

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, 5/11/2011**

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: "The ballad of the Old Man"

Song: "Silenzio cantatore"

Glory Be

Let's resume our journey. I'll start by reading two letters that you sent me. "For me to look at the 'I' in action, now, means to recognize a deep forgetfulness. Last time you said, "You recount facts and then you add whatever you want;" you described extraordinarily well many of my last years..." This is crucial for us to understand why we do not have an experience, notwithstanding all the things we say. And it's not that now by recounting facts without judging we are less ideological than before, that is, when we were judging without the facts; it is another form of ideology, another way of getting rid of experience, that remains useless for our life. Because there are two positions: either facts without judgment or judgment without the facts. You can choose...What do they have in common? The lack of experience. This is why I am saying that it's one thing to follow Fr. Giussani and another to have the intention of following him. This is an example; we speak of 'experience', but we don't give to this word its true sense and meaning. We will see the consequences later. "...However, I can say that if I hadn't taken seriously the work of School of Community and of following you as I can now, I think I wouldn't even have this glimmer of awareness at seven thirty in the morning in my office... I live life in sectors, and now it has become extremely clear, I would say an experience in the flesh, what you meant by break between knowing and believing. Recently I found myself facing this question: but what does Christ have to do with the proceedings of sales, with semi-conductors [that is, with work]? And I don't know the answer. But, while before this acknowledged misery would block me, now it revives me, it energizes me, I am made of desire, and when I listen to you I hear a friend who is spurring me on, who is reminding me, and who loves me." When we become aware of this we understand why Fr. Giussani, as we recalled at the beginning of the Exercises, says that the only way to move forward in our journey is not 'facts without judgment' or 'judgment without facts,' but a true experience. The result of not following the path can be seen right away, and it sings like the 'silenzio cantatore'. Listen to this other witness: "I am writing to tell you what I discovered about myself in the last few weeks. A married couple we didn't personally know came to spend Easter with us, invited thanks to some common friends. We knew their story, though. Last September they lost their twelve year old daughter who had cancer. During lunch these new friends were telling us of their sorrow, at times desperate, when someone asked an interesting and provoking question, "Is it still possible to be happy after such a drama, after a pain like this?" Some of us tried to answer starting from personal experiences they had or they had seen, but to no use. At one point a friend urged us, "Come on, let's answer!" Silence fell among us, too long a silence in my opinion, almost embarrassing. I don't remember what broke the silence; I remember that I got up and left the dining room

with the excuse of having to check on some of my children who were playing in the backyard. At first, as I was talking with someone who was in the backyard with me, I found all the possible excuses to justify my behavior: "One cannot be so pushy; everything happened so recently; the pain is still so raw and no matter what one says it won't be very helpful." I was also saying, "Time will heal, I am sure of it!". However, in my heart [we are not joking about this] I wasn't at peace, and I felt a piercing sadness growing in me. The next day I was able to talk to my friends who had been at lunch with me, and I discovered that that silence had been meaningful not just for me. Someone said, "Our inability to answer the question on happiness yesterday makes one think." However, my sadness was not related to my inability to give an answer, but to a lack of certainty [the result of not following the path that Fr. Giussani points to us is that one never reaches certainty]. If someone had told me, "Your son is dumb" it wouldn't even have taken me a second to answer, there wouldn't have been even a second of uncertainty; I would have shouted and proved that it wasn't true. It's not that on Easter day [on that day of Easter; not on Friday, but on that day of Easter!] I wasn't able to answer the question (I know many nice sentences and experiences that can come in handy, even if I haven't lived them first hand). I was silent because I am not so certain that Jesus can do everything, that He can make one happy even after such deep pain [and she becomes aware of this not by reasoning, but through the comparison between how she would have reacted to the statement that her son is dumb and the way she reacted to the question on that woman's happiness: it can be seen in action, in the way we respond to reality]. Otherwise I wouldn't have given up [very acute observation]; I wouldn't have given up, I wouldn't have felt embarrassed. However, this sadness of mine is keeping me company, because in the past I accepted it saying, "Too bad, I will learn." Now, instead, I feel the same way I do when I have an argument with my husband, whom I love deeply, and I suffer because when I'm angry I say things to him that I would have never wanted to say, and I have a strong desire to apologize and make peace with him. Peter comes to mind, when he betrayed Jesus, and Thomas who didn't believe He was truly risen. And yet they became new creatures as you told us at the Exercises; they didn't give up because "their lives were taken by Christ." I wonder what is happening to me. Why am I becoming aware of this sadness that doesn't accept cheap satisfactions? Why am I not always behaving with Christ as I behave with my husband, as a woman in love?" This shows us how relevant is what Fr. Giussani told us in the famous episode of Manzú's son; if one doesn't follow the path he will not be able to understand, because he will never reach this certainty. And this will "sing on its own" at the first chance. This is why it seems that Fr. Giussani is complicating our life by making us follow this path; but the truth is that he is the only one who challenged our mentality, our need, who offers to us a path to be cured of this disease that we suffer from because of the cultural climate in which we live and of our inability to become certain about things. This is why he always insists that it is a matter of knowledge. We continue to shift the issue on morality, on being consistent, but this is nothing in comparison to the lack of certainty that ends up paralyzing and ruining us.

