

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, December 14, 2011**

Reference text: The Religious Sense, chapter XIII, pp. 125-131.

Song: "Amare ancora"

Song: "Favola"

These two songs summarize everything that we are about to say in the School of Community: everything is given. In order to recognize that everything is given, it would be enough to become children again, but often, when the journey becomes harder, we start to fear, and if someone isn't right there with you, if you lack the certainty that there is One with you, One who will never leave you, who overcomes this fear, you are frightened. This is what we see many times regarding the experience of risk that Fr. Giussani is talking about, as one of you asks, "The experience of risk is not very clear to me; better yet, I have in mind some episodes like the death of my mother or my vocation, that were totally compelling and urgent because of the meaning they had for my life. Yes, I was afraid to face them, but at the same time I realized I couldn't back out, otherwise I wouldn't have moved forward anymore, and in one way or another those questions would have always resurfaced. Today's School of Community says, 'The more something involves the meaning of living, the more we fear affirming it.' " Why are we afraid to affirm it? Because the more something relates to the meaning of living, the more it challenges our freedom. We all grasp the import of what is interesting for our life. If a person drops a penny, he barely bends to pick it up; but if there's a million dollars, he moves pretty quickly! If one has to decide what kind of pasta to toss in the water, it's one thing, but if he has to decide to get married, his life is challenged and he experiences all of the risk; this doesn't mean that he doesn't love his beloved, but that he is aware that what is at stake is something so crucial for his life that he cannot avoid trembling in front of it. The more something is important, the more one becomes aware of the risk he has to take. Therefore, the question is how to help each other to live these moments so that our freedom may adhere in any circumstance. How do we educate freedom to do this?

I wanted to ask you a question on the 'acceptance' mentioned in the School of Community, when it says that it is the conscious embrace of what comes my way, because instinctively this issue of acceptance bothers me a little. Instinctively for me acceptance means to be resigned in front of a circumstance. If I think of some circumstances in my life, I say: I don't want to be resigned. So, I would like to understand the content of this acceptance and what value it has for life.

But when you say that it is being resigned, what judgment are you making on the circumstance?

That it is a circumstance that I don't want, that I don't want to face, that doesn't suit me; that I want it to change, to become something else.

Then it is difficult for someone, in front of this, to desire to embrace it...

I would say yes.

Lately each time I heard you speak, I heard you repeat one of Jesus' phrases, which has accompanied me for the entire past month, but it wasn't until the last School of Community that I was really struck by it: "Do not rejoice because the demons obey you, but rather because your names are written in Heaven. Do not rejoice about success, because it is not enough for you, it is too little for your soul; rather rejoice because you have been chosen by Me." At the last School of Community, as by grace, I heard these words not as I had always

heard them before, i.e. like a reproach, but as tenderness, and I realized that when I hear a phrase like this as tenderness and not as a reproach, for me this is the experience of freedom. Because it is like a discovery of myself, that what I am is something positive, while usually I always think of myself as something that is not all right. Here I understood that this is the widening of reason; whereas I realize that I run the risk of always hearing these phrases as something devout and therefore entrusted to my moralism. On the contrary, I was struck because the jolt of tenderness I experienced when I heard you repeat this phrase made me understand that when I reach this self-awareness then I discover myself attentive and welcoming what is present, I rediscover in myself a positive starting point in front of reality and I perceive everything as a companionship that is telling me, "Jump!" (in keeping with Fr. Giussani's example in the mountains). For me this is education: an authority that tenderly tells me, "Don't rejoice because the demons obey you; rather rejoice because you have been chosen."

