

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, October 12, 2011

Reference text: The Religious Sense, chapter 10, pp. 100-109. “To Live Always the Real Intensely”, Traces, no. 9, 2011, pp. I-XVI (Page One).

Song: “Le stoppie aride”

Song: “Il mio volto”

Glory Be

“Make me walk in Being.” Let’s ask that this may be our journey this year.

As we have seen, Beginning Day is a proposal to the reason and the freedom of each of us to answer life’s urgent needs. However, one can understand this proposal only through experience. We have to stand firm on what Fr. Giussani always instructed us to do: reality becomes transparent in experience. Therefore, we don’t arrive to the truth of the proposal through our thoughts and intentions, but we get to it by verifying it in our experience. This is why each person is called, is challenged, to verify the proposal in reality, in life, so that its truth may appear in front of our eyes; otherwise it will be just words, and we will think that we have understood. However, one doesn’t understand what love is primarily by reading books about love; one understands it by experiencing it! This is why the work we do here cannot replace this experience. By getting together we accompany each other in the verification of a present experience, confirmed by the experience itself. We are here together to witness to each other the work we have done, in order to help each other, because the work done by one person is something good for all, the discovery made by one is a something good for all, the grace given to one is something good for all; we are here also to tell each other facts that help us understand the truth of the proposal. This relationship between personal work and shared verification is crucial, so that each person may be helped, supported, accompanied in the experience we are having.

I am starting from zero, that is, from that moment at Beginning Day when you reminded us of that sentence of Fr. Giussani, where he says that we don’t look at present things as present, starting with the leaf and so on. This is so true, and it is also true that when, on the contrary, I do the work and in front of things I get to the core and I arrive to recognize Him, when I get there then everything changes, because it is true that also my affectivity is moved and that unity happens again. But this happens once in a thousand years, while everything, everything, everything, requires that I do this kind of work, which I never do, unless reality forces me to. I got scared, because I thought, “Where am I really living?” If I treat everything ‘normally’ and I never get to the truth of these things, to see Him, in what kind of reality do I live all day long? After Beginning Day it became evident that this distraction is terrible, to the point that I am not even aware of the magnitude of the problem Fr. Giussani has re-proposed to me.

What you describe is a work we usually never do, and this shows us how much we are accustomed to a weak use of reason, as we were saying at Beginning Day quoting Fr. Giussani. The consequence of this weak use of reason is that the break between recognition and affectivity remains. It is important that we really follow Fr. Giussani, because we easily think that there are more crucial matters. Instead, he insists that this is the real problem! Are we willing to follow him or not? Because usually we never do it. How many times in our life we read *The Religious*

Sense or chapter ten, and how many times did we follow him in this? This is why it is important that from the very beginning we don't say, "But I already know this..." The first thing we need to be aware of is that we don't know this at all. And we don't know this, not because we can't understand the words; we don't know it because we never risked it in our life in the way he is telling us to! In fact, many of you say and write me, "But I never do this kind of work."

Recognizing this seems like nothing, but it is the first critical step. Because the consequence – as the person who just spoke said – is: "I do not live in reality." Living without following the path proposed by Fr. Giussani is not living the real, because I never reach reality for what it truly is. Then we can be involved in many things, but what prevails is distraction, and the worst thing is that we don't even realize it! And we always think that there is something more interesting to do, something more essential; then we can fill our mouth with "Giussani, Giussani, Giussani," but there's no way that we are following Giussani, because on this point we don't give a damn about him! As this friend writes me, "I realize that what you said at Beginning Day is crucial for my life, and I need you to correct me in this work. What I desire most, what I need most, is to be present to the present, to be able to vibrate with my whole self in front of present things, because I realize that for me it becomes unbearable to live with my patients, my family, my girlfriend, my friends, waiting for my fulfillment in the instant after the present moment; that is, it is unbearable to live as if the present didn't exist, as if what is in front of my eyes couldn't be interesting for my life [this is why we always wish for the present moment to end and for the following one to come, and so on: it is unbearable!] However, I recognize that ninety-nine percent of the times I reduce the awe in front of being and in front of things that you describe, that awe we need to be educated to again, I reduce it to a sentimental awe, a reaction that, as such, doesn't depend on me but fluctuates according to my sensitivity and my emotional state. Also, I recognize that this attention to being, to reality, cannot be the fruit of a thought or of a right and good intention of mine; better yet, it can be, but it doesn't last, because I get quickly bored with my effort, since instead of making life more intense it makes it burdensome. It is immediate: it is easy to recognize the difference between someone who is amazed and someone who thinks he should be amazed." So, the first sign of the importance of the path Fr. Giussani makes us follow is that if I don't follow it life becomes unbearable.

