

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, May 25, 2011

Reference text: "Whoever Is in Christ Is a New Creation," Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation 2011, supplement to Traces no. 5 (2011).

Song: "La guerra"

Song: "Non son sincera"

Glory Be

I will start by reading a letter that one of you sent to me: "I am writing to ask you for your help on the question of method, which is a point that is still unclear to me. I am a musician, and the other day as I was practicing my instrument, I happened to make this analogy: what do I do when I have to tackle a particularly complex and fast passage with a difficult start that makes me stumble? I stop, I play it more slowly, I analyze it, I focus on the problem; that is, I tackle it with a very precise technical method, and little by little those difficult notes seem to get easier, and by following this path I get to truly know that piece of music. Now this question arises: 'How do I move when I am stuck on the difficult parts of life? How do I face them? Do I use a working hypothesis like this?' It is pointless to lie to myself: this threw me off balance." Do you understand the problem? Even if this person dedicates a lot of time to music, it will always be less than his lifetime. (Music is a piece of life.) When dealing with certain activities we have a method that allows us to tackle the difficult passages, but when we apply this to life we are thrown off balance, even though we have many more opportunities to learn. This is why, when Giussani insists on method, it is not a fixation of his: he does it because otherwise we can't learn, and after many attempts one feels thrown off balance, as this friend witnesses to us. He continues, "If somebody asked me, 'How would you tackle this difficult musical piece?' I would have a proven method to point out to him. And what do I have for life circumstances? Reading what you said and seeing you at the last School of Community I thought, 'Coming to such a certainty about Christ can be possible only through a scientific method [a method, let's say] like the one I have in music.' I don't think I am exaggerating if I say that, by desiring a scientific method, I desire to enter every circumstance without hurling myself into it haphazardly, confused and hesitant, saying, 'Let's see how it goes!'[Usually this is how we face circumstances: "Let's see how it goes, if by chance it happens," because it's like what we tried (because this is the word we would choose) didn't allow us to have an experience; in fact, it didn't grow; it didn't become ours.] And so I keep on living by groping in the dark. What do people say in front of the painful death of a young man who was going to be a father? 'When faced with such a fact, there are no words to use' – this is the sentence we repeat. But I would like to shout, 'To heck with not having words – Christ conquered this too!' However, I cannot say something just for its own sake. [This is the point: I cannot say it. I would like to say it, but I can't!] I'm asking for your help, because I realized that telling myself that the method is to follow Father Giussani and that the method is experience still doesn't have the same scientific approach that I see in you, and that, for the time being, I only have with my instrument." My friend, I have nothing to add to what I am saying to you, but the point is that this "scientific approach" can be obtained only if you take the method seriously and you verify it. I have nothing to add; I don't have a book that I've hidden away, or any different instructions. However, since you now have a method that you have verified in experience, you can learn only if you take the risk of using it. This is why Father Giussani proposes a journey to us, a path, and not a miracle: he proposes a method, and the method is experience. How do you learn this experience? How can you have an experience? By trying and betting on what you understood, and then going

back to the text, trying to understand what you learned. The first time we don't understand even a tenth of what the text is saying, because we don't understand by reflecting on the text in an abstract way. Instead, we learn by risking: then, when you read it again you exclaim, "Ah, I missed this before!" and you take the risk of using it again, and then you go back: "Ah, I missed this before, too!" Then you see how it becomes more and more your own. At the Exercises, I quoted Father Giussani, when he vented, "When I started to say these things thirty years ago, I didn't think that thirty years later I would have to repeat them over and over again so that the people who have been walking this very path for ten years already could understand them!" Nobody takes what he is saying seriously, "scientifically" (if you want to use this term). This is why a person could be relentless in music (perhaps also because he is getting paid for it), but in life he thinks that he can get away with being less precise... Without a journey there is no certainty, because we verify through experience, by living life, not in our thoughts. If we don't follow this path we end up like one of you writes, "In front of the sentence [Look, these are basic sentences!], 'Faith is a present experience,' I too often sit there as if I were totally dumb (but sometimes I have the feeling that it's happening all around me), without even understanding the meaning of the sentence, as if I were looking at Egyptian hieroglyphics, because I don't know what 'faith' means (too often confused with either sentimentalism or moralism, which can end up expressing itself in ritualism or in 'clubbism'), because I don't know the meaning of the word 'experience' (too often confused with feeling or imagination). When you ask me to do the work of recognizing my constitutive factors in action, I feel like you were asking me something that is beyond me. [No, it is within your reach: it is very easy, but a work is required. We all arrived at certainty about our own mothers when we were little: becoming certain is possible for everybody, everybody!] It feels like I'm running the 100 yard dash, and halfway through, I'm being asked to stop and look at the path I've already run. You need to make an enormous effort to resist the impulse of running: it seems useless, like a waste of time. Yet, when faced with the circumstance of a child being born, of a friend who is sick, of losing your job, you react. Then I understand that the only way to discover comes from following this path." But in order to understand, it would be enough to just follow the path! Don't think that we learn it from something abstract, by saying whatever pops into our heads! Now we have a marvelous opportunity for verification: this is why we spoke of the elections as the verification of faith. They were a fact where each of us saw how he did or didn't risk himself, what he did or didn't learn (not by reflecting on the elections or on the Exercises as something abstract).