This would be enough for us to end right here and go home: the fact that, by grace, it happens that one hears that phrase with all the novelty it contains. Because it is precisely as she described it, "Do not rejoice for the success of your mission. Rather, rejoice because you have been chosen by Me." But one who says something like this, who foresees the disappointment of the day after the success (if not the instant after), already sets you free. The fact that many times we heard that phrase as a reproach means that we often reduce the Gospel to moralistic instructions that are never able to grasp the substance of what is truly there. It was enough for someone to perceive that phrase, just for an instant, for what it truly is, according to all the tenderness that Jesus, by saying this, has for His friends, in order to feel the full experience of freedom. Why am I repeating this phrase? Because first it happens, and then you repeat it. First you become aware of its value and then you want to communicate to your friends the same experience of freedom, otherwise we don't understand what freedom is. Then one discovers himself - she says -: I am something positive; to be like this is not a misfortune (whereby not even success will fill me, because I desire something so great that not even success can be enough). It isn't a misfortune because Jesus doesn't leave me there, He tells me that I have much more, much more than success: that is, the fact that I have been chosen by Him. However, in many occasions we couldn't care less that we have been chosen by Him! It seems that being successful is more crucial to answer our need than the fact that we have been chosen in the encounter that revealed to us an infinitely greater and more powerful experience of life. Only an experience like this makes one understand – not like a sentence from a philosophy class – what it means to widen our reason, that is, what it means to rediscover the experience of freedom. Because freedom is this becoming one with oneself, and the experience of satisfaction that happens in life when one becomes aware of this. Then it is as if the companionship were telling you to jump: you can live the experience of risk. This is the value of authority: someone – above all Fr. Giussani - is given to us to make us understand what is the meaning of this, and becomes ever more an authority precisely because he makes you grasp an experience of reality that you were far from having. Afterwards you can't help but repeat it, because the very fact that it happens gives you a completely different way of looking at everything. There are many examples, but I am going to tell you one that happened to me last week in Rimini during the CLU [CL University] Exercises: a young man – whose letter I had read – who suffers from a degenerative disease (his mother had it and she died). It is striking to see how this young man is facing his illness. What could we say to him so that it doesn't become a consolation? What is freedom for a person who is seeing himself degenerating? He was asking me, "What about all my school projects on the subject I am studying?" I told him, "But what do you have in your life that is more interesting than saying 'yes'? You could think, 'He is saying this to comfort me.' But why should I? Is it a cheap consolation because you do have that disease, or didn't the Virgin

Mary, who wasn't ill, have anything better to do than saying that 'yes'? Is there another project in the world more crucial than our 'yes'? Is there an experience of freedom greater than this?" Tell me if there is anything more accordant, more corresponding, more true - not more comforting: more accordant, more corresponding, more true! - than the design God has for each of us and our saying 'yes' to this design! However, in order to be able to say 'yes' with this freedom, it is necessary that one understands that he has already won the prize, the treasure, because of the fact that he has been chosen. Otherwise no explanation, no moralistic approach will be able to help the person start from a positive. What does this mean? We shouldn't forget this, not even at the end of the book: we are reading *The Religious Sense* as a verification of the faith. We aren't reading *The Religious Sense* to see if we are free or not, but as a verification of the faith. Has something happened to us that allows us to have this kind of freedom to enter into any circumstance, or not? Because this is the experience from which Jesus starts to enter any circumstance, even to enter into the disciples' success. However, without Jesus' gaze, we can't even dream about this kind of freedom, even if we have all the possibilities right in front of us.

Starting from what had been said by the second witness last time, I wrote to a friend of mine. I told him that the focus of my relationship with him had changed a little, as I was thinking of that witness that had struck me, and how I was seeing that it wasn't any longer about affirming myself...I am going to read just a short passage from what I wrote to him, "I couldn't move back from this position, so much this has become part of who I am, and it surprises me because I didn't make this and it doesn't belong to me, even if it is the truth of me; it is a gift offered to me, totally inherent and part of my nature." Even as I was writing to him I was surprised by this, and I was aware that I needed to let him know this. With respect to the work we are doing today, I realized that the nature of my 'I', of my reason, is inherently made for a relationship. On the other hand, in relationships, especially work relationships, also considering what you were saying about risk, at times the community, instead of being a possibility to be accompanied when we are frightened, is a point of resistance in judgment, as if my 'I' couldn't express itself according to the experience of the 'yes' it had. At other times people's judgment (perhaps even people who have known me for a long time) seems a bit superficial, making me experience that sadness we were talking about a while ago; and I hope it's a good sadness, because I desire Jesus.