In spite of the fact that I read it many times, I am not sure I understood clearly what is the experience Fr. Giussani wants to show us. I would like to understand better when recognizing this inexorable presence is a true act of reason and when it is only a sentimental reaction.

This is the second important issue regarding what we are saying. The essential difference is that an emotional reaction leaves us fluctuating, that is, we remain in our unsettled emotional state, as if there wasn't really anything we can cling to. This is why I like the example of the pebble swept away by the stream. How can a person being swept away by the stream tell if it is only a momentary feeling or if he is really grasping a piece of reality? From the fact that he stops floating, that he has something to adhere to. Without this I continue to live depending on my mood; it can change in a second, and in the following instant it is again at the mercy of this fluctuation. I realize that there really is an adequate use of reason because of the change it introduces in me. I recognize this when all of my "I" is taken, drawn by what I have in front of me. This is why I cannot find a better formula than the one Fr. Giussani uses: the entire problem of reason and intelligence is contained in the episode of John and Andrew, because they were both taken, so drawn to Him that from that moment on, even if they made a thousand mistakes,

they always remained His. This “being His” cannot hold if not for the fact that, amongst all things, they grasped something forever.

During the lesson at Beginning Day in Assago I was very struck by something I had never noticed before: our movement uses the word ‘presence’ to define the ultimate nature of reality, the event of Christ now, and our task. We use the same word to say three things that in the world vocabulary are expressed with three different words (Christ, reality, the “I”). I was very struck because it is like a suggestion that I need His presence to recognize that reality is a presence, and this makes me a presence.

Say it again. Say it again exactly like you just said it, because it is a clear formulation.

I need Christ’s presence to recognize that reality is a presence, and this is what makes me a presence. Otherwise my task, for example in my job, is always either political or ideological. The Monday after Beginning Day I went into a classroom of kids who worry me a lot this year; I gave a beautiful lecture and when I left I asked myself, “Why was it so beautiful? What happened that was so interesting?” What happened was that I wasn’t dominated by my lecture, but I was focusing instead on what was happening in the kids, and so I established a true dialogue with the other. It is when you become aware of the other as presence that you are a presence, otherwise you are never a presence; you can be able to incite a group, you may indoctrinate them, but you are not this kind of presence.

What made you recognize them as presence that day?

What had happened the previous Saturday.

I find this use of the word “presence” according to three different meanings very interesting. The nature of reality: the present things as presence. The nature of Christianity: an exceptional Presence. The nature of our task: to become a presence to others, in reality, in the world, in history. Instead, this being a presence is often disconnected, perceived according to a certain dualism, as this person is writing to me, “While you were speaking at Beginning Day in Assago I found myself being very enthusiastic in certain moments and even moved to tears, not because of a sentimental tendency, which I don’t have, nor because I was listening to a new doctrine, but because what I was hearing was true. What you said and the words of Fr. Giussani that you repeated to us made me feel looked at once again like the first time, in a way that doesn’t forget anything nor does it make it easier for me, but a way that told me again, embracing me, who I am and what reality is made of. You repeated to me that my desire to be is not a utopia, but that which has really started to become flesh, making the path walked up to now interesting. Moreover, the care taken in preparing every detail of this gesture; it wasn’t something else added to your words, but a fragment – ephemeral, but sacramental – of that Presence. I felt growing in me some of that naïve boldness that allowed me to repeat as truly mine the words of Sunday’s Responsorial Psalm, “With your help I can advance against a troop, with my God I can scale a wall;” this is also helping me to face my job and the various daily tasks as manifestations of the great plea that everything may be true and so, redeemed. In contrast with this I was a bit surprised by the position of some friends to whom I was telling these things, who said to me, “Yes, it is true, but then we forget,” or, “Yes, but then look at life, I would like to understand what is the work we need to do,” or yet, “Yes, yes, but then, how do we risk ourselves in the world?” [everything disconnected!]. At times it was also my position, but now I realize that all those ‘but’ and ‘however’ are destructive, and are an example of the absence of that vibration Fr. Giussani was talking about, that doesn’t let one stop even for a second in front of what you said, looking at it and at ourselves with one instant of total affection [there isn’t even a second of that

