

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, October 20, 2010**

*Reference texts: “Living Is the Memory of Me,” Communion and Liberation Responsibles’ Assembly (La Thuile, 2010, online booklet); “...One Day He Asked Himself Who It Was...,” Beginning Day for Adults and University Students of Communion and Liberation (online booklet; to be mailed).*

*Song: “Zachée”*

*Song: “Al mattino”*

The last question and answer of the last School of Community provoked a lot of discussion. Therefore, I would like to go back to it, starting with your letters:

“Dear Julián, I was very struck by the last witness of the last School of Community and by your answer – but I wasn’t completely satisfied with it. So I ask you, if possible, to go into it in more depth, because it’s something that touches me in a special way. For various reasons, I personally had to deal with sickness, sorrow, and the real possibility of dying soon, but (in much less dramatic predicaments) I also had to face situations of evil and darkness where ‘Jesus, risen and present here and now’ sounded like empty words. In those moments, I experienced the same deep anger as the young man who spoke last time. Screaming out this anger to someone in the movement and in the Church means asking a question that we cannot help but direct to the only places that we can expect an answer from. One needs courage to scream out about this absence (“My God, my God, why have You abandoned me?”), because it does not fit the CL pattern, where it is only good to say the things that don’t create problems, and only what follows the topic. When someone is living in this darkness and he doesn’t perceive a presence, it is not enough to make an effort to see, and certainly not to try to justify evil as he struggles to look for possible positive aspects, such as, ‘If you are patient, the good plan will come into view,’ or, ‘The answer will come in a way you do not expect,’ or, ‘Maybe this will help you to ...’ I am asking you to help me and many others to understand how we can face the reality of this ‘absence.’ It is not good enough to say that there are situations when the Presence is visible, because this only makes a ‘here and now,’ when this Presence is not seen, more dramatic. Even the extremely keen awareness that nothing would make sense without the Resurrection is not enough. Sometimes, the fact that nothing makes sense looks like a real possibility, and a faith that is used as an anesthetic and as a psychological support against unbearable evil proves to be fragile and without substance. Even the invitation to pray, which is certainly essential when someone is making a cry of despair, is not enough, because when one is crying out in the darkness, sooner or later the cry will die away.” This is one of the many letters.

I’ll read you another one: “The young man who was living the drama of his grandmother is all of us. The plea that arose in him is our plea. Yes, we have the companionship, the movement, the Church, the saints, Christ Himself – but here, we are suffering. There is evil here; we are dying here: what then is the purpose of faith? Only if we keep this harsh question in mind can we resolve the well-known break between knowing and believing. In fact, due to the grace of faith, we know – that is, we recognize as true – as true as the fact that in this moment I am here writing in front of the computer, as true as the fact that today the sky is cloudy – that Christ, the almighty Son, maker of heaven and earth, died on the cross so that I, along with all the people I love, and the whole world, may be saved. Saved means kept safe, not lost, lasting forever, not ending up in

a small darkness of grief at first and in a rotten nothingness later on. Precisely here, where this cry arises, Christ opens an unexpected possibility, an unthinkable hope, which is so far out, so corresponding to our heart that even we often have a hard time believing that it is true. If this connection does not happen at the level of that plea and of that answer, no movement is enough, no faith is enough, no Carrón, Rose, Father Aldo, Cleuza, etc., etc.: there is no Christ. As a son, though, I would like to reproach you, father, or to just mildly scold you, out of compassion for my brother. That young man came to us crying out that he could not see; he clearly displayed his close-mindedness, although he appeared to be full of healthy doubt, as you correctly tried to suggest, and there's no other possible way. In fact, if he weren't the first to doubt that his own negative statements weren't completely true, why would he have come and spoken them out loud at the School of Community? This is why I was hurt by how you hastily ended the conversation with him after obtaining 'proof' of the fact that he was unreasonable. We are that young man, willful and unable to see, but in the end, we desire someone to break our stubbornness and to embrace us, helping us to understand that our position is a bad dream, and that the promise that reality is making will be unexpectedly and undeservedly fulfilled. I beg you to look for that young man, to track him down: do not let him go away with his tragic disappointment! In getting him back, you will embrace each one of us once again."

Let us start from this point.