At the Fraternity Exercises I was very struck by how you started, because it seems I never perceived as I did now that the repercussion of the risen Christ is the awakening of the "I," the awakening of the "I" as mystery. I was very struck by this, because I had never connected these two things: that it is because I feel alive again that I recognize that Christ is risen. To recognize that Christ is risen, I need reality; and to move, I need opportunities like the electoral campaign. We can no longer move for a reason inherent to politics. I discovered that in order to move, I first need to tell myself my entire experience, long before I can tell anyone else about it. From this point of view, I am struck by the fact that the Fraternity Exercises are not a moment of intimate, personal reflection on our feelings (as I sometimes hear people saying), but a historical judgment, the most appropriate judgment for this historical moment, because only an "I" moved in this very moment moves; otherwise there is inactivity that is preceded by a reaction against a judgment! I had many meetings to go to around Italy due to the elections, and the episode that struck me most was the meeting with a woman who was the top candidate of an important party in a large city where the elections were taking place. She was so struck by what we were saying during the meeting that she asked if she could come to eat with us. As soon as we sat down to dinner, she looked at me

and asked, "Why are you a Christian? How did you meet Christ?" I told her how I encountered Christ, and I was left speechless, because she told me, "Now I understand, because I started to move and I am moving, because I have a desire that becomes clear only by touching reality as if in the dark, because I am moving in the dark and I expect to understand something about me from what happens. Now I understand what I am missing: I am not missing God, I am missing an authority. I am missing a father, because you are living the same drama I am living, but you are not living it in the dark but with clarity, while I am living it in the dark."

Either the clarity of the son, or the darkness of the orphan.

I want to say something about the elections by telling you about an event. During the weekend, a volcano (that is, the Movement) exploded in Milan, because the life of the city concretely changed since the entire Movement moved, following the CLU. What I want to make clear is that it wasn't like moving behind the leader of a herd, but something totally different. The climate is violent; there is almost a physical intolerance to a presence that is there. Obviously, there are two reactions in front of this: one is fury (you feel threatened and you answer in kind); the other is discouragement (because they make you cry, they mock you, they reject you). But in Milan the dominant feeling in the Movement is gladness, something I haven't seen in years, a gladness that responds to aggression by presenting the reasons for a certain vote, repeating them and proposing them with a patience that is sometimes striking. I will relate just one episode. An Egyptian man attacks a group saying, "You are against people outside the European Community," and two Arab boys who go to Portofranco (a free tutoring center) answer him, "That's not true! They defend us; they are the only ones who really love us," and they start a long discussion in Arabic. Gladness and fullness of reasons. At this point I say, "There is something strange here, something exceptional, as if desire could see the presence of the Mystery in action, and this provided the sense of correspondence and the reasons. Father Giussani comes to my mind, when he used to say that when facing the barbarians, the monks stayed because they were certain. I received a text message that said, "They are chasing us away, but we are not leaving." We are here. But I want to specify the reason why, because I think it goes back to the issue raised by the first person who spoke before. We were confused, but Carrón remained firm and showed us the last part of the Exercises in action, when he spoke about the authority that challenges the heart, because when he spoke about the verification of faith, facing difficulties week after week, he made us experience an authority that is not mechanical, not isolated in a tower, but who is saying to you, "Try, look, verify." Looking at the university students who moved first, one by one, we moved too, but not as a group. One by one we followed this authority. To the question on method asked at the beginning, I would answer that here we are experiencing something greater than the elections; we are experiencing that, by following an authority not as obeying a command ("Vote this way"), but as challenged by the reasons, it makes us rediscover our humanity in a way that I think is forever, like a final step. In front of an authority that tells you, "Look at your desire, go to the bottom of it," you become the protagonist of a presence that I think will last, no matter who wins the elections, because it is a presence that perceives that nobody will be able to take this experience away, which is also the most effective thing. Above all, I think that we are starting to verify the meaning of the method of experience, a desire (reawakened by someone) that rediscovers the Presence it wasn't seeing before.