‘passivity’ we spoke about]. It seems that the work of discovering reality as presence in the end is still a premise, and that sooner or later you will reveal to us the mystery of how to be present in our environment [it is shocking: since this seems abstract to us, then we have to add something that makes us present in the environment!], of how to be able to help each other and to be happy about what we are living.” This is dualism, through and through! In fact, what makes us a true presence? What makes us recognize present things as presence? Try this test (I took it myself): what did you tell your friends when you saw them again at the end of the summer? What was a presence for you during the summer, so much so that you felt the need to tell it to others? Those aspects, those facts in which there was something that amazed you. And why were you amazed? Because there was something more (that couldn’t be reduced to the usual things), and this imposing presence made it easier for us to recognize the present things as present. This is what we told them. Things became so present for us because they were full of the Mystery who filled us with wonder. Reality is interesting; reality interested us this summer for that possibility of recognizing the Mystery present in those things. We are well aware of what life becomes when these things happen. Through these things we are educated to recognize ever more every present thing, from the leaf on, because the exceptional presence of Christ in these facts, in what happens, makes them so present to us to pull us out of that distraction in which we continuously fall. This is the way in which the Mystery educates us to recognize everything as presence, everything as sign. We become a presence only when we start living reality like this. Our becoming a presence is not something added on to the way we relate to reality, but the very way in which we relate to reality! It is there that we verify if we have become a presence, because this is what makes a difference; otherwise we live in reality like everybody else, suffocating like everybody else, and then we make some gesture to say that we are present (which is a ridiculous way to conceive the presence). This is why, often even the grand gesture we make – and when it becomes necessary we do make it – doesn’t have the necessary authority; because why should the grand gesture be interesting when we are not seen as being present in reality, in daily life? The authority, the possibility for the grand gesture to be heard, that gesture we propose to everybody, exists if we have raised a curiosity by the way we live daily life, that is, if we have become a presence. If we don’t overcome this dualism the three meanings of ‘presence’ do not coincide any longer, Christianity becomes an abstraction and then we have to ‘do something’ to make it become concrete. However, Fr. Giussani told us that Christianity is the subversive and surprising way of living ordinary things! We become a presence by living ordinary things with a difference that is the constitutive factor of a true presence. A presence is not greater because it’s more numerous or more spectacular. There are many big things, spectacular things, that are insignificant, that are not a presence; because the true presence isn’t about being spectacular or in the number of people involved, but in its difference! And this difference is born only from this way of learning the true relationship with reality. Without this it’s impossible.

I wanted to tell you about something that happened to me this summer. I left for my vacation at the beach feeling a little irritated by everything, especially myself. With us there was a mom from my son’s pre-school. I didn’t know her at all and I was trying to avoid her. I couldn’t stand myself, let alone others. One day I met her by chance, and she told me that her husband had not been well. I was amazed at my freedom as I was giving her some advice (so free that I could say: “But I am not myself”). I realized that Christ was happening in me. I started to look at everything with an incredible gratitude: my husband, my children, and the sea. I was amazed at

how I was looking at my everyday life afterwards, i.e., moved in my heart. Each instant was really full of His presence.

Thank you.

The Meeting exhibit on the 150 years of the Unification of Italy is now at the Catholic University (in Milan), and on Friday we, the senior guides, were explaining it to the new guides. At the end, one of the new guides asked us: “So, this exhibit shows how throughout history a man, moved by desire, actually created Italy?”. And I said: “Yes, but a concrete desire, like the desire to make money, the desire to make an impact in a political debate, the desire to educate, and the desire to survive”. We immediately realized, though, that this was not enough ... A friend, one of the Meeting guides, said: “Be careful, though, because Giussani’s thesis, which we put in the last panel, is very clear. It says that the powers that change the world are the same ones that change man’s heart, but the power that changes the world is a man Who has made His dwelling place among us, Christ”. We realized how this awareness opened up again for us the whole adventure of the exhibit: not because it was a sentence added on, but because it actually required us to apply it to a particular reality. So – as you were saying – you get to a point that overcomes fear. And you say it to the whole world. You realize that you are saying it with awareness and dignity. So I experience a re-conversion to what is happening by reading again that sentence, so that everything is new, everything is given. The first thing given to me is my heart burning again for what is happening. And because of all this you are a presence.

Let’s not miss anything here – Tell us more about how this happened.

By explaining again the exhibit to the new guides.

And?

And we realized that Giussani’s thesis had a name and a last name.