*Regarding this witness and the discussion you two had, while you were talking I discovered that I am not freed by a generic embrace, but by a judgment like the one you gave when he said, "Where is this risen Christ?", and you said, "You need to ask yourself this question in reverse, how can you look at your grandmother, if this risen Christ is not here?" or, "Can you be absolutely sure that there is nothing, other than what you can see?" or, when he was talking about an affection that is about to die, "For the very reason that she is about to die, it would be good for you to look around, to expand your reason, to see if what you are seeing is everything there is to see." When I heard these answers I had an experience of liberation because, especially sometimes, I do not need kind words, but true words; I need to perceive something so true that backs me up against the wall; only then I can start over and change. The other thing I wanted to say is that while I was listening to your discussion, an episode from the Gospel that I had heard a few days earlier came to my mind. It is the passage where the priests challenge Jesus, saying to Him, "By what authority are you doing these things?" and Jesus, with incomparable intelligence, asks them a question, and with that question he backs them into a corner, exposing their position. At that point, I said, "What a use of reason!" and I recognized this way of using reason in your discussion, that is, that evening, I recognized this same trait of Christ. So, that discussion made me experience Christ's presence here and now too.*

What frees us is a judgment, but what is a judgment? I agree with what we heard; it is true that in front of a situation like that of our friend from last time, or when we get stuck like him (because we can get confused as well), other situations in which the Presence is visible may not be enough (although I will say something about this later); not even the awareness that, without the Resurrection nothing would make sense, is enough, because this does not prove the Resurrection. It is true that an invitation to pray is not enough, because a person can pray as if Christ were not risen. The question, my friends (and we are going back to faith at the beginning of *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*), is if the starting point of faith is a fact and if faith is a journey of knowledge (even if the fact that I had a true experience of His Presence does not actually let me face a given situation as if I had seen nothing...). I was thinking of this example: if John and Andrew, after

seeing Him risen, had to face a situation like that of our friend, with his grandmother dying, would they have faced it in a new way compared to others, or not? It would have been impossible for them to look at their grandmother in that situation without the fact in their eyes that they had seen a Friend, whom they had put in the grave with their own hands, risen from the dead! Right or wrong? We each have to look at this. But beyond the difficulty that I am experiencing now, this tearing that I feel, the suffering that I am going through, the point is that, if I really desire the good of that person, I can look at her with this presence of the risen Christ in my eyes! And I really get this. I'm not saying it just because I have to come up with an answer, because I had to make this effort in front of my father's dead body. I was not spared this; I could have been blocked by this separation, because what human being is ever ready for the death of his father? However, if I had not done this work that the movement introduced me to in that very spot... Is death the last word on my father's life, or have I seen something that not even this moment can erase? The example of John and Andrew and the disciples came to mind, because judgment is a fact; it is recognizing a fact. This is why it is true that just a few things are not enough: faith is needed; it is needed to recognize a fact. A fact does not consist of thoughts, consolations, feelings, or moods (as bad as they can be): a fact is a fact, and nobody can erase it. I may want to ignore it, but the fact that I do not want to look at it does not mean that, for me, Christ is not risen, and that there is no hope for my grandmother. We often get stuck and we endure the circumstances in a way that is old, as if the file has not been refreshed, because in the end we keep looking at reality as if Christ, risen from the dead, were not a fact, a real event in reality. I look at all of reality as it is, and I see many facts that witness to His Presence, and yet I go on as if all of this were nothing. But it's not nothing! A fact is a fact! And I added that judgment is *recognizing* a fact. In recognizing a fact, freedom is in action, as we saw. This is something that no one else can do for us. We can accompany one another, but nobody can take our place. This is why Jesus says to Lazarus' sister, "If you believe, your brother will rise again." "If you believe": that is, if you acknowledge this. So, when we say that we want a companionship that helps us to understand that our position is a bad dream and that the promise of reality will be fulfilled, we can say it as an act of our will, as if saying it repeatedly more and more powerfully gave us the ability to keep it. No! What allows a promise to be fulfilled is that there is a fact that witnesses to it: Christ is risen. The promise will not be fulfilled just because I, or anybody else, affirms it with more strength, power, or fervor; it depends upon the truth that the fact happened, the truth that I recognize. In this vein, listen to what another person writes to me: "I thank you for your answer to that sad young man. I often had to face situations like that, and I used to say that the Mystery cannot be explained (but I was certain that everything had a meaning). However, in your discussion you gave reasons that were more adequate. [Since we are Christians, we do not affirm the Mystery as if we still were "at the level of the religious sense"; we have facts. My friends, the Christian faith starts from facts, and we can give reasons for these facts, not a generic "Let's hope." We need to repeat the entire path of *Is It Possible to Live This Way?* Faith has its origin in a fact that begets hope, and this hope is full of reason due to the fact that happened.] You gave more adequate reasons, and you especially forced him to look at what exists and what cannot be denied, namely, facts – and not promises of something good. This is crucial, and it changes everything. Also, the example you gave about having to put your hand on the fire in order to be absolutely sure that there is nothing other than what you can see leaves no room for a comeback; it is so reasonable that we are creatures, and not the Creator. I was reminded of the passage in the School of Community where it quotes the Bible: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?" This is where the risen Christ is: I invited a friend