I have to say that the presentation of The Religious Sense and the Exercises arose in me a great turmoil that doesn't let me be any more; on the contrary, I dare to say that it is making me restless. Finally, after many years in the movement, I am discovering some things I thought I already knew and that I was trying to apply with difficulty.

Do you see? Christianity for us is this: something we think we already know and that then we apply. But we never start from experience. Please, go on.

To explain what is happening I am going to talk about two or three episodes that happened to me recently. First of all the silence. At the Exercises I always observed the silence while going from one place to the next. However, never like this year had I experienced that the silence is not an empty moment that I have to make an effort to fill with thoughts and reflections, even noble, right and important ones; finally, I realized that the silence is the moment in which I can look at what is happening. The second thing is that during these Exercises I finally let myself be provoked by what you were saying, instead of thinking that I agree with what you are saying, but ultimately being touched only to a certain degree. So, I arrived at the hotel on Saturday, I had lunch with some friends and, bolstered by this provocation, by this restlessness I had inside, I asked, "How did it go today?" A slightly embarrassed silence followed. One of my friends answered, saying, "Well." I pressed on, asking, "What does it mean well?" because obviously it wasn't enough anymore to talk about what was happening in life in a certain way. Again silence. Then this friend asked some questions on the two letters you had read in the morning, and I said, "But the letter Carrón read about the woman writing to her friend seems so important to me that I asked myself as I am asking to all of you, "But are we this kind of friends for each other?" Silence...

Silenzio cantatore!

Silence, broken only by a trivial fact that happened at the lunch table: I stained my shirt a little and for a few minutes this became the topic of conversation; then silence again, and then, finally, we started to talk again about the letter. Hypotheses, interpretations, and stances abounded. There was someone who said, "But your perceptions could be wrong, " or...

Pay attention now!

Or, "We are friends, we help each other, we pray for each other, for our needs, for our relatives, we go to Rome."

What more can one ask?

Or the last question, even more striking from this point of view: "But, is there maybe something more?" This question made me sad from a certain point of view, but even more I was restless about what was at stake. After the Exercises I went back to the office and during our break I brought up again with some of my co-workers the subject of immigration, that is continuously discussed because it is dramatic, important. However, honestly, up to then I had been thinking, "It affects me, but only to a point, because it is distant. However, in that moment I discovered that I couldn't stand anymore discussing this issue in such a way, and I found myself experiencing the same need the immigrants have; and they have infinite needs that I don't have because I am well, I have a home, I have food to eat, I have a job where I'm highly esteemed, in short, I basically have everything. From these three things I briefly recounted, a demanding need emerges: I need my life to be pulled out of this nothingness in which I inevitably drag myself or in which I am dragged by reality, by what happens, by the tension. If something powerful doesn't happen to pull me away from nothingness...