But why did you get there? Because someone asked you a question. If you had not paid attention to it – “Why should I care about this question? I explained the exhibit for the whole summer, and now someone comes up with his objections?” –, you would not have had the experience you are talking about. You let yourself be provoked by this newcomer, maybe. By accepting this fact of reality, you were able to get this far: “But is desire enough?”. So you went to read again the last panel which says that desire is not enough, that a Man has made His dwelling place among us. You explained it for a whole week, but you had not fully become aware of this. Can you see what it means that present things become present? Any circumstance, like in this case, can be a precious opportunity to understand everything again. This is something new that now can make explaining the exhibit even more interesting, isn’t it? Otherwise it would be just a repetition of what you have already done. Whereas, if we are willing not to ignore anything that is happening, not to ignore the unexpected that happens, not to ignore that particular way in which reality challenges me, then we start living a fascinating adventure, evermore fascinating, because everything becomes newer and newer. Why? Because we didn’t ignore even a leaf in the present. Imagine what life could become in this way! Rather than complaining, we would recognize circumstances not as obstacles, but as a resource that helps us understand everything again more deeply. Is this worthwhile for us or not? Each one of us needs to decide.

After Beginning Day, I realized that for some time I had been living as if I were used even to myself. So I was the reaction or the feeling of myself of a given moment. For example, as I was studying – at the moment I am writing my thesis –if I was able to write more than five lines, I was happy; if, instead, I couldn’t write anything, then everything crushed me. Or in relationships: if I

was able to treat my friends in a certain way, then I was ok and I was happy; if not, I immediately felt scandalized by myself, and I became the sum of all the various states of being. Along with this, I also felt coming up in me that deep nostalgia that never allowed me to feel calm and still doesn't. So when I was feeling completely restless, I would become my restlessness. However, this week I became aware of something impressive that helped me stay calm and be glad in all I experienced. I started to take seriously the work you have proposed to us, that is to use reason in a true way. You proposed to us not to stop at a pure reaction that I may have in front of things, but to get to the bottom of my face, of who I am. I started to be amazed, first of all, by the fact that when I wake up I don't give myself to myself, just like I don't give myself the desire to be happy. I am not the one to decide to feel again that nostalgia. This, by itself, tells me that I am a constant relationship with He Who makes me. I don't even give myself my desire and restlessness. They are given to me. So I say, along with the Pope: "He is more intimate to me than I am to myself". I began to look at myself, not as the sum of everything that I felt, but as the presence of my present desire. My name is connected to a You Who prefers me continuously, whether I am doing something wrong or doing right. And, as you said, life begins to have a strong foothold, not sentimental or floating, not dependent on moods, but certain, because of that link between reason and reality, down to its origin. I am starting to be amazed at myself, and not to depend on my feelings, on my success or my failure; I am even starting to look at my sadness with tenderness, whether any given circumstance is favorable or unfavorable. And this explains also what happened yesterday at my university, where we had a fundraising event for Avsi. It was amazing, because in front of all the people I met with my friends I was free from the outcome. I knew who I was, and, by looking at them I could make them participate in the same preference that makes me be.

Thank you. This is an example for the previous question: how can we recognize when we are using reason in a non-reduced way, and when there is only a sentimental repercussion? We can understand very well what it means to go through fluctuating emotions to get to that more "intimate" foundation of all fluctuations. In order to realize that I am more than all my sentimental moods, a feeling is not enough. What is needed is a true use of reason. It's like someone stuck in a swamp: if he want to find a safe foundation, he needs to dig until he finds a rock. Or when someone goes on an airplane and there's turbulence: holding the course is the only way to get through the turbulence. It's impossible for us not to through turbulent circumstances. Because of all our moods and feelings that constantly attack us, everything can cause us some kind of turbulence. The question is whether we remain in the turbulence or in the swamp, or we pass through the turbulence and the swamp. Going through them is a widened use of reason. I realize this because I get to something that is beyond mood fluctuations. And how can I see this? By the fact that I become aware of myself as relationship with the You. And this gives me a fullness that frees me from the outcome of things. What an awareness! I often think about what Jesus said when His disciples came back "charged" from the mission He had sent them on: "Don't you realize that this is not enough, even though you have made miracles and cast away demons? Don't rejoice just for this. Don't depend on this. Rejoice, rather, about the fact that your names are written in Heaven, in other words, that you have been chosen". It's as if Jesus were leading them to a depth in their relationship with the reality of themselves that they couldn't have reached even with all their pastoral and missionary success. Without this depth we depend on everything, because we can't find or reach a point that remains in any fluctuation; and this makes us uncertain, at the mercy of anything. What confirms for me that there is something deeper than all my moods? That I, in any moment, can say that this deep nostalgia, this desire of