to Beginning Day who, for the past ten years, has been unable to sit on a chair or stand for more than ten minutes due to a backache that no one has yet been able to explain. She came with a handicap permit, and she listened while lying down on a cot. Once in a while she could sit up to take notes, but then she had to give in and lie down again. At the end of the lesson she told me, "I understood the reason for these ten years of pain. If not for them, I would never have come here." She talked about her illness as a grace she had received, and I was moved by her words, because who can speak like that about such a debilitating illness? Either you're crazy or there's something that really lets you breathe easy in difficult times. I called her a few days later and she told me that her pain has not been lifted from her, that her discomfort is not gone [faith is not a pain killer!], but that everything has meaning now, because she is sure that she is on a journey. Some people told me that they did not understand Beginning Day: it is because they took the journey for granted. She gained certainty from the fact that we are on a journey. She is also sure that she is only at the beginning of the journey, but she is certain that Jesus is next to her, and this makes her glad."

At this point I cannot help but mention the impressive event of the death of our friend Marta from Rimini, a former student at Catholic University in Milan. Some of you may have read the conversation she had with her father. I am going to read you some passages from it, because they speak of a twenty-seven year old woman who is facing death, who witnesses to us what gives her the ability to stand in front of her own pain (not somebody else's pain). "Marta, who is Jesus for you?" asks her dad. "Now, stop with all this reasoning. Jesus is 'I am You Who make me.' The most obvious thing is that we are the object of an infinite love, that Another loved and loves you. Look, look at what you have!" She tells him to stop reasoning, but what is she doing? She is using reason at its best: the most obvious thing is that we are the objects of an infinite love. What is this young woman at the threshold of death doing? She is inviting him to look: let's look at what we have! She continues, "Look at all of reality. You do not need all this reasoning. Look, it's like when you make *piadina* [flat bread]: you have the dough in your hands. To be happy, you have to love Him more than anything else, above everything else, and this makes you love everything, and with more intensity. I love everything, everything in my life, from the time I was born until now. Life is joy and sorrow because Jesus made it like that; this is why I say 'yes' to my illness. A person washes himself, gets dressed up, chooses beautiful things, cares for himself because Another cares for him. This happens as a grace. You have to ask for it every day, and ask that He give you peace. We will have happiness in Heaven; here, we can ask that He allow us to live in peace." "Where did you learn all this? Is it thanks to your friends?" "A friend is like a camera lens: it puts things into focus, that is, it helps you to shed light where truth is, but the whole of the relationship is yours and yours alone, yours with Him, nothing else, nobody else, not you, the friend, and Him. It is just yours: it is you who ask, who beg, who cry out; it is you who ask Him, 'Love me!'" "And He answers." "He answers in reality." "For example, in this case, with all the people who are surrounding you." "Look at what's happening! But not only this: He is changing me. He is changing me, and in the meantime, I am waiting to be healed." "We are all waiting for it. We are praying, we are fighting, we are asking. Earlier you were saying, 'I care for myself because Another cares for me.' Is this what you were saying?" "Yes." "When did you learn all these things?" "By living, living in the company of older friends." "And by looking?" "Yes, by living everything to the fullest. But how can a person live everything to the fullest? We need a method and a path, too, and I learned the path and the method at the university. I met Jesus when I was at the university." "What you are saying to me is beautiful. We need to talk about these things more often." "No! I am telling you! It's not a matter of

