

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, November 3, 2010

Reference text: “Living Is the Memory of Me,” Communion and Liberation Responsibles’ Assembly (La Thuile, 2010, online booklet.

Song: “Il viaggio”

Song: “Lagrime”

Glory be

I would like to start this School of Community with two letters that came in. The first says, “I was very struck by the last School of Community. One particular thing you said hurt me. I thought this hurt would pass, and eventually I’d be able to either hide it or forget it like on other occasions, but this time I can’t do it, so I’m writing to you. When you answered the first person who spoke, you said that when faced with painful circumstances, with life’s trials [I was reading a letter that was sent to me], previous experiences are not enough, and not even the certainty that without the Resurrection nothing would make sense [because this does not prove the Resurrection]; it is not enough to pray, because one could pray as if Christ were not risen [here he summarizes what the letter was saying; it wasn’t exactly this, but it is basically like this]. You said that it is necessary to make a judgment, and that judgment is recognizing a fact. Up to this point I completely agreed with you; I was nodding at every single word you were saying. But then you said something that felt totally alien to me and to the topic. You said, “All this is not enough; faith is necessary.” Faith? I thought, “What does faith have to do with it?” I was speechless. I didn’t understand at all. I thought faith came at the end of the journey, after making all the judgments on what happens and on experience, after using freedom. Then, as the conclusion, after using reason, faith comes in. I did not get it at all when I heard what you said at the Fraternity Exercises or afterwards when I read it over and over. I have joined the club, and only now am I waking up to the hypothesis that faith starts with facts, and that life’s challenge starts here, and I have to learn what I thought I already knew. I have to say that it bothers me a little to admit that you are always right on this topic and that I have always been wrong, but now I am left with no excuses. I am asking you, really, like a child, to explain the basics to me. And anyway, I think I am in good company – the club is pretty crowded.”

Why am I going back to this? Because I am taken aback by the difficulty that emerged during the last Schools of Community, as if what we need, after all, is an answer that is essentially sentimental; so much so, that many did not feel that my answering with a fact was adequate to their need. I’m telling you, if the person dearest to you were sick, what would you find most useful? That I comfort you, or that I tell you that a drug that can cure the person has been discovered? Which answer corresponds to you more? Which one is the greatest charity? Which answer is most adequate to our need? To be comforted in a nice way? To receive a good explanation of the disease? Or the news of the fact that the disease has been defeated and that there is a possibility to live differently? This is what I tried to do, to announce this fact as I faced the questions that arose; not answering in an abstract way, but talking about Christ’s Resurrection – which is *the* fact – not as an event of the past, but instead helping you to recognize those facts that give witness to the Resurrection *now*, that is, the changes that can be recognized in the testimonies we had listened to. I did not need to explain this to you, but only to

help you to look at what was happening there and to recognize that the only explanation for those facts is His Presence. If one does not recognize this, he has to go through the entire explanation, adding word to word. My attempt last time at giving a method had this aim: “Do you realize what we have heard? Do you realize that none of the things we have heard would exist if Christ were not present *here and now*?”

This last observation is in response to another letter: “How can one prevent his ‘seeing’ from becoming a devout memory, so that once again he tries to make a personal effort to recapture what happened? Because I am interested in this presence here and now; I am interested in experiencing today that certain faces are the sign of His presence to which I gave my life, that a certain place is the place of memory, not because it is written, but because it happens in front of my eyes.”

What is missing, if this is happening, is a faith not separated from the facts, faith as recognition of the origin of the facts that I am witnessing. Otherwise not even what happens in front of our eyes is useful to us, because we reduce it; we reduce the sign of His presence, in which His presence is proven. Father Giussani always told us this with great simplicity: what is the sign of His presence? “He is, if He is at work.” The criterion is very simple: He is, if He is at work; if I see Him at work, this is the clearest testimony of His presence. This is why the answer to our need is this recognition, which is not our attempt to imagine, to hear, or to explain, but the recognition, with simplicity, of His presence.

