a deep tenderness toward him that it made me say, “My friend, nothing of all that is beautiful and good will be lost. Everything remains forever. There is a big party waiting for you in Paradise.” He looked at me with his ironic look and asked, “Do you really believe that there is this party?” In tears, I told him, “I am sure!” Then his countenance suddenly changed and his eyes filled with a very powerful longing. He leaned his head on my shoulder and said, “Then invite me to this party.” From that moment on, everything we did in our own little way to assist him during the difficult months that followed—until he was hospitalized—was full of that promise that God made happen that day in our backyard. When he died, I saw with sorrow that his relatives, who do not believe in anything, didn't even organize a non-religious funeral, but only a gathering for all those who knew him to drink a beer at the pub. So I decided to write them a letter, in which I told them about the conversation I had with him in our backyard, because that fact saves everything and everyone. His sister replied by thanking me, because her brother had always told her about us and had kept

the drawings of our little girls among his dearest things until the end. Faced with a fact like this, I can only ask the Lord on my knees that He uses my life, that He takes it according to His plan, so that all our brothers and sisters that we meet on our way may be invited to that heavenly banquet that awaits us. As for the good thief: an instant of being moved in front of Christ saves everything, saves me and those I encounter from the nothingness in which it seems life can sink.” Behind Fr. Giussani's insistence on familiarity with Christ is a struggle against nothingness! It isn't just about becoming a little more pious or devoted, do you understand? The real challenge is—paraphrasing the question of that old man: what is the point of being born if then everything that you've lived ends up in nothing? And if after the experience that we have together when we meet, the situation changes, or the party ends, nothing remains the next day? Montale's temptation is always lurking: to turn back and see only “nothing behind me, the emptiness / behind me, with a terror of drunkenness” (“Perhaps one morning walking in dry glassy air ...,” vv. 3-4, E. Montale, *Ossi di seppia*). In what do we see, then, whether we have this familiarity with Christ? In the fact that I can look with certainty in my heart at the most dramatic situation of life, when one begins to approach the last threshold. Sometimes it is another person who makes us realize it, who make us aware of what we carry.

I am in college. I want to tell you about something that happened in my department with a classmate of mine who is very dear to me. In the past three years of college I have always had a very nice and very free relationship with her, yet it was never completely true. In fact, I was always very doubtful whether to share with her that I am a Catholic and that I participate in the movement of Communion and Liberation, in part because she is an atheist. In the last two months, some things have happened that amazed me and made me realize that I don't do anything, but that it is the good Lord who is at work. One day we were in our department for an assembly and I, being a student representative, was speaking with the course coordinator about some issues that were concerning her. My classmate, listening to our dialogue, reacted by saying, “Professor, how lucky you are to have a student like that!” The professor replied, “Yes, she is a good student, she is good-hearted and she is available.” At that point, my friend burst out saying, “She is happy, that is why I follow her.”

“She is happy!” Say it with emphasis, like your classmate must have said it! Don't you get excited in telling it? Your friend must have not said it so gloomily, did she? Come on!

“She is happy, that is why I follow her!!! I want to be like that, and to have many of her qualities.” I burst into tears and hugged her. From there a new relationship was born between us and I started to tell her who I was, what CLU is for me, who my friends in the School of Community are and how I live my daily life: studying, life in the apartment, and the things I have to do during the day. Yesterday we finished our classes and she was very worried about the fact that, not seeing each other as frequently as before, our relationship might end, because she wants to be accompanied in all the questions she has.

Do you see? The temptation arises, the fear that “our relationship may end.”

I answered her that the beauty had yet to begin, and that through her simplicity of being in front of her questions it was she who was helping me first of all to be serious with myself. She was very struck, we said good-bye with a hug and she returned to the train station in silence. Today she wrote to me that her elementary school teacher died and that she felt the need to go to her funeral, telling me that it wasn't very clear to her why she went, but that she felt like doing it. I think that in front of this it is clear that it is an Other who is at work. I am truly moved by what the good Lord makes me experience in my daily life. What an overabundance!

Sometimes He makes us discover it through another person who perceives—before we do and more than us—all the newness that we carry. Only this can truly invite us to go to the core, to the origin of what the other sees in me and gives back to me, otherwise we will not be able to find an adequate answer to the challenges of life.