talking.” “But when you tell me your experience, it helps me: what you tell me is a fact.” “The point, though, is not sitting at a table to talk. The point is that tomorrow morning you get up, and looking at yourself in the mirror, you say, ‘I, Giorgio, am You Who make me,’ and for the entire day you ask that He make Himself visible to you; it is not about me and you talking about this. Do you understand? That’s not the point.” She ends the conversation by saying, “It’s not a matter of talking about it: it’s your personal relationship with Jesus. Nobody can take your place in that.” Twenty-seven years old, with her father!

As a follow-up to this, I will add what Father Aldo writes to me from Paraguay: “I wanted to thank you for the School of Community. I was really struck by your dialogue with the young man who was the last witness, because I realize that I can often have the same attitude as I live surrounded by a sea of pain and sorrow, and I often hear reactions like that of the young man from those who are dying or from their relatives. I was shocked by the way you challenged that young man, and you’re challenging me, provoking me to keep my eyes riveted on the risen Christ, and inviting me to conversion, so that any circumstance and any sorrow may become an instrument of grace. Every day I understand more how we have to be able to stay with Him who is present, even when facing suffering. A personal work is needed, so that neither death nor life may separate us from Christ’s love. I am praying for that young man and for myself, that, being moved (“Who are You, O Christ, Who have loved me with eternal love, having pity of my nothingness?”), we may be transformed, and the ‘no’ may become a ‘yes.’ I thank you also for your seemingly harsh response, which is actually the supreme form of tenderness, when love for the other person’s destiny defines our relationships.” I am glad this point came out, because it makes us really understand, when we get down to the drama of living, what really accompanies us, even in the darkness. This opens up the issue of what we said in “Living Is the Memory of Me”: What is a real companionship? What is memory?

*I am going to tell the experience of how I changed due to something new that happened suddenly the other morning. The day before, I had been feeling lost when, for the first time in a long time, I started out the day feeling that things and people were sort of alien to me, irritated by the limitations that I kept facing throughout the day: my colleagues were distracted and sloppy, my client was rude, I was tired because my baby boy doesn’t sleep at night, my friend didn’t seem to match my expectations, and conversation with my wife in the evening was difficult. The entire day seemed to go against me. In the evening, I had to think of the song that we started Beginning Day with, and I found myself in that same predicament. Meanwhile, when you talked about it, it seemed like a position very far from mine, something that didn’t concern me. I realized that, at the time, I had felt no personal urgency when listening to your appeal for conversion, as if it didn’t really concern me. The next morning I woke up with a sense of dissatisfaction and worry about having to live another day as heavy and difficult as the one before. More or less consciously, I asked the Lord to make Himself visible, to help me that day to overcome that sense of alienation from life that was scaring me because it didn’t correspond to me, even if I didn’t know how to get out of it. While I was having breakfast, I saw the new issue of Traces that I hadn’t read yet. The title of the editorial caught my attention and I started to read it. I was immediately struck when it said that relativism affects our daily life in concrete ways. It said, “If everything is the same, the consequence is not that everything has the same value, but that nothing is worthwhile. Everything vanishes quickly, and this leaves us disillusioned in life, in our daily life: work, relationships, family... We grow annoyed, sometimes angry.” I felt myself described in dramatic terms: so much for not needing conversion! As I kept reading, I felt*

*overwhelmed by something like a sudden newness when I read the invitation to read Beginning Day, even though I had already read it, but without this same urgency: "There, the only antidote to this disease that corrodes our existence from within is clearly indicated: it is memory, Christ happening again in our life, now." Almost immediately, I recovered from the apathy that I had when I started the day, and a sense of hope and liberation took its place. I felt at the depths of my soul that the author of the editorial was my friend, because he had described the longing of my heart so well, which suddenly put me back in front of the place where Christ has begun the battle for my conversion (which is the companionship of the movement, but especially your witness, your continuous exhortation to recognize Christ present here and now, the fact that you direct my attention to facts, events and people that make the presence of the One my heart desire so intensely familiar). Unexpectedly, the day became a promise of something good. That day at work, the same people with the same limits were a provocation instead of an obstacle, an opportunity to get involved with my whole self. The same friends have once again become the sign of the tenderness the Mystery has for me, my wife the sign of God's faithfulness in my life; even my baby who keeps us awake at night has become, instead of a cause for complaint, the opportunity to get up early this morning at 6:00 a.m. and read Beginning Day with a new appreciation. I recognized through my experience that you are really right when you say that we should not harbor any illusions: a long journey of conversion is needed to overcome the influence that relativism has on us, which hinders our ability to know the truth that gives us more life and more love.*

Thank you.