And this is why the simplicity witnessed by this other letter is necessary: “Two years ago, while in Freiburg for my studies, I met a German girl and we became very close friends. She was born and raised in Berlin and proclaims herself an atheist; she is interested in a million things that took her around the world to have the most varied experiences. Once I was back in Italy and she in Berlin, notwithstanding many difficulties and distractions, our friendship continued; in fact, it grew deeper, to the point that last summer I invited her to the vacation that we have with some Fraternity groups. Not only did she miraculously accept, but once she was there she was immediately taken in and provoked by everything she saw, washing away all my concerns that, being German, she might not understand a lot of things. Then she went back to Berlin for a job that made her basically unavailable until a few weeks ago. When we talked again she said that one of the desires that was born in her last summer was to read the Bible in order to continue what she had seen, and that to do this she would start going to a Protestant Church she knew. I was truly disappointed, because I thought that she was already changing the method, inventing what to do instead of following what had happened with simplicity. However, I did not want to stop her, but I thought instead of helping her to judge what she was going to see. We talked on Friday, and the first thing she said was, ‘What I saw in the Protestant Church was very important, because it helped me to understand more clearly what I saw last summer, and how different the meaning we give to the word “faith” can be.’ Then she explained to me that in that church she had seen that the pastor was focusing everything on feelings, and she made this comment, ‘Once you’re back home, there is nothing left besides passively following what the pastor told you to do.’ Instead, what she had seen at the vacation was totally different: friends who help each other in their personal journey of faith, using reason and without taking each other’s place. She concluded, ‘I understood that what you are trying to do is a human journey toward faith.’ [Compliments to this girl!] These words gave me a jolt, because I heard you saying them many times, but I am sure my friend never heard them. I was struck by how a new person, with many experiences behind her and an openness that makes her attentive to what she sees, immediately caught the unmistakable trait of our companionship, that is, the enhancement of what is human

and the radical use of reason. She was not able to find better words to describe it than what she said; she found it corresponded, and she was able to use it as a criterion for comparison with what she experienced later on, showing that it is truly something unique that cannot be reproduced at will. For me, it was an enormous provocation that pushes me to desire to deepen the knowledge of what my friend recognized so easily. [It is easy!] I am full of gratitude for the One Who gave me, undeservedly, a relationship with this friend, as an unforeseeable occasion to remember Him.” Not an effort of our imagination, but again, a witness, the “unforeseeable occasion to remember Him.”

My mother is very ill and the situation is only getting worse. She suffers from depression, and I am telling you this because it has gone on for many years, I suffer a lot because of it. My whole family suffers a lot. The situation is very difficult. Yesterday I talked to her on the phone (I had not talked to her for about two months) and we had another fight. She dumped a lot of issues on me that I find very difficult to deal with. When I ended the phone call in a very ugly way, I was shocked as I have never been before in my life, because I discovered a gladness inside me, a peace and a serenity in the way I was looking at her and at her illness and at the way I am starting to ask myself what all this means for me. The first thing I thought was, “On Wednesday I have to go and tell Carrón and everybody else that Jesus is true and that He is a fact.” This is something I never said before in my life in such a simple way. I can say that it is Jesus because it is not something that comes from me. I am not able to give myself this serene gaze. All this is born only from the work of the School of Community, because I met the movement at the University, but I never took the personal work seriously. In the past five years I probably did it, I don't know, maybe three times.

Not a bad record.

It is a good average! I got my degree in May, I started to work and I had these twenty minutes during my trip to work on the subway, and out of moralism I used to say, “I am in the movement, so I will use these twenty minutes to read School of Community.” (It is beautiful how, in the end, the Lord uses everything...) I started to do School of Community like this and every day I am increasingly struck by the fact that more and more I cannot spend a day without doing School of Community, because it makes me become aware of the things I already have in front of my eyes, but which I would not look at in this way.

