

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julián Carrón
Milan, 10/6/2010

Reference text: “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 posted).

Song: “Il Monologo di Giuda”

Song: “Amazing Grace”

We are resuming our journey after the summer. I will start with a few words of clarification. The attempt we are making with this School of Community connected by video is simply to offer an opportunity to try to learn a method to work, on the text and on life, to help us judge our experience. Because, as we have said many times, there is no experience without judgment, and without experience we do not learn from the facts that happen: they remain vain, useless for our life; they do not leave any trace. Many things happen, but they leave no trace because, as Father Giussani always taught us, our “I” grows only by living an experience, and experience cannot be only having a reaction, a feeling, a jolt: experience is a judgment. This is decisive for understanding the text, because we do not understand the text, as we sometimes think, only by putting the words together; we understand the text when we compare it with an experience, because the text that Father Giussani is proposing to us is the communication of an experience, and only someone who has an experience can understand it. This is what needs to emerge when we work together during the School of Community: not abstract reflections, because we can all express tons of them and they are useless, but real witnesses of what we have learned from experience that allows us to understand the text, and from the text that allows us to understand our experience. This is why, for us all to help each other, and to not waste time (because time goes by quickly), I repeat that you need to be precise. I am reminding everyone who will speak to give short witnesses, to be precise, as I just said; to be concise, to get to the point, so that everybody can understand you. If you want to speak, prepare yourself well because this is part of the work: to understand the experience you had and to be able to relate it in a suitable way is part of this work. We are not coming here to speak at length in a confused way, because this means that we did not do the work, that we are improvising, and this does not help us. So let’s get going.

This summer I was struck by two words that you said, which are the beginning and the end of the booklet we are working on now, and by their close connection: conversion and being in the here and now. It seems to me that each indicates the nature of the other, because unless conversion is surrendering to a presence that is with me here and now, a presence now, it is a moralistic effort. On the other hand, we speak of Christ’s being here and now only at an emotional level if it does not instill in us a desire to change. So I was very impressed by the fact that I cannot speak any longer of conversion without being here and now, and vice versa, that the title of the booklet, “Living Is the Memory of Me,” struck me, because we often speak of living the memory as if it were a premise instead of being everything. This is the first thing. The second thing is that I realize that Christ is with me here and now because I become “here and now” with the reality I

am living, finally present to the present moment; otherwise I defend myself from reality with all the things I know and do, so that the movement, instead of an introduction to reality, becomes the most subtle defense I have. The last thing is that when at the Beginning Day you spoke of the Christ being here and now and the Pope, I was a bit taken aback, because when I say “Christ here and now,” I cannot separate this sentence from you. Actually, one of the most striking discoveries I made in the recent past has been the fact that my conversion is impossible without surrendering to a Christ who is here and now; Christ here and now has to do with you, otherwise I wouldn’t even become aware of the Pope, I would not have gone to Rome last May, let alone paid attention to what the Pope said in England. However, regarding this, I need to really understand what you think about following you.

I am going to leave this question open, because I think that what you said is essential for everybody. I am asking all of you a question: what changed your perception and feeling of the word “conversion”? Because everything depends on this. If you continue to perceive the word “conversion” as something that in the end is tearing something away from you, then you will be defensive; we defend ourselves from conversion. It means that it is disconnected from Christ here and now, and this is the sign. I am going to give you some examples. Did Zacchaeus convert? Yes, indeed! Did he defend himself against Jesus? No, he received Him very happily. When John and Andrew were there to hear Him speak, did they defend themselves against Jesus? No, they followed Him. Did they convert? Yes. This means that when we separate these two concepts, conversion and being here and now – it is inevitable that “conversion” is reduced to moralism and “being here and now” to a feeling, without provoking in us any desire to change. Then the point is to start from this reality, from this experience: how does it happen in us? When do I catch myself with this desire to change? Because conversion is exactly this, that the desire to change arises in me so that I do not lose what is in front of me. Why did John and Andrew follow Him? To gain an eternal life in place of their real life, or because they did not want to lose that Presence for their whole life, so fascinating a Presence that they had in front of them? This is decisive for understanding what Christ here and now is, that Christ makes the very reality He wants to introduce me to truly attractive, because it reveals the meaning of living to me. What would be the meaning of following me, unless you follow me for this reason, unless it is to follow what I am trying to follow, what I am trying to verify in reality? I learned to follow from Father Giussani, because for him Christianity is an event that is happening now, and this is what makes one become passionate about Christianity. However, for Christianity to be conceived like this, it is not enough to say that I do not want to be a moralist and that I want to follow Christ here and now; it is necessary to recognize Him, to not reduce reality, to see that in many of our gestures (and this is the purpose of Beginning Day) we often do not see all this. Then, for us, the concept of Christ here and now is often abstract and conversion is moralistic, because we do not see Him in reality. (We do recount facts, but we stop at their emotional repercussion.) Let’s ask ourselves how many times this recounting of facts starts a desire to change within ourselves, because this is the test: that I do not want to lose that thing there. I wanted to bring this to your attention, for example, in reference to the Pope, because what interested me about the Pope’s visit to England was seeing him in action: it was impossible that such a figure could spring only from human energy; it was the clear witnessing of Christ’s presence. It is not necessary to have visions. Jesus (I always say this) did not heal all the sick people of Palestine in His time, but through certain miracles He showed that He is present, that we are not alone with our powerlessness and our nothingness, that God’s power makes itself present in facts and events. The Pope’s trip is one of these instances; it was obvious even to his adversaries.