*I have been going through a very hard time at work for the last two years or so. I am a physician. For reasons unrelated to my profession, my whole department has become the victim of an actual case of harassment. The situation has gotten worse in the last few months, causing discouragement among my colleagues and an attitude of total autonomy, where everyone looks out for himself. This scenario may be common to many, but luckily not for me. The group I work with had been quite unified in the last few years (especially thanks to my contribution), and looked out for the common good. This situation has caused a lot of pain in me these last few months because of the unprovoked evil I was witnessing, and because it was impossible for me to change this very dry and desolate circumstance. It gave rise in me to a fear of acting in reality on the basis of a hypothesis of a present good. I understood that the typical CL language, even though correct, which I was hearing and even using myself (I could quote thousands of examples), was not enough for me. Then I thought about this more deeply, and I wondered why, in the last few years, even very painful situations, particularly a few losses in the family, including the death of my father, had not caused the same degree of discouragement. My answer was that, in those cases, I had not carried the pain and sorrow by myself. I had been physically supported by my friends who had been close to me and who had helped me, down to the most mundane details. I had not been spared the pain, but there was goodness present there, and I could see it. But this time, I was practically alone. I say "practically," because actually, at least three people helped me as much as they could (even if just a little) and supported me. I talked about this situation with a widow who has a son with some difficulties. She told me that when her husband died, she too had been physically supported by a large number of people who had really helped her. Then, however, as the months went by, when she would get up in the morning and when she was dead tired at night, she would constantly see the face of her son with all his issues, and she would see it as a canker, as something unavoidable. And this, she said, almost forced*

*her to understand that a situation where your problem and your anguish are yours alone, is also the point of your maturity, when you are called to come to terms with the depth of everything; and really, it is you alone who have to come to terms with the Mystery who is asking you to recognize Him and to keep on calling on Him. I have to admit that I immediately felt struck by her words. I had not even considered the hypothesis that the dryness that was filling my heart with anguish was actually an opportunity for my life. So, in the days that followed, I started to live all circumstances, exactly the same ones as before, starting out from this position, asking Jesus to make me able to recognize Him. The immediate effect was that my fear disappeared, because even the aspect I disliked so much took on a value for my life. By getting rid of my fear I was able to look at reality in a different way, so that it became a friend again. Once I was free from fear, I started treating reality as a possibility for something good again. I started to try to have an effect on reality, however little I was allowed to do so in any given situation. What I am asking for now for my life is to not draw back from this position of begging in front of the Mystery. I certainly don't ask to remain in this circumstance that is so hostile; in fact, God forbid! However, I am asking that the same urgency to seek Him which this circumstance has engendered may remain in me.*

Let's try not to lose track of the heart of the question. Look, he didn't tell about an extraordinary fact. What brought about this change?

*The possibility of looking at reality as a friend.*

Period. Do you understand? Period! Someone opens up the possibility of looking at reality not according to my own measure. This can be a point of maturity for you. It's a hypothesis one takes into consideration when one is up against it because one is needier and so less presumptuous. This opens up reason, so that I can start looking at reality, even the part of it that I am stuck in, as an opportunity for my life. Look, we don't need absolutely exceptional things, as we sometimes think. We just need to be loyal to this true use of reason, as a category of possibility that brings in Another. This has an immediate effect: fear disappears, reality becomes a friend, and everything looks different. One needs only to be open to this, even if just minimally. And I am amazed, because you witness this more and more to me all the time. I am going to read to you this letter: "I was very much struck at the School of Community by how you replied to that young man. You challenged his reason by asking him if he admitted anything other than what he thought in his mind. I realize that this is exactly my attitude, because it's true that in front of any circumstance the starting point for judging is always my own measure. I am saying this because, regarding conversion (that you are helping us work on), it's not that there's no desire for Him [we all have it: I am sure that you are here because you have it!], but lately His presence is not dominant in my mind; His presence does not prevail as a possible replacement of my own measure. Looking at all of reality with the immediate certainty of the fact of the presence of Christ seems almost impossible to me [and we can say this after years of life in the movement, after years of witnesses by the thousands]. And it is so true that, as you say, I am struck even by what I see happening in others; but then it remains impossible for me [we see that, in others, many measures have failed, but, lately it's as if it were impossible for us too]. It's even more challenging when one thinks about all the good things that have happened in one's life. Here it's evident, at least for me, that there is Another at work in spite of me." Conversion is not, as we often think, just a matter of stopping doing something bad in order to do good things – because this is something we could just about manage (just about!). But to change our measure, we practically need a revolution! When Jesus uses the word conversion, He is referring to changing the way we look at reality, the *nous*, that is to say, the way we use reason. Giussani was