What is your difficulty? That in certain moments, as when you are facing the experience of risk, you don't feel accompanied?

Yes.

It is here that each of us needs to recognize which companionship allows him to face reality, to face any darkness; because if the companionship is superficial, in the end it won't be able to accompany us completely. This is why each of us has to judge and find the place, that presence that can truly accompany him. Because only one who has already entered that darkness is not afraid of it.

I simply wanted to give a witness about what we are saying. The most interesting thing that happened to me in the past few years is something that even today I cannot completely accept, and may sound like a heavy statement: the more I go forward the more I realize that I don't depend on myself. That is, the greatest revolution that happened in my life was when, starting from a plan I had since I was ten, a dream, things evolved to make me face the fact that I don't make reality, but, rather, it is reality that educates me. This awareness evolved within human dynamics, within a relationship of friendship: someone who calls you. This evening we were talking about being called. We say we are called – so much so that Christ means 'anointed' and therefore chosen - , but how am I chosen in my daily life? First of all, I

thank God for the fact that I am here and I am able to communicate with all of you, because there are many people in the world who cannot do it. Second: daily circumstances become unique when you realize that there is a reality that calls you continuously. Tonight until the last minute I didn't know if I was going to speak, then I entrusted myself and I said, 'Let's see what is going to happen'. My mother used one of the songs we sang tonight, Favola, as part of her will, saying to me: 'One day, when I am not here anymore, this will be my way of being close to you,' and she is probably listening to me right now. What is the beauty I discovered? That God exists and He loves me through reality. Soon it will be Christmas: until I became aware of this revolution, habit was slowly eating away at the beauty of things. When I was a child it was very beautiful, then little by little it was always less (I would say it's beautiful, but I was actually completely bored). Now it has become beautiful again because, there is this uniqueness that comes back in the daily circumstances, if you become aware that reality is a gift that continues to come towards you. The example of a gift comes to mind: someone who prepares the wrapping paper, the ribbon for the bow, goes looking for it, pays for it and then comes to you and says, 'Here, this is for you.' For what I understood, God gives us reality as a gift; this place, tonight, is the present he has prepared for us, the face of the person next to you, afterwards when we will go get our car to go home. This is the reality He is giving to us and if in this reality you catch a glimpse of someone who is continually calling you, someone you trust precisely because he showed you that he loves you, you understand that habit doesn't prevail and in this way you overcome any fear.

Thank you.

I am amazed that the experience of being chosen is growing more and more. I can say this based on something that happened to me in which I think I experienced risk: when I got personally involved with the article about the current crisis. I had all the reasons to put myself out, to offer a different judgment. I also wanted to do it because I knew it would be rewarding, but I found myself in a situation in which I had neither the freedom nor the desire to do it. I had every reason to do it and I was convinced of this, but I was divided inside. So I understood that one can feel divided like this only in front of something concrete; as long as I talk about it and give my own judgment while I am with my friends, I don't live the risk, and I don't realize that I am divided. However, if I have to talk about it with just anyone, publicly, there my current position is revealed, first and foremost to myself. This realization, however, has not blocked me. It has put me back in motion, almost grateful that a companionship like ours exists. Even though I may be so divided, there is still a place which cares so much about the totality of my person that it educates me, in other words it shows me a road that I can follow. I was really amazed at how I felt this experience of being chosen, this tenderness, simply by doing such a gesture. I became aware of the position I was in, and realized that there is something bigger that embraces something as small as me.