I am rereading what you were just saying, because this authority is not me; many times it wasn't me; I only said, "Let's verify faith," but what did it mean to verify faith? It isn't "the image of a robotic authority or guide, like people walled up in a tower who send out signals," as we said at the Exercises, quoting Father Giussani. Instead, "authority is a person, and by

seeing this person one sees that what Christ is saying corresponds to the heart. This is what guides the people.” It can be your own daughter; it can be a university student; it can be your neighbor or your friend. And this brought back desire to those who didn’t have it anymore. Because the method is the same: it is an experience in action. If each person looks at what made him move, he will recognize it, he will be able to see what possibility this explosion offered him, specifically when the conditions seemed right for saying, “Now we’re giving up.” Instead, the opposite happened; the opposite is happening.

During the electoral campaign I lived this experience of the verification of faith that you are describing. In a situation like the one described by the person who spoke before me, one morning, at a market where the majority of people were either skeptical or furious (usually both things at the same time!), I was distributing flyers. At one point a lady starts shouting at me from a distance; I start to answer from far away, and then slowly we get closer and this lady lays on me all her anger over the present political situation, et cetera. At one point, in the midst of her anger, I stopped her and told her, “Okay, ma’am, but what is the real problem lying at the root of all of this? Why are you so angry?” She started to tell me that her two sons had lost their jobs and didn’t have money for her grandchildren. Right there, something happened to me: facing this woman’s need, I discovered inside of me a vibration unimaginable before, something you can’t program, because the most you can reach when you program it is to increase the emotion you are already experiencing in that moment. Instead, it was something else: it was a passion for her destiny, which is something that you often wish you could have in front of the people you love, but which doesn’t happen. So with great simplicity I told her, “Ma’am, I would do anything in my power for you, and I promise to set up a job interview for your sons.” The lady stopped shouting at me, hugged me, started to squeeze my hands crying and saying, “Nobody helps me, nobody helps me, but you are doing it.” There you discover in experience what can pierce the skepticism that often seems impenetrable: this vibration in yourself when facing another person, given to me only since I met Christ, since I have been looked at in this way. I can face a need like this, because I met the One who can fill it; this is why the first criterion I followed was to support, with all my energy (by handing out flyers), the people who allow this place that is the Church, the Movement, to live freely and to propose itself as the answer to man’s need.

That a person can feel insulted like that and that it doesn’t become the prevailing reaction, that a person is surprised to live this vibration in front of need, this passion for the destiny of another person so much so that it opens up a chance for dialog! He was wondering, “What can pierce this wall?” Only a political argument? Sometimes we need to ask ourselves, “What does making an impact on history mean? What moves man from within?” These elections have shown us that there have been multiple situations like this, and that every one of us who did not have an experience could not face these situations. Rather, only those who have had this experience have been able to face it without running away, by opening up a possibility, piercing the wall. So let’s ask ourselves: if Christ wanted to affect history, did He use a wrong method by creating the Church instead of a political party? And in the same way, was Father Giussani wrong by creating a movement rather than a political party with a whole set of rules? If we don’t understand this, we’ll always think we’d rather do something else, and that we’d affect history more by doing something else. But this explosion would not have happened except for the reason we are talking about! If at the end of these elections we still aren’t clear about this, and we don’t acquire this awareness, then we’d inexorably go back to the old system, because we have not learned and judged something new. As this girl writes to me who had handed out election flyers in front of a church, “First I was deeply affected by the verbal violence addressed to me, and I wondered, ‘Why is this person so violent?’ At the same time, I wondered, ‘What has happened to me that I can face this person without playing