no dreamer when he had us work on these things. Ever since his first hour of teaching at the Berchet High School, he was very much aware of what the battle was about, because we are glued to this measure. But when we allow another possibility to come in, then we start to see what reality is really like.

*I wanted to talk to you about the results of our work on the School of Community. The first result is a change of attitude in front of reality. From the moment I open my eyes in the morning, it's like I can no longer ignore the fact that reality is (as it is in the literal sense of the word) like something that is given to you: waking up, having a husband, children, a house, a job, parents, faith... Having said that, when you began to take conversion seriously and so started challenging us about it, I felt stiff and afraid; needless to say, this saddened and troubled me.*

Why? Why did you become stiff?

*I don't know.*

When I say that we get defensive when we hear the word conversion, this is exactly what I mean. We don't know why, but as soon we hear it, we become stiff and fearful. This is what I mean.

*Yes, in spite of this sense of grace that I feel inside.*

I thank you, because this is what I experience too.

*I was upset, but later on in the text you were very consoling: don't worry; after all, "you only struggle with something that is present." I couldn't understand how I could struggle against what I believe is my biggest desire. So I did something, the only thing that accompanies me in my daily life; and here was the biggest surprise, in the sense that I understand that I wouldn't have even been aware of either the here and now or conversion without a third factor, which is the method that you proposed to us, because aside from recognizing Him present, in all these given facts I always need to meet Him again every day. I need to see, in that man I've been married to for twenty-two years and who I know so well that I can predict his actions – as I was saying, I need to see in him something that is absolutely new. I need to see in my job (which is the most totally ordinary job) a possibility of being changed, and not only of me being changed, but the whole world, all of history. So at this point I understand what the previously mentioned e-mail was saying, that Rose or Father Aldo are not enough, etc. But I do have them in mind. When I think about forgiving or being forgiven I have the Pope in my mind; when I look at my children I have Rose in my mind; when I go to my office I have Marta Cartabia and what she said in my mind. I always keep what you say to us in mind because otherwise it is not possible for me to live my humanity as it is, down to the point of the loneliness I carry inside that nothing and nobody seems able to fill, and living all of it as a resource.*

What makes it possible? I ask, because this is the conversion you cannot defend yourself from.

*That Someone bent down and loved me with an everlasting love.*

This is the point. In front of someone who asks you, "Do you love me?" do you become stiff? No. I say this because one becomes stiff in front of certain things that one needs to leave or get rid of, not in front of an embrace. Is this true or not? Because an instant after we have said the word conversion, we reduce it to the usual moralism (that is to say, that I need to change something). The first change Father Giussani has forever been inviting us to is that our first activity is almost a passivity. It is welcoming the embrace of another! Did Zacchaeus convert?

*Yes.*

Did he resist?

*No.*

Did he become stiff?