"But, is there maybe something more?" It is enough for one to become aware of his own need to start speaking differently about life, about immigration and about everything else. It's not by reasoning. What happens is that we speak of the same things with an intensity and depth that we couldn't dream of before! I am going to read a letter precisely on this topic (because often there is a lot of confusion on the 'I' in action): "I started to work on the Exercises and I discovered that I have been focusing on these questions for a few months: in truth, though, what do I think I am

made of? From what do I really expect fulfillment? What makes me breathe? At fifty-three years old, do I really still expect to be happy, to be fulfilled? Or am I settling? Until recently I thought that to discover the 'I' in action meant to discover what kind of contribution I was able to give to reality, since I have a certain experience of life, work, family, CL." We often reduce the 'I' in action to this, to a moralistic judgment about what we are not able to do. But this is not one of the constitutive factors of the 'I'; this is altogether a different matter, that is, what am I capable of? The way the letter ends is very significant: "Instead, now I think that to discover the 'I' in action means to acknowledge what is the good of my life that fulfills me." But he missed the point! Because before being able to know what is the good of my life, the problem is to know what I am! That is, we take the most elementary things for granted, we constantly skip them. It's not that the person who wrote to me is not trying to do a work, but it is as if he couldn't move from what he has in mind to Fr. Giussani's proposal. This close comparison with what Fr. Giussani is saying is necessary, because if we read again chapter 4 of *The Religious Sense*, we would see that in the examples he gives, our being capable is never at play! Instead, it is as if we already knew; we heard the phrase and we interpret it according to our thoughts, and the constitutive factors of the 'I' never emerge. And the result of this, as Fr. Giussani says, is that we don't see how what faith proposes is pertinent to the need I have discovered in my 'I'. Then we can celebrate Easter – as the previous letter said – without discovering that this Holy Day is relevant to the need of my 'I'. Then we wonder if it is possible to be happy after the death of a twelve year old girl...But has this something to do with the Resurrection, or not?! The fact that these things are not connected inside of us shows how much the experience of what faith proposes is foreign to us. Knowing and believing don't meet.

Naturally, for us priests the week of Easter is very demanding, very intense, and it was followed right away by the week of the Exercises. I wasn't able to go to Rome because I had to prepare an event in the parish where I am the Pastor. After the Sunday in Rome, let's say, by Monday the tension sort of subsided. I was struck by this. There had been Easter, the Exercises, the beatification of John Paul II, and instead I was sad and melancholic. And I was struck also by what I thought: I am melancholic, exactly as Carrón told us at the Exercises. For the first time clearly I was not afraid, that is, I didn't ask myself, what should I do? How am I getting out of this? How am I going to fight this melancholy to get back on safe ground? No, I said, to be melancholic means that I know You, it means that I need You. For the first time instead of fighting this melancholy I started to look at the whole week, to what was happening, starting from this melancholy, that is, waiting for Him. What amazed me the most is that I am not afraid.

What struck him most is that he is not afraid.

On March 22, after working hard for a work project that was really important to me, I had a performance evaluation that went beyond any expectations. Yet, I had in mind what you had said about the experience of your friend in Barcelona who had been so successful at her art exhibit. When March 22 was approaching, I had to do everything perfect at my job and work from 7 am to 11 pm. So, then, I said: it is exactly a curse, i.e., life is a curse, because if things go bad, they have to go bad anyway, so they always go bad. And if they go well, it's the same.

What is the criterion of judgment you used to say that life is a curse?

Because there was nothing that could have satisfied me, whether things had gone well or bad, nothing would have filled me, nothing. At the same time I couldn't tell everyone to forget about the whole thing...

Why couldn't they fill you? How do you know this? Because you were trying to fill your desire with what you were doing.

Yes.

Yes! This is the toll we pay every time that in our life we can't understand what we are made of. You say that life is a curse, precisely because there is nothing you are able to do to answer all of your dissatisfaction, not even working from 7 am to 11 pm! And we can be here for years without understanding this. This is not due to the fact that we are all sick or sinners, but to the fact that we don't understand. We don't understand what this is all about, because if we had understood it, we wouldn't say such things! But we keep saying them, like everybody else, like everybody else. We could talk about all the logic of *The Religious Sense*, but we still haven't understood anything, and we see this every time we talk. When I say that the sense of the Mystery is missing, I mean this. If you had understood the nature of your 'I', you would have never thought that what you were doing in your job from 7 to 11 could have answered your desire of satisfaction and you wouldn't have wasted your time. You don't try to climb this wall empty-handed, you don't do it, these are unreasonable things, we don't do them. If we keep on doing them, it's not because we are dumb, but because we don't know what we are talking about. If a new knowledge is not introduced, the only one, the real one, in spite of years in the movement and of Christian life, we'll keep saying that life is a curse, and there will be nothing that could change that, nobody will be able to convince us of the opposite. The problem here is at the origin. Am I making myself clear?