the same game?’ And second, I was surprised at the importance of the encounter in my life. I have encountered people who challenge me all the time about reason. Yesterday in particular I realized this is something extraordinary, because those of us who were there had to ask ourselves what we were learning. Third, I encountered people who were not afraid of my freedom. As a matter of fact, those who were accusing us had censored this, and this showed me the absolute lack of respect that people have and, even more importantly, it showed me once again how much I am loved, that I am not kept under a glass bell hoping I will never run into circumstances and situations that demand my judgment; in fact, on the contrary, our work of verifying the faith is out in the field. I surprisingly became even more aware of how grateful I am for the Movement, for the people that I have met, which is really unique: on the one hand, the fact that we are encouraged to use reason and to give a judgment that is finally mine; and on the other hand, the appreciation of my freedom. I realized that these are the two signs of the verification of my faith.” Who discovered this? Who among us has become more aware of the historical import of faith? Whoever has become totally involved in this proposal (which is not a set of rules to follow), and has verified it, and has seen how useful it is for his humanity. It is an example of Father Giussani’s sentence that we have often quoted: faith becomes a present experience, confirmed in reality. This person, by living an experience in the present, not a memory of the past, has discovered in experience itself how the experience she was having was useful for her humanity: this is what will enable her to endure in a world where everything violently says the opposite. Here is another witness, a university student writing to her friend: “Handing out flyers is dynamite for faith and humanity. It’s great to discover oneself in action as free [Look at what she is saying!], because of a gratitude that is already there and that grows by doing. I told my parents that I am handing out flyers and for whom I am doing it, and they didn’t take it well: ‘They sold you a bill of goods; you are a false Christian,’ et cetera. All the objections that I am facing from them or from other people won’t affect my certainty, though: in fact, it is growing more and more reasonable, and I am freer and freer, whereas everyone else, over time, is angrier and angrier, whatever side he may be on. This is meaningful too, because I was not convinced by a speech, but I have been and still am with you. So, the ideal criteria of the movement become more and more mine [Mine!], along with the realism and the passion to realize them. I don’t need to hold my nose in front of a political idea I don’t like, because I can clearly see the origin and the purpose. I can verify my faith in this, that is, I am finding that it is forming me to the point of showing itself true in the way I act even in politics. On Sunday I handed out flyers at my church at the end of the evening Mass. Since I had been distracted that afternoon, at Mass I asked Him in a special way to reconquer me. When I went out to hand out flyers, I found four other girls who were there for the same reason. One of them instantly caught all of my attention [One of them drew her attention: authority] because of her face: it was splendid. She was so happy! When I went up close to her and was really staring at her (how embarrassing!), she asked me why. And instead of answering her, I asked what her name was and what she did for a living. In the meantime, two friends came and they too were amazed by her face. After handing out our flyers, we said goodbye to her and we left. Then the three of us had the same reaction: ‘She must be in the Gruppo Adulto!’ I kept thinking about her because I had never understood the call of Saint Matthew. How can it be that a gaze could be enough reason to drop everything and follow? He said to him, ‘Follow me,’ and he followed Him. How He must have gazed at him! Now I know it is possible, because if in that moment she had said, ‘Let’s go,’ I would certainly have gone, literally conquered. The eternal [The eternal!] came to look at me, me, in that way.” Why? Because of the relationship with the Resurrection that the first speaker talked about. The living, the living! Not the sentimental, the living! Someone who can challenge others with this intense living.

About what is happening, I have two prevailing feelings, which very much determine me. The first is gratitude for what I see happening, for what is being talked about here too, for the work we are doing, because I am sure that without the work we are doing, without passionately doing the work we are doing, not only would many of these facts not have happened – and this is something we need to be insistent about – but I would have never become aware of their meaning. I would have never become aware of how important it is for me to find myself removed from skepticism, to be glad, vibrant; I would have never realized how historically important it is that I meet people and move them, that I physically pull them away from skepticism, how there are people who come into this grinder, this centrifuge where everything tries to throw you out, and yet they stay united with themselves, glad, happy. That is, I would not have become aware of the meaning of the experience I am having. And the other thing, the other feeling that I have inside, is a restlessness, a desire, almost a longing, because what prevails now is that I want to know more and more what makes this possible, what is at its origin, what is making these things that I can see happen. I can no longer reduce them to a question of how good someone may be, a question of organization, of numerical victory or defeat, of intelligence, of how good we are, of how much more capable than others we may be. I need to understand the origin of this thing that I see, that is moving me and others.