*No.*

Why not? Because he accepted; first of all, he did not expect to change anything. He accepted the unexpected, the One who was embracing all of his humanity. The point is that we forget this, and then we imagine conversion as if it were something of our own doing. No. It is under the influence of being moved in this way that Zacchaeus changed. But we separate it: there is a sentimental aspect, and then a moralistic conversion. We separate two things that can only exist as one. So much so that if one separates them, they don't exist, and one gets stuck. Why? This is the point: because we have already reduced Christ not to the gift of His presence, but to the attitudes that we must change. When Zacchaeus welcomed that gaze he had never seen before, he was so moved by His tenderness that later, without realizing it, he changed. Is this clear? If we don't accept this, if when you become stiff you don't let Him in (it's not that you need to change your stiffness; it's not that you first need to adjust yourself: if we could get it right without Christ, what would we be doing here?), then conversion becomes anxiety. And in the end Christ is only a word, a decoration. In today's collective imagination (and we are certainly included in it), how is Christ perceived? He came, He went away, He left us here alone with a few rules to follow, and later He will come back to judge us in a final summit meeting. When I become stiff and don't start over on the basis of the good that I have experienced, then I cannot come out of this stiffness, I cannot get unstuck. It's necessary to constantly challenge this stiffness with His presence. And this requires work.

I conclude by reading another e-mail that explains very well what allows us to really enter reality in a different way: "I want to tell you how the work of our School of Community has helped me and is still helping me face circumstances anew, even the most unthinkable ones. About a year ago, by grace alone, I obtained a job transfer for family reasons. On my first day at work I introduced myself to the branch manager (I work in a bank), who tells me straight out that if he had had the chance to choose, he would have never chosen me for the job I had to do, but a person who had been doing the job much longer. It was not an easy time for me, but it was a time full of blessing. Every day I would go to my office with the plea that He would show Himself, that He would not let me feel lonely in such a hostile work place, that I could know Him more. After about a month the manager comes to my office and says to me, "Look, forget what I told you the first day; if they asked me now to choose between you and someone who has been doing this job forever, I would choose you. Apart from learning to do this job better than someone who has always done it, from a human point of you, I have met very few people like you." I felt thrilled, because it was obvious that Christ had done this. Conversion is exactly what you say: that a desire to change arises in me, so I won't miss what I have in front of me. It implies a truly personal shift, turning to look at where Christ is provoking me in reality; otherwise I would leave Him out. This was clear in another fact that happened to me. A few months ago I went to some training classes for the bank that I work for. When I talked with my colleagues I realized that they were very upset. Some were complaining about the manager who is not understanding enough; some were complaining about colleagues who were not very cooperative. I was struck by these comments, because in that moment I said, "For me, this is not what work should be." Then after a few months, I was talking to a colleague about her work, and she said, "Well, okay, but you've already made it." These were clearly two privileged opportunities where the Mystery was provoking me. For me, conversion meant taking these two episodes seriously, episodes that opened a huge question in me about the meaning of my being. [This is how the Lord calls us: if we can't see even a single possibility of getting something out of it, then we don't move, and we

reduce our heart to feeling.] I began to desire to understand more deeply what possibilities my job can offer me, and to extend this invitation to my colleagues and friends. By talking to someone about this desire I suggested inviting a dear friend who is the living witness of a humanity changed by his encounter with Christ for a public meeting. So I invited my colleagues and the manager of my branch. Only my manager came, and at the end of the meeting he was so struck by what he had heard that he said he did not know how to thank me enough for the invitation. He also said, "I would like to be part of this story, too. If I had known, I would have brought along my daughters and my wife." [This is exactly the way Christ makes Himself known: by facing reality like everybody else, but by looking at it with a different gaze. As soon as He can find a little opening in our heart, He binds us to Himself.] I really thank you for the passion with which you walk with us on this path. You leave us no way out. A few years ago these facts [mind you!] would certainly have only struck me; I would have talked about them at the School of Community without saying, "Who are You, O my Christ, Who make these things happen, and so draw me more and more to You? You make me seek You more and more." This is conversion, when someone gets the desire for this amazement: Who are You, Christ? This is the promise that Father Giussani's proposal contains. We don't need to wait for who knows what apparition; we simply need to accept this hypothesis to enter reality in any circumstance where life challenges us. Otherwise, hearing these things and not seeing them in one's own experience is not enough for us; we know this well. And so without each of us accepting this challenge and this verification, this evidence and this certainty won't grow. But when we accept, you'll see what happens...

For our next School of Community we will continue our work on the lesson of La Thuile, because we didn't even glance at it today: What has changed in us after reading this lesson? How do we think about communion and companionship, and what does memory mean? What is always with us, even in sickness or death? Without this we won't be able to really understand what the lesson's proposal is.

*Glory Be*