mine, this abyss of fullness which constitutes me, all this I cannot give to myself, I do not give it to myself. In the positivist mentality in which we are immersed, the more one feels this longing inside, the more one considers it the clearest sign that there is no answer. But let's look at things for what they are: this nostalgia, this desire, this longing, do you give them to yourself? It's the exact opposite: the recognition of this desire is the clearest sign of His presence, because there must be Another Who reawakens it in you so powerfully. So, what constitutes the fundamental objection for us is, instead, the most decisive confirmation. It's the opposite, we don't really understand anything! Why? Because for us these present things are not a presence, and we take for granted that they are there. It's not to be taken for granted, it's not to be taken for granted!!! The height of this limitless desire witnesses His presence. And this makes us a presence in the world, in reality, at work, with our colleagues, with our wife, with our kids; we become a different presence. "But why are you like this?", will be the resulting question, not because you did a particularly great gesture, but because you are a presence. Does this have an impact on history or not? Can it move something deep down inside those around us? Because this is the biggest challenge for a human being: seeing that what one desires is present, that it is reachable. And this is what awakened in John and Andrew their desire to follow Him. One can't communicate Christianity in any other way. Only if we accept to follow this road, we can see, first of all, what happens in us and therefore be filled with gratitude and tenderness toward ourselves. We can be moved by this preference of Christ which enables us to live this way, so much so that we can witness Him through a change in our face. This enables us to be really present in reality, with this difference. I think that this path is worthwhile; however, as we can see, it is only revealed to those who accept to verify the proposal of the charism.

Our next School of Community will be on Wednesday **October 26th** at 9:30 p.m. We will continue working on the 10th chapter of *The Religious Sense* and the text of the *Beginning Day*, on which we have already started to work.

I remind you that we have an active e-mail address where you can send questions and brief contributions about the section of the School of Community on which we are working. Please use it only and exclusively for School of Community. This e-mail address is: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org

Given the importance of Pope Benedict XVI's talk in Germany, we have printed out a few excerpts from his speeches, because they witness how the Pope is a presence. He shows us what it means to be present. One can get to the German Parliament and go unnoticed, or one can get to the German Parliament and amaze everyone. And why did he amaze them? Just because he was the Pope? Or because of what he said? Because of that difference, because of that different way of using reason, not reducing reality to positivism, to the point that he could see something that nobody else could see, although it was in front of everyone, like for example the ecology phenomenon. We often reduce reality to something that is not true, and the Pope took this opportunity, the environmentalist movement, to say: do you see how there is a way of looking at reality, if we reduce it, in which there is something wrong, and now all of us can recognize it? This is why he says, with a sentence we all need to memorize, sculpt in our memory: "Reason and nature in their correlation". Startling! Reason and nature in their correlation. Because it's only when reason is in front of nature in a mutual correlation that we can avoid reducing reason and nature. This is the great battle the Pope is fighting. Is this familiar to you? Are we on his

path? This is the same exact thing that Giussani did from the beginning, since his first day of religion class, do you understand? When the Pope says: “Reason open to the language of being”, to *being*, are we trying to understand this? Because it’s not that we are kind of fixated on reason or on reality (otherwise it would be more interesting to do other things). Rather, we follow closely what the Pope sees as the biggest urgency. He is the only one who carries on this battle to widen reason. Without widening our reason Christ will always be something pasted onto reality, something added to a reduced use of reason or to a reality already perfectly constituted. This is why I think it is useful for us to read the words of the Pope, to help us understand also the meaning of the journey we are on. Because some of us can’t connect the two things.

In particular, I would like to recommend his speech to the Protestants and the one to the politicians at the German Parliament. Both for different reasons. The one at the German Parliament for what I explained earlier, the other (to the Protestants) for the way he looked at them, for his position towards the Protestants. Some could have thought: “He goes to the Protestants, he should bring up all their mistakes, from Luther on”. Read what he says, and see how this is a turning point in the way we think about ecumenism. Can we learn something about how the Pope is present in reality, also in front of those who are not in total agreement with him? He does so by affirming what we have in common and not just our differences. Can we say we are more present, just because we keep on saying what is missing? I think we still have a lot to learn.

So let’s spread this page to everyone, in order to offer a judgment and also a hope that can help us stay in front of the dramatic reality we are living, because this is the most decisive urgency.

Book of the month for October/November: *The End of the Affair* (also known with the title: *The End of the Adventure*) by Graham Greene, Mondadori. In *The Religious Sense* (in the chapter “Education to Freedom”) Father Giussani quotes an episode from this novel to help us understand that in front of reality it is more human to start with a positive hypothesis. He says: “The worst thing in the world is to place oneself in front of reality with an hypothesis, not necessarily negative, but simply suspended. In such a situation, one no longer advances”. But a positive hypothesis is an option, a choice for which we need to be educated.

At the end of this month it will be available also in e-book format by Mondadori.

Veni Sancte Spiritus