I wanted to ask a question on the power of the powerless. Normally, I would not have been a very good person, actually quite bad, because I am impatient, not very merciful, very self-centered, I complain all the time; so, I would not be a great person, if it weren't for the fact that in this place and through my friends I have come to know the method and the reasons for stopping to be like this, for changing. Then I discovered in myself an unexpected humanity that does not stem from my ability. I wanted to give some quick examples referring to my job. My boss goes by the saying, "Divide and conquer"; I try to witness to him that, for me, working as a team is a different thing. My colleagues have a hard time greeting people in the morning when they come in and they're always very precise and correct in pointing out any of my possible mistakes; I try my best to be open to a dialogue with them, and I would really be happy to collaborate with them. Two years ago a young gypsy girl of about sixteen, pregnant, stood on the sidewalk in front of the medical office I work for; my colleagues were glaring at her and they were sending her away when she was getting close to the waiting room to help herself to some coffee. I stopped many times next to her on the sidewalk. I asked her about her baby; I brought her some of my children's clothes, and a few days before going back to her village, she told me, "You are very good to me; I would have liked to have a mother like you." Another time, it even happened that I was saying the Angelus while I was pulling the results of the CAT scan of one of my patients out of the envelope to see if the chemo had worked, and he told me, "Doctor, even if the results had not been good, I am at peace because I know that you will find another treatment for me." I could give you many other examples. This is not happening because of my ability, but it does happen and I recognize in this increased humanity the presence and the work of Jesus, and I beg for His presence every moment of the day. I think I understand this. The question, then, is: does my faith still have a chance of success on a boss who is not using his authority, on colleagues who attack you, on all these things? On page 19 it says, "In this present cultural climate, do we have to be satisfied with witnessing, or can we still pursue cultural and political battles?" I would like some help on this.

How do you answer this question, according to your experience?

I think I understood that.....

You did understand, because you just said it! Where did this unexpected humanity come from?

Did it happen within you?

Yes.

So can faith be successful? Yes. Otherwise you would have not said what you said. But it happened according to a plan that was not yours. The same will happen to your colleagues, patients, et cetera, because it happens according to a plan that is not ours. What is God's method? He gives the grace to some to reach everybody; that is, He does not give it to everyone at the same time. True, there is Christ here and now, as we were saying earlier, but since Christ does not impose Himself, but proposes Himself, it depends on a person's freedom. As I said in the homily at Beginning Day, witnessing is not enough. The heart of the other person needs to be open as well, because, if Christ deigned to submit Himself to it, bending over our nothingness, how dare we claim to do otherwise! Christ does this because this is man's greatness, your colleagues' greatness, and paradoxically your greatness. The fact that this is greatness means that man is not a mechanism that you can control: he is something more; he has a mystery within, the mystery of freedom. What is our role? How does this relate to you and your conversion? Jesus is calling you; He is calling each of us in this context to say, "How can I contribute? What kind of relationship, of listening, of witness do I have to have in order to make the face of Christ more

plain, instead of obscuring it, as the Pope said in England, to make Christ transparent through my humanity?” This is our conversion. To make you understand how we often reduce this “here and now” of Christ, I am going to read what someone wrote to me: “I was best man at the wedding of a dearest friend of mine and I was sitting with the others next to the bride and groom. During the ceremony I noticed the photographer walking around the couple, around us witnesses and around the altar. I don’t know how it is here in the north, but in Sicily weddings are the major source of income for a photographer. As I was looking at him I thought that for a photographer, the more weddings that happen in a week, in a month, in a year, the better; more weddings mean more earnings. Life is strange! That photographer definitely is not sad about having to go to Mass every day, spending his life going around Jesus who provides food for his table. But he is not getting Him; he gets everything but Him. I am not talking specifically about the photographer, but I am using him as a metaphor for my experience and likely for the experience of many others: an entire life with Jesus without getting Him. Every single time, we get something of this world, even if it’s just a good way to keep from being alone on the evening of the School of Community. One can spend his entire life with Jesus, like a photographer, getting a piece of the world or of your own world, without getting Him: one can get intelligence, power, self-esteem, girlfriends, feelings of belonging and unity, companionship to keep from being alone, but not Him. I am a doctor and I have Jesus in front of me every day, but often I too risk having the photographer’s syndrome: Jesus as a source of income. Every day I stay with my patients who provide for my salary, power, career possibilities, social status, intellectual satisfaction and friends of good standing in society; I spend every day with Jesus. But I risk not getting Him.”