And this is the work we need to do: understanding. I will conclude by reading a text by Father Giussani, who reacts to someone who has not understood this origin: “One day in 1969, Giussani is walking the hallways of the Catholic University of Milan, ‘where revolution was rampant,’ when he runs into ‘a young man who was energetically saying (he had apparently gone over to the side of revolution), ‘If we don’t discover the forces that make history, we are lost!’ [This belonged to our history, but he was not aware of its importance, and had not understood its origin, that is, which forces change history.] I don’t want to enter into a description of the absolute naïveté – which is common to any ideology that claims to be universal – of this sentence. I simply want to tell you the reaction I had in my heart when I heard what he was saying: that the forces that move history are the same that make man happy.” As a matter of fact, “the force that makes history is a man who has set up His dwelling among us, Christ.” [He doesn’t say that the force that brings a change is a feeling, the force that gives us goose bumps... No, “the force that changes history is a Man who has set up His dwelling among us, Christ.”] Discovering this again prevents us from being distracted as men. Recognizing it introduces our life to an accent on happiness, however fearful and full of an unavoidable reticence it may be.’ Giussani stresses that ‘it is by going deeper into these things that one starts to touch his shoulders in the morning and to feel his body as more consistent, and to look at himself in the mirror and to feel his face as more consistent, to feel his own “I” as more consistent, and his path among people as more consistent, not dependent on how others look at him, but free, not dependent on other people’s reactions, but free, not a victim of the logic of the power of others, but free.’”

This is the verification of faith: *ubi fides ibi libertas*. Each one of us now, as in front of any gesture that we propose, can verify to what extent he is more free, to what extent he is more glad, to what extent he is more consistent, to what extent his awareness of the origin has grown. Because if this awareness doesn’t grow, even if we have reported facts, the same thing will happen as we said last time: facts without judgments. Without judgments, we don’t learn anything from facts, and so in the end we keep on pronouncing judgments without facts, that is, we create ideology, as if everything we have lived had not been useful for understanding more deeply the importance of what we have encountered, that is, for making us more aware that the forces that change history are those that change man’s heart, and that the force that makes history is a Man Who has set up His dwelling among us, Christ.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, **June 8**, at 9:30 p.m. We will return to the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises, along with everything that we have seen tonight.

In all cities and towns, the celebration of the feast of Corpus Christi will be marked by a public procession. The Church proposes this gesture every year to remind us that Jesus is a presence that comes to meet us today, and is a question for all society. To become educated in the total life of the Church, as in every year in the past, we propose participating in the Corpus Christi procession together with the whole Church. We went to Rome, but we also want to propose to everyone, to the whole Movement, this gesture of education in totality, in opening up our hearts to the dimension of the Church. Due to the course we are following, it should be easy for us to understand the value of this proposal. The exhibit on the Eucharist prepared by ITACA for the National Eucharistic Congress may be of help in this regard. This exhibit is being offered in several cities in Italy and I ask you to please take it into consideration: we cannot waste the opportunity of this exhibit and of the Eucharistic Congress to take a step in our awareness of the value of the Eucharist for our lives, about which we do not yet have a clear awareness. Let's not miss this great opportunity. In Milan, the exhibit will be at Palazzo delle Stelline (in Corso Magenta) from May 31 to June 12, 2011.

On Saturday, June 11, the 33rd Pilgrimage on foot from Macerata to Loreto will begin at 8:30 p.m. in the stadium in Macerata. This pilgrimage is an opportunity to become beggars again, to recognize the full greatness of our desire, which is so big that we cannot respond to it by ourselves.

Volunteers at the Meeting: The Rimini Meeting is an example writ large of what a new gaze on reality can bring into being. The Meeting is an expressive gesture that belongs to the whole Movement, to everybody, because it is the place where we can invite people and say, "Look, look what comes out of a faith that is lived in this way!" It is an opportunity for giving reasons, for an encounter, for a proposal, for an impact on history. This is why the Meeting is something good for everybody. It is one of the most beautiful things the history of the Movement has brought into being, and this is why it belongs to everyone. It is also made possible through the "I" of everyone who is committed to this reality, from the organizers to the speakers, from the people participating in it to the volunteers, whether by presenting an exhibit, or by manning a gate that almost no one comes in through. This is not the point: we don't do it for profit, but, as we were saying earlier, for that something more that we already have, out of gratitude.

What makes the difference is the involvement of the person *in* what he does, not so much *what* he does. If one is present, and accepts the challenge that he has to face to live any assigned task, everything becomes useful, and each of us can experience service with a benefit for himself. If one does a small gesture as a relationship with the Mystery, no matter how small, it is full of an infinite meaning, and it acquires a limitless importance. This is why we propose to all of you to volunteer at the Meeting as a prized opportunity.

Veni Sancte Spiritus