Second part. I come to School of Community on March 23, and I would say, the heart was really firm, convinced, and you kept on saying: "Ok, there is a Presence that keeps us company, but what prevents us from stopping?" On April 6 you went even deeper: "And you, and you?", and I, Carron, started to cry like crazy. Why? Because while I was going back home I caught myself saying: my heart was not beating and now it does. And I said, even better than Luzi – but because I was following you ... -: but what is this presence a presence of? And it's not over. You kept on saying: "Don't skip ahead, don't skip ahead", I didn't want to say "Jesus", but I ...

Jesus is not what's missing.

I didn't want to say it!

That's good.

Why didn't I want to say it? Because He was the One who had to present Himself. I understood it later.

He was in front of you. You couldn't see Him. If Jesus were not in us and did not happen in us, we couldn't say these things. What the Easter poster says is true: Christ is Something happening now, do you understand? Not the image you have in your head of how He should appear. Because if your heart was not beating before, and then it started beating, who was making it beat? Was it me? Are we out of our mind?! As the Gospel says: we are foolish because we don't understand what is happening in front of our eyes! Words and images, never an experience! Except when, by chance,

we say something about experience: “The heart wasn't beating and then it starts beating”. And this is the only thing we say about experience. But once we have said it, we immediately start sticking on top of it what we have in our head, all except the unity of the experience that makes our heart beat. This is why for many people Christianity is something we already know, and that now we have to apply. But you didn't apply anything to make your heart beat. You were amazed that it was beating while you felt it beat! And so?

So, at the Exercises I laughed and cried. I laughed when you said that the liturgy for us is not yet opening our eyes and recognizing Him. On the two Sundays before Easter the readings were presenting the episodes of the man born blind and the Samaritan woman. The man born blind who says to Him: “Tell me who the Messiah is” and He replied: “It is I Who is talking to you”. The same for the Samaritan woman: “Tell me where I can find this water”; “It is I Who is talking to you”. It had never happened to me to be moved at Mass. Then there's the temptation of moralism, but this time I defeated it. So I want to say thank you, because I don't know anything about me any more, but I have myself, now I have myself.

Let's start from the “myself” that you have. Giussani says to us: let's start from ourselves, from the “I” in action. Let it come out, and discover what you are.

It

hurts.

It doesn't hurt! Listen to what this letter says: “The last two weeks have been heartrending, excruciating, and extremely painful. I was overcome by disappointment. Maybe I am about to tell you something terrible, but you taught me to be sincere and I will be. The day of my first encounter with you, that gaze and of my re-awakening is getting farther away, and I realize more and more that I can't live off of a memory. I had put all my hopes in you, but you don't give me answers anymore, and often it's hard to talk or see each other because of my problems and yours. One day I realized that the more I thought about you, the angrier I got, because not even you were enough any more. I thought it was another disappointment, and that after the initial excitement, everything would have gone back to the way it was before. Once again, confused, insecure, uncertain, without a foothold. You should have seen me! I felt as if I was looking for something in a dark room, as if I was groping my way, like when there is no light and you can't see, and you don't know what you are touching. Any piece of furniture, any corner may be a danger. There were rare and brief moments of joy: a laugh with friends, a drink at the bar, a compliment from someone dear, and so on. So, in the last two weeks my life has been like a flashing light: joy and sadness, coming and going, satisfied one moment and saddened the next; focused for one second and then lost in a thousand thoughts, convinced and then disappointed. Contrasting and contradictory moods, one after the other, until, at a certain point, I got really tired of what I was feeling. Blown away left and right by these feelings, flung away, wandering aimlessly, powerless, a slave of my thoughts, a prisoner of myself. Because I have an idea of myself, I have an image of my needs and of the answers that I want to give myself that is totally distorted. My innumerable attempts to know who I am and to satisfy myself keep on deceiving me, strangle me, repress me, suffocate me, I am the one doing violence to myself. I am not enough for myself. I am not enough for my desire and I can't explain it to myself either. As Emily Dickinson said: “To fill a gap, you need to fill it with what caused it. If you fill it something else, it will open up its fauces even more; you can't close up an abyss with air”. So much so, that the more I tried to explain it