I’ll begin with something that struck me very much at Beginning Day: “His Presence is made visible, tangible, and it can be experienced, due to the fact that it changes the life of the people who are part of the community, of the companionship. This is why the keenness with which we perceive the witness of this and that person (not necessarily the leaders), the keenness with which we perceive the witness, however cautious, even very discreet, present in the people of the community, is the greatest sign of the honesty we mentioned earlier. A final attempt to avoid conversion is denying the existence of facts and events.” Fifteen years ago my friend’s husband died. She was thirty-three and expecting her third child, with two other small children. I was there by chance because I live in the building next door, and I had known her since we were young girls; it happened before my eyes and I stayed there, observing through the days, the weeks, the months, the years, her and her children standing tall in the circumstances that happened in their life; I observed their humanity getting greater, not perfect, because they were poor souls, but great, embracing the Cross of Christ. What I realized had happened is that at a certain moment that same Christ turned to me and said, “What about you? Do you love me?” Incredibly, the event that turned their life upside down, that marked their life, that transformed it, making it painfully great, impacted my humanity, changed my life and my husband’s life, and transformed it (as the source of an experience of a good that is endless, but even more unexpected). I have been married for eighteen years and I do not have any children. I got married because I wanted children and I asked to have them: I asked for them, I begged for them, I prayed, I asked people to pray for me, I went to pilgrimages and I made a lot of people go to pilgrimages; all the mothers of this world prayed many rosaries. I am a doctor and when they were asking me, “How much do I owe you?” I answered, “One Hail Mary.” But children did not come, and this never gave rise to any ill-feelings in me, any sorrow, any anger; it never made me doubt that my prayer had been and was continually being heard. I am sure of this, because it is God’s tenderness for my humanity, and I saw it in action specifically in my relationship with the three children of my widowed friend: the tenderness with which they have loved me and my husband, even

more than the enormous love we have for their life, made it possible for me and my husband to experience a maternity and a paternity we had not asked for in this form, but true all the same. Thank you.

When your article about pedophilia came out, for the first time I did not get angry for not being able to make a right judgment on my own (because in fact I always used to say, "I did School of Community, I did everything, but ...!"); on the contrary, I was amazed at how infinitely grateful I felt that someone had been given to me, leading me by the hand to recognize Him, to recognize Jesus present, even in this. Then this summer when you started to speak about conversion it became clearer. When you said that conversion exactly coincides with freedom, because when you are corrected, you are led by the hand to recognize Jesus, and you experience exactly what freedom is. I would have never thought that conversion would coincide with freedom, that is, with staying within the circumstances with Him.

This is another way of saying that what prevails is gratitude, because Jesus is there, because there is Another. It is no longer the issue of whether I am able to do something or not. What prevails is that He is there, that He is present among us through one person or the other. Conversion coincides with this freedom, with this liberation. This is the example I would always give to my students: when we have a seriously sick person, we are happy there is a physician who understands, one is happy, one won't get angry because there is someone better. One is happy. It's good, it's a grace, it's a blessing to have someone who can understand the disease and try to cure it. So conversion is when this good prevails. It happens when you don't miss this ultimate good that life consists of.

The day before yesterday I was at school. I have gone back to teaching after three years of working for a magazine. I went to this eleventh grade class having planned exactly what to do. I had prepared for the class. I went straight to the point. They looked at me with their eyes wide open as if they had never heard someone speak like that. They seemed to follow me, and asked questions. I felt so proud of myself. I left and saw that one of them was following me. He said, "Professor, I need to tell you something." "What?" "Professor, you don't need to be so maternal when you teach us. You need to provoke us more, because we have already heard these things you are telling us about, because last year we had a professor of philosophy who explained these things to us." So I looked at him and said, "Thank you for telling me this, because in this way I can go more deeply into this. This provocation is meant for me." I truly recognized Jesus' love for me because He did not want me to stop halfway. Rather, he gave Himself to me by telling me, "I am here. This is what is important to you, and this is what they desire, nothing else."

What do you get from this?

The fact that I had a big desire ...

Don't stop halfway: what does this mean?