Thank you. Sometimes we wonder: how is this freedom educated? She was referring to the article "The Recession: a Challenge that calls for Change." This was Fr. Giussani's genius: to educate us he always proposed gestures to us! The gesture is what educates, because – as she explained well – we can have reasons. But it's only when we risk by standing publicly in front of everyone that we feel the split. I think it is important to point this out: how do we constantly educate ourselves to freedom? Through gestures, because a gesture is a natural way, that calls us, that provokes us. Since many times we don't respond by ourselves, our community proposes a gesture in which we are all provoked. We can do it together to discover and then overcome this split, and to express our whole person by doing it together. So I am amazed at what she says, because we are often overcome by that uneasiness for what doesn't exist yet; yet she witnesses to us that when she saw that division in herself, she was grateful to know that there is a place, that there is a companionship like ours where this split

is constantly overcome. So what does this fact say about our companionship? This reminds me of Fr. Giussani's sentence in *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*: "Only the divine can 'save' the human," the human dimension. So what is the nature of the place that constantly saves the human dimension? What is the nature of this companionship where our life is constantly rediscovered, and where our 'I' is revealed, and our reason is widened? He says this about the nature of that place where we begin to see the break between reason and affection being overcome. On this I wanted to read one more letter: "The sentence that affected me the most in this chapter is the one that says: 'An education in freedom is an education in positiveness before the real.' You were suggesting to pin point our difficulties. Here is my difficulty: I see that what happens is a sign. It's not a problem for me to perceive the threshold of the mystery towards which reality pushes me. In spite of this I often feel paralyzed, as Fr. Giussani in the mountains when he was a little boy. It's as if I was still not certain of the ultimate positivity of reality. I was very struck by the fact that in front of the same event, of the same split, of the same mysterious turn, for you sacrifice is there, but it's not an obstacle. For me, instead, it's so cumbersome, that it paralyzes and consumes me. I desire for myself that freedom of a gaze always drawn by a positive hypothesis in front of the unexpected, in front of the objection, in front of death. What allows us to be attracted by this positivity?" Without this positivity you won't be able to enter, you remain paralyzed! Fr. Giussani tells us that it is a problem of community, just like a child together with his mom can walk into any dark room. The question for us is: how does the awareness of a place where we are constantly accompanied in our life grow in us – as the last speaker was saying – . But I was struck. We already mentioned this when we did this chapter at the Fraternity Exercises: we need a presence that can overcome this break, this split between reason and affection, i.e., a presence – as we had said – that glues itself to me so as to enable me to overcome this fracture. But Fr. Giussani says that when things become really complicated, when life leads us beyond our predictions, not even this is enough. I quote Fr. Giussani in *Is It (Really?!) Possible to Live This Way?*: "Grace. Only this, at a certain point, can fulfill what our companionship was not able to fulfill, and what the great man was not able to fulfill." He is talking about the disciples. When the time of the Passion came, they all ran away. It's not that Jesus was not with them. But they had to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome this last split. As a matter of fact, it's the grace of the Holy Spirit that made the disciples free, publicly, in front of everyone and with no fear. This is why Saint Paul said that nobody can say that Jesus is Lord, nobody can confess Jesus strongly and truthfully if not through the Holy Spirit. And how does the Holy Spirit act among us? This Holy Spirit for us is the grace of the charisma, and only by living in a place like this can we take the last step. When we have to face these issues, I always think about Jesus. What allowed Him to have a positive starting point even in front of the biggest challenge a man can have, i.e. passion and death? What? Only His relationship with the Father. Only a relationship that is more powerful than any challenge, of any pain, because at the end everyone abandoned Him. This is the question of our life: whether for us faith is a present experience, confirmed by experience, that reveals more and more a relationship with the Father that enables us to face any circumstance together with Christ. Because the possibility for this positive starting point is precisely there: it's in the ultimate mystery of reality that was revealed to us in a face with the name of Jesus. In Him we get to know the true face, full of tenderness towards us, of a Father, because we have known the Father through Jesus. It's only if this ultimate relationship becomes more and more familiar, truer, and more pressing, that we'll be able to face any circumstance. Otherwise, as soon as life's challenges prevail over our abilities to face reality, we'll succumb. So, I am going to conclude by re-reading two passages that begin on page 228 of *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro* ('What is Most Dear to Us'). I found these passages very impressive as I was preparing the CLU Exercises. I am going to refer to them