to myself, the more I was confused. Three mornings ago I got up and I asked myself: but in all this confusion, is there anything, even just one thing that remains, whatever it is? Is there anything I can say about me with certainty that remains as an indelible sign? My brain started to elaborate a million things, the majority of which made no sense, and the rest absolutely insufficient. Then I remembered the promise I had made to you: I will never say anything without looking at myself in action first. I observed myself the whole day, trying to understand what moved me, why I was doing things: lunch with that friend, studying in a certain way ... In all my actions there was a common denominator: a constant search for something that would fill my nostalgia. About me, about life, I only have one certainty: that my heart is full of nostalgia, is full of expectancy, of tension, is full of the promise that life is not empty, that I am looking for something that exists, otherwise I would stop looking. My heart is searching, so it affirms Another with a constant certainty. Suddenly, without any calculation, without any formula or any reasoning, that You came back. By breaking in, He overcame me, He assailed me, He involved me and He embraced me. It was this You and I, and that's it. And I started to breath again. Such an intimate and tender relationship to leave one speechless. What clarity! A lightning in the dark. I can fail, fall, make a mistake, take a thousand steps back after having taken only one forward, I can be left disappointed, be mean to the people I love, I can become aware of my nothingness, I can realize how low I can get, I can finally look at myself all the way to the end, I can look at how wretched I am, how little, how lousy. This is not what supports my life; this is not what determines me, not my confusion, my bitterness, or my sadness. There is only one thing that remains, and every time I can re-start from here: it's this You that I, unconsciously or consciously, every time, every day, in every gesture, desire and affirm. This is my portrait, this I can say with certainty [and if we don't follow this path, we'll never be able to say it with certainty], simply by looking at myself. I did not learn, I have not learned this, I did not decide it, it was not my will, but I can see it clearly, it imposes itself [this is a point of no return!]: my religious sense, the certainty of Another and of the privileged relationship I can live with Him. I don't know exactly who He is, what face He has, but He is there looking at me and calling me. For the first time in my life I can love. My pain, my expectancy, my restlessness: I can love that part of me that always irritated me. I understand that my nostalgia and my dizziness are the means of this relationship. I am always holding my breath until I can say "You", and then I can breathe. I wanted to tell you this because now my life has roots". A few days later she sent me this message. " I want to thank you because you let me take every step by myself, and you let all my consciousness come out, without fearing the pain that I would have had to go through. Thank you for your education, for introducing me to the depth of things and to the beauty of life. I hope I can always have a friend like you next to me, a friend who lets me be completely myself". Is it possible or not? It is possible if one takes even just a little seriously the proposal made to us. She doesn't know something more than us, but she followed and verified. And this is a no turning back point. Each one of us can decide.

Our next School of Community will be on Wednesday, May 25 at 9:30 pm. We will start going over the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises.

Father Giussani's book **What Is Most Dear To Us (1988-1989)** has come out. It is a collection of the CLU equipes from 1988-1989.

It is providential to be able to read at this time the text of these dialogues with Father Giussani, and to be challenged by the question: “What is most dear to you in Christianity?” But in order to be able to understand this, if we don’t do this work, we’ll always feel it like something added on. We won’t be able to say that it’s the dearest thing to us. And when life challenges us, we’ll remain in silence (in silence!) ... but we wouldn’t remain in silence in front of our dearest child. When Father Giussani tells us this, it’s out of tenderness for us, because without this work, we wouldn’t even dream about all this. For us to be able to say with the Staret Giovanni that “what is most dear to us, [...] is Christ and everything that derives from Him”, for us to be able to say it with the same certainty as the Staret Giovanni’s, how much personal work we need to do!

I think it’s amazing to see how Giussani accompanies us now with these texts, and helps us understand what he had been trying to do for years, for years with us. It’s never too late!

On Sunday, May 15, there will be local elections, not in all cities though. It’s an opportunity to verify the certainty we have, and how we talk about things, even about elections, according to the novelty of what we have encountered. And if we don’t do it, if one doesn’t do it, one will not arrive at a certainty. It’s not a question of “militancy”, that would be nothing. Yesterday some university students were telling me that, as you can also see yourself, what prevails among people is skepticism, not only about politics, but about everything, about life. All of us know that many times skepticism is not a problem concerning others. In fact, it does concern us. We have it in our homes. This is why; we can’t miss this opportunity to verify what has happened to us.

Veni Sancte Spiritus