What is it making you aware of?

It is making me become aware of Jesus' presence, of the fact that everything is given.

Thank you.

Do not forget that I asked you two questions. What has changed in us after reading the lesson of La Thuile? How do we think of communion and companionship, and what does memory mean, what has kept us company?

Working on this question over the past two weeks, I realized that my idea of companionship is changing, because looking at the witnesses I realize that you are proposing a journey that I can follow. Companionship and communion are the fact that during the day, in that fact that happens, going to work, meeting a colleague, I can say “You” and then start what for me is a new journey, shouting it to the world.

Thank you.

In the past few days I had an experience that I want to verify with you, and I also want to ask you a question. My father got sick, apparently with the flu, then as the days went by, strange, worrisome symptoms appeared, to the point that on Saturday I booked a flight and hurried to go and spend Sunday and Monday giving my sister a hand. I left with three wishes. The first was to convince my father to go to the hospital. (We had already advised him to go, but he did not want to.) The second was to convince him to hire somebody, at least while he was sick, to help my mother who is not very self-sufficient. (This was also something we had proposed to him, but he had said no.) The third desire, great and hidden, was to invite him to make peace with Jesus, because he has not had a relationship with Him for the longest time, at least not in the form of an adhesion to the Church. When I was at my parents' house I took my chance: "I came to tell you three things," and I told him all three of them. He answered no to my first request (but I understood right away that it was a matter of waiting a bit, being patient, and I would win that point). He accepted the second. The third was a bit like giving birth, because it was actually the first time I was revealing to him this secret desire of my heart. I don't know if it is a heresy, but I think that even Heaven without that hard-headed man who is my father would not be beautiful enough, neither for me nor for my mother and my sisters. He asked me to explain myself better, and I said, "Allow others to pray for you, maybe agree to meet with a priest, to go to Confession," and he answered me with a maybe. I also added that it was what I cared about the most, and I stopped right there; then I went in a hidden corner and I cried, for the time being happy that I had talked to him, and praying to the Lord to embrace him ever more strongly. During the day I realized that he was very sick; he needed to go to the hospital right away, and so I went to him and told him he had to go, no discussion. As I was doing this I understood one thing: my three desires were not different. Agreeing to go to the hospital, that is, to stay in front of reality, was the first way to make peace with Jesus. The judgment is that saying yes to Jesus and saying yes to the circumstances is the same thing. If my dad had said, "Yes, I am going to Confession," and then he had refused to take care of himself... I wanted to ask you if this judgment is true. My question is, is it human to say, "Make peace with Christ because you love me," that is, "I will not be happy if you do not make peace with Him," which is the same thing I told him, "Let yourself be cared for because you love me, and I will not be happy if you don't let people take care of you"?

The attempt in itself is not evil. The point is that it has to pass through your father's freedom. The question is, what did you witness to him, what move did you make to make the issue easier? This is the question. Thank you.

Please answer the questions.

Two weeks ago you read us some of Marta's letter and her dialogue with her father, and you said that Marta was saying, "I love all of life; I would not leave anything out." Marta and her words kept me company these past two weeks. You also said that the work you are asking from us, you had to do yourself when facing your father's death. Why? I wondered where Marta came up with saying something like that, and I forced myself to do some work. And you were saying, reading, that in the morning she would say, "I am You who make me." For me, this has always been a slogan disconnected from my life, something formal. But in the last two weeks I challenged myself to understand the origin of such a statement: how can someone say such a thing, knowing that he or she is about to die? How can someone say something like that in front of one's dead father? So, how can I say this sentence to myself, which is my biggest challenge, because I would like to get rid of a lot of episodes in my life? And in these last two weeks I found

out who Christ is for me, that is to say, I met Him again in the challenges you give us so many times. I saw Him as what corresponds most to me. What is even more amazing is that I too started to love my life not like cheese with holes in it, but everything, and I mean all of it, because Christ is giving it to me. Christ gave it to me since it began and I know now who Christ is for me.