to answer the two fundamental questions that emerged in these last two chapters and which seem to me indicative of the journey Fr. Giussani proposes to us. One is about reason: “The problem of *The Religious Sense* is exactly to help each other understand that the human horizon is not exhausted in what one can see and touch. So it’s like an exercise [it’s as if we had to train ourselves]: it’s by exercising reason as a function of faith [to avoid remaining in the apparent] – faith as grace that develops reason –, it is by exercising one’s own rational life [by using reason in this way] that, more or less slowly, the idea “as if God was not there” [living reality, after all, as if God was not there] becomes the God That one can see, the God That one can hear, the God That becomes one’s friend.” Fr. Giussani is inviting us to an exercise, to a work, i.e., to use our reason according to all its truth, without stopping at what we can see and touch (positivism), so that, precisely through this exercise of reason, slowly we can start seeing Him, and touching Him with our hands. We can recognize Him by using reason in this way because – as the second to last speaker this evening was saying – we cannot avoid living reality as something which points to something beyond, which points to this You. Just imagine if every time we got stuck, every time we were suffocated by circumstances, we started to ‘wield’ reason! But we think that doing other things is more interesting. Everything is more interesting than this...The second passage is about the break between recognition and affection: “The connection between recognition and affection is the last trench of the battle [do you understand, my friends?]. To recognize that God exists [which is what reason recognizes] and to have this recognition become something stable, with a certain stability, is easy enough as time goes by [it’s in time that this happens, if one begins to do it]. The most difficult thing is to go from this God Who is there [from this recognition], Whom one can almost see [if one uses reason, as he was saying earlier, one can see Him and touch Him], to the affection for Him [this is the most difficult thing: everyone can say that God exists, but the most difficult thing is to go from there to affection for God. It’s our last trench]. This lack of affection is overcome by further maturity: it is time that acts, if one starts from the right position, i.e., if one knows what reason is, if one is able to really be amazed, if one really realizes what faith is, so if one is aware of the input, the force that is within everything: everything is sign. If one realizes, if one begins to see a glimpse of the great presence, then time that goes by makes this presence become continuous, and turns ever more easily this continuous presence into the object of affection.” And when God becomes one’s object of affection, I can enter into any circumstance, like the child with his mom. But in order for this to happen, one needs to be willing to do this work, because otherwise this affection will never be ours! Now we can understand this better: why did Fr. Giussani insist on this point? Because he knew well what we are saying now about positivism. He knew that many times we use reason in a reductive way (and so we never get to overcome this break). So, if we really want to start from this position of positivity every time, whatever the circumstance may be, the path that Fr. Giussani proposes to us is really simple, anyone can follow it. We only need to take it seriously, each of us needs to accept to be educated to this. Then you’ll begin to understand, first of all for yourself, what life is, and what novelty is introduced in life by accepting the proposal of the charism.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, **January 11th** at 9:30 pm. We’ll talk about the 14th chapter of *The Religious Sense*: “Reason’s Energy Seeks to Penetrate the Unknown.” Let’s ask ourselves this question, because, as we said on January 26th: it is only if we have this experience, that we just described, that we can really live this chapter, that we can really be religious, just like this chapter describes. Let’s see what we’ll discover by re-reading it.

Please remember that the book *Spirto gentil* is coming out. It contains the texts of the booklets attached to the 52 CDs of the series *Spirto Gentil*, founded and directed by Fr. Giussani.

We know that for Fr. Giussani music was a privileged way to perceive beauty as the splendor of the truth, capable of provoking and keeping alive one's desire for the "Infinite Beauty." Fr. Giussani recognized in music an exceptional way through which the Mystery speaks to man's heart. This is why he systematically used music as a privileged instrument to educate. Having a single book collecting of all his commentaries (together with those of various critics, music experts and composers) on the various CDs of the "big masters," is a precious instrument. This is why we have decided to make it available for everyone in this book.

Glory Be

I wish all of you and those who are connected a Merry Christmas.