A few days ago, while I was in the teachers' lounge, a colleague of mine came to greet me and another colleague, saying that it would be his last day of school because they would admit him to the hospital together with his daughter, who was diagnosed with leukemia and needed to be treated urgently. They would admit him and not his wife, because she had just given birth. He was very serene, sorrowful but very serene, even if the situation is tough; he must stay in the hospital for at least a month with his child and visits are allowed for a few hours a day by only one person. He was a little concerned that his wife might collapse under the weight of all her worries and caring for the girls. Since we live close to each other, I said to him, "Some afternoon I could take your older daughter to the park with mine," and stopped there. After he left, the other colleague told me, "This is the moment to help with deeds, not with many words. Let's prepare a pan of lasagna to bring to him in the hospital." It was true, looking at him it was really true that he didn't need to hear a lot of words. For a moment I had identified myself with his wife and with his other little girls, and the earth trembled under my feet: a newborn, nursing eight times a day, you have another child at home, your husband is in the hospital with your sick daughter. I could no longer breathe, I had the physical sensation that a truck full of bricks had come to dump its load on me. However, my meeting with that colleague had occurred just as I was meditating on the Introduction to the Exercises. I had just underlined this phrase: "Jesus replied, 'It is impossible to you, but to God nothing is impossible.'" This is the foundation of hope, of the possibility of redemption from demoralization, what rescues us from losing the tension of the heart toward what it is made for: God become man, Christ. "A new man has entered the world and, with Him, a new path: the impossible has become possible." So, I saw something new: that the destiny of that child, of her mother, of her father and of her sisters is good; they are precious in God's eyes and I am sure of it because of everything that has happened to me. I asked my colleague to support me so that our friendship will get to that point; otherwise, I will make the pan of lasagna, but there will be another brick that crushes me, given my inadequacy compared to the disproportionate need that they are and I am.

It is from the need we see in others and from the need we see in ourselves that, after having encountered Christ, we might urgently seek Him because of our discovery of a familiarity with Him. Otherwise, we too—even if we live in the Church and we are in the companionship—can perceive news like this as an unbearable burden. That is why, after this evening's witnesses, this page of Fr. Giussani's came to mind again: "If [Jesus] came here in silence [...] and sat down on a chair there, near [...], and at a certain point everyone realized it, [...] in how many of us would the affection be truly spontaneous, even though with still a bit of self-consciousness. [...] [Or] would we would feel covered [...] in shame [...] [because] we did not [...] say "You" [...] [seriously]?" What does it mean that we have not said "You" to Him? Pay attention to how Fr. Giussani's phrase unfolds: it means "that our collective 'I' has not totally been taken up into His personal 'I.'" He is telling us that we reduce the personal "I" of Jesus, His unmistakable face, into our collective "I." With phrases like this of a unique intensity, Fr. Giussani invites us, through real challenges, to a real companionship. There is no need to diminish by one iota the carnality of our companionship, but only when we find ourselves in certain situations, such as the one just described, does one feel the urgency of living a companionship suited to the challenges, to be able

to stand before reality. If we don't support each other, the circumstances crush us. We realize that the true companionship, the one that doesn't abandon us—as our friend told us, remembering Father Giussani—sustains hope. Otherwise, rampant nihilism will be the winner. Instead, it will not win, because in history there is an irreducible presence: it is the Church to which we belong. So let us begin this path of work on the provocation represented by the Exercises, so that we can recognize more and more in ourselves what this familiarity with Christ consists of. We all know the word, we all know the definition, but it is a very different thing when this familiarity begins to be so carnal that we can no longer spend days without saying “You” to Christ, without looking for Him, without noticing that He is missing, to the point that everything that happens to us becomes a provocation to look for Him, to beg for Him, to ask that He make Himself present.

The next School of Community will be held on Wednesday, June 20th at 9:00 pm. We will continue the work on the Introduction to the Fraternity Exercises. The booklet of the Exercises will be attached to the June issue of *Traces*. It can provide an opportunity to make the content of the Exercises known to others. Doing so could be helpful to many people—perhaps your parents, a neighbor, a colleague, or a friend—who might receive a word of hope for their own lives, a way to make it possible for them too to become familiar with Christ, a familiarity that is so necessary for living. What has been given to us is for everyone.

Books for the summer. We propose to you some books that can accompany us during the summer to live this familiarity:

- *Gaudete et exsultate*. Apostolic Exhortation on the call to holiness in the contemporary world, by Pope Francis.
- *La convenienza umana della fede* [The human convenience of faith] by Luigi Giussani (volume 2 of the BUR series “Christianity put to the test,” which includes the Fraternity Exercises led by Giussani from 1985 to 1987) will be available in bookstores on June 19th.
- *La voce unica dell'ideale: In dialogo con I giovani* [The unique voice of the ideal. In dialogue with young people], by Julián Carrón (Paulist Press). This booklet contains the texts of two meetings I had with GS students before their graduation in 2010 and 2013.
- *The shadow of the father: A novel of Joseph*, by Jan Dobraczynski
- *Fondata sulla pietra: Una storia della chiesa cattolica* [Founded on stone: A History of the Catholic Church], by Louis De Wohl (Bur-Rizzoli). Re-reading in an essential way the key phases of the Catholic Church can also help us to understand many of the ideas we have heard and seen in the School of Community.

Volunteer work at the Rimini Meeting. I would like to point out that this year participation by adults in both the pre-Meeting and the Meeting is particularly needed.

For information you can write to: volontari@meetingrimini.org

Procession of the Corpus Domini. After the School of Community of the last few months on the sacraments, it is easier for all of us to understand why the Church celebrates the feast of Corpus Domini with a public procession. She does this to witness to everyone that our hope rests on the real presence of Christ within the sign of the host, that is, that the center of our companionship,

the source of our companionship, is a Presence with unmistakable features, “ultimately unique.” That is why we are all invited to participate in the procession where we live.

Veni Sancte Spiritus