What have you done to cause this change?

I had to look at what I truly am, at what fulfils my heart now: it is He, His gaze.

In the lesson at La Thuile, looking back at the question of the gaze (looking at ourselves as God looks at us, or looking at ourselves as we look at ourselves), we are facing a decisive point. Why, how do we look at ourselves usually? By going back over our path, all the mistakes we've made, all the missed opportunities, when life did not go well. This is the way we are usually looked at in society: in the end, our value is in what we are able to do; our value depends on our success. And since, as she says, we often don't succeed, we are always stuck there. What is the novelty that entered life? What entered Zacchaeus' life? He too could have listed all the things he had done wrong; but what happened? Another way of thinking? Another change of disposition? Another thought? Something else in his imagination? No, a fact happened. Someone looked at him and this, as we said in the booklet, embraced his entire person. I tried to remind you again to imagine being in that moment when he felt looked at, and surrounded by a new light, by a new feeling. This instant before, which is a fact – we can choose whether to let it in or not when we look at life (because you can start making a list and there always seems to be something wrong). So what predominated in Zacchaeus (as in John and Andrew) is having been conquered by a gaze that overcame all analyses. And this is communion: letting this novelty come in, this new light, this new gaze, this new judgment in our life. And what has happened to us in the past is not relevant. In fact, the more things have happened, the more you are amazed at such a gaze so powerfully overcoming everything, amazed that nothing, absolutely nothing, no pain, no mistake can overcome it! What happens? The problem, as Father Giussani says, is that in our daily life we forget this event that changed our life. He says that our fault is that we are missing the existentiality of memory, that is, this gaze does not remain in us when we are facing our daily life. If it doesn't remain, then the other way of looking will prevail again. This is a "great weakness of the existentiality of the feeling of belonging." If, instead, now I say, "I belong to You, Christ," this choice of where I stand saves me from doing my own analysis. This saves me from my analysis, do you understand? And it is a summary judgment which lies within the fact of Jesus' gaze on Zacchaeus (because Jesus was judging Zacchaeus' value); Jesus' gaze saved him from analyzing all the mistakes he had made. That's why this judgment is liberation! This judgment is a gaze; it is a fact I could never imagine (so much so that very often we keep on analyzing instead of recognizing it). If this gaze does not become familiar, we won't let the novelty of faith come in. And without the novelty of faith, this novelty that first came to us in a historic Presence that looked at us in this way, we are like everybody else, not because we deny Him, but because He is not existentially present in our way of looking. So, what is communion? Communion is this novelty that comes into our lives precisely in a presence. At the end of the booklet, at page 60, we say, "It is by surrendering to Him [like it was for Zacchaeus] that our unity, our communion, is generated. It happens as it happened at the beginning, when each of those twelve that Jesus called, by surrendering to Him, generated the first Christian communion. There will never be another origin of a Christian communion, never!" This is a choice of where one stands, Giussani says; it is a problem of freedom. We cannot generate it ourselves, because it is a fact, an unforeseen encounter, unforeseeable; but that one goes back to this gaze, that one

recognizes it again when one finds it again, and that one welcomes it again when one is told, this is a decision of freedom.

Welcome back. Have you welcomed this decision, this gaze, or haven't you?

This is exactly the point. I am very angry for one reason only, because for me faith died with my mom's death, with my mother's ashes. And there is no bigger fact; for me, there is no bigger fact. And this question here of the gaze that you are talking about, I am not interested, ok?

It is a choice. You can do it: this is your greatness. Zacchaeus too, when Jesus said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down from the tree. I am coming to your house," could have said, "I don't care about what you are saying."

Why, do you want to invite me to your house? Are you Jesus?

No, I am not Jesus. I am not so stupid as to think that I am Jesus. I am telling you that this gaze has come to us through the poor people that we are, and that this gaze is the possibility for each one of us, just like for you, to be able to look at everything and not be utterly lonely.

So, practically this look is a fact?

Yes, it is a fact. It is a fact. As I am looking at you now: it is a fact. As it was for Zacchaeus: it is a fact. And it makes itself present now, so much so that you can reject it; you can reject it one more time. I am repeating it to you now, and in front of this fact, that is happening in front of your eyes – now! – you can keep saying, "I don't accept it." You have the right to do so; you keep denying this fact, but it is happening right in front of you now, like the first time.

And what is liberation? You free me from what?

You can continue ...

Will you bring back my mom? No!

You can keep saying all these things, but, as I had asked you a month ago, can you be sure that what you say is everything? That there is no possibility for anything else to happen?

And what else is supposed happen? It's already a disaster! What is supposed to happen?

This is the question. Can you say that you already know everything? This is your assumption, that you think you know everything, and you won't leave open the possibility that any intelligent person must leave open. Because possibility is the most reasonable option. But for this to happen, one needs to leave open at least a minimum possibility...

So tomorrow morning when I go to the hospital for my condition, I need to leave open the possibility? Do I have to do this?

Yes.

I have to say, "There is this bigger possibility of greatness"?

Yes. It is also possible when looking at one's own disease. Many people live your same situation, even with gratitude. Is it clear? There is your freedom, my friend, your freedom! Now everybody has seen you; now you have your own freedom to choose. That's it. Because none of us can save the other from his or her freedom. Through an absolutely fragile method that consists in our presence, each one of us receives this announcement, like two thousand years ago. We spoke about this at the Beginning Day: there will be no fact, not even the most extraordinary fact that can change me if I am not willing, not even if I saw a person rise from the dead. Our friend clearly shows us the possibility that is lurking for each one of us; he has the courage to say it, sometimes stubbornly, but this is a possibility for each one of us! Each one of us needs to make this choice, particularly when we face crucial moments in our life, with all the drama of life, each one of us needs to make this choice. Not in an unreasonable way! This is the path of faith: when

one is on a human path, one can say that one's "yes" to Christ is the most reasonable choice possible in order to be able to judge the facts that, by grace, we have witnessed.

Beginning with the next School of Community, without closing the La Thuile booklet, we are going to start the chapter on sacrifice from Giussani's book, *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*

Every year we support two charitable gestures that are very important:

- National Food Drive Day, which will take place on Saturday, November 27, organized by the Fondazione Banco Alimentare [Food Bank Association in Italy];
- The AVSI Tents Campaign, which this year will be entitled, "The Forces that Change History Are the Same That Change Man's Heart," supporting projects, above all educational projects, to help Latin America (Haiti and Chile), Africa (Kenya, South Sudan, and Uganda), and Lebanon.

These are two wonderful opportunities to witness to what we hold most dear, by sharing the need of many people. There are many people we meet who spontaneously respond to this gesture, and who get involved with us out of a surge of generosity and gratuitousness.

By staying together during the Food Drive day or during the initiatives of the Tents Campaign, we can witness to the origin, the deep reason for these gestures that educate us toward charity, much more than by a thousand talks. Without being aware of the origin, with what we saw in our School of Community about charity, these gestures lose all their significance, which is communicating the gaze that one needs to live. It's not about sticking a label on the gesture, to stick Jesus' label on it: in the way we live these gestures, we can witness to their origin and help others to grasp the origin of what we do. We don't want to do something that does not leave a mark, but that may be useful to the person who is doing it for something more, because we know that a person needs something more than an act of generosity (even though it is a precious act). Through the Food Drive and the Tent Campaign we can introduce something else: namely, that the need is bigger, and that we are there because we are grateful for having found the answer to this need. We will be there for this reason, not to fill someone's emptiness with a generous gesture, but out of our gratitude for what we have encountered.

Ignoring these two educational opportunities for our communities would really be a shame.

* *Veni Sancte Spiritus*