It means that I wanted to go more to the bottom of what was happening to me, because the Lord had called me there.

What does going to the bottom of something mean?

Letting Him ...

But what does this mean?

To consider my humanity, what I am made of, as well as circumstances, but also in this case to take into consideration an unpredicted factor: this boy.

Exactly. And what did this boy help you understand?

That the Lord uses His Own method.

Which?

Coming to me to help me understand what is really true.

But what did this boy tell you? That you were missing! Because education is communicating oneself, that is, one's way to face the real; a fine lesson is not enough. What is necessary is the "I" that is present. Because this is what bears witness to Him. After Christ there is no other way to communicate truth other than by witnessing, where concepts become flesh and blood. This is the provocation that boy is offering you.

And this has changed things a lot.

I am telling you this because it is really a challenge for us. I have received many e-mails where – I am only going to read one of them, from a person who worked hard at the Meeting – one can do certain things and not be there. "It had been a great week... but there is a huge 'but.' While all this was happening, at home I hadn't talked to my husband for a week because of a big fight about our children. A big mess. At the end of the Meeting I was like a schizophrenic, literally divided into two persons, tired, sad, disappointed, and, above all, cynical. Being in my normal life with all its drama made me feel like running away. I did not want reality. The Meeting had taught me that one can deceive oneself and others. One can do everything very well and not be there; one can say nice things and not be there; one can have a hard heart and talk about the desires of one's heart (because everybody can give a fine speech); one can stop believing that Jesus answers us, and tell the volunteers that only Jesus can answer us. I did not mention this suffering to anyone, because I did not want to hear fine speeches. I wanted to be alone. I did not want to be helped, as if the canker of my skepticism had dug deeply into me. In my despair I wrote to someone, unloading everything I had inside. He did not let me off the hook. One day he told me, 'Read the chapter about sacrifice,' and as I was reading it (I had started only to please him) I realized, while crying, that I could not run anywhere, that only in Jesus does everything make sense. There He was, waiting for me. I went to confession. I asked Him to take me back, but He was already there knocking, even while I was keeping my door closed. But He was there waiting for that 'yes.' When you experience your immense smallness, you can enter the mystery of His greatness. I don't want to live for anything less. I want a personal, live, carnal relationship with Jesus. Nothing else is enough for me. Cynicism, skepticism, relativism have all dug a deep hole in us too, who, thinking we are immune to them, can still fall into this trap." We are capable of not being there. That's why a sign of one being in the here and now is finding an "I" that is there, with all of oneself: "The glory of God is man fully alive," says Saint Irenaeus. What gives glory to God, what manifests Christ, is not our words, even *our* words. The question is whether we are there. The same in another e-mail: "I am writing not too long after my previous e-mail because I feel so moved by the outcome of the work that you are proposing [because the work we are doing is exactly for the purpose of achieving this, so we can be more and more in reality. We have seen how the Pope can be in front of people who don't share the same beliefs, how he can go to them and witness who Christ is with all the reasons]. Your work proposal has for me meant trying to stay in front of what you are telling us, to stay in front of Christ, with the torment of the most unspent question that I may live, because I can't do it on my own. This is producing amazing fruit that begins from a judgment. I was very struck, for example, by your emphasis on personal initiative. Looking at my life, in the light of your words, I suddenly felt astounded and wondered, 'Where have I been up to now?' When Father Giussani says that what is human is missing [now we are starting to realize what this truly is and to see this more simply]... Where was my 'I'? The answer came immediately: it was on a hamster wheel. One's 'I' is like this not

only when, for example, one takes part in a proposed gesture without being aware of its meaning, but also in every moment. Personal initiative must happen at any moment.” The sign of Him is exactly this: that He makes us present to the Present.

Look, I would like not to be there, really not to be there. My grandmother’s condition is a disaster: hospitals, nursing homes, social workers. You say, “Christ is risen.” Where is this risen Christ? I came here very angry because of my grandmother’s condition, because she can’t hear any more... So where is this risen Christ, where is He?

And you, how can you look at your grandmother, if this risen Christ is not there? You need to ask yourself this question in reverse, why you, who see your grandmother like this, because this is a fact...

These are the facts.

These are the facts, and you need to ask yourself, “Is this the end?”

For me yes, for me yes.

And can you be absolutely sure that only what is in your little head exists or that there cannot be more reality in heaven and on earth than in your philosophy? Can you be absolutely sure that there is nothing other than what you can see? Can you really? I have not found anybody yet who could tell me. “Yes.” Start opening up your reason. Failing to do this is what keeps us from seeing what is there.

I can only see pain around me, only pain.

This is the point: that we can only see this much. But in order for you to see everything else, something else needs to happen, and you need to be ready for it.

And that is?

That is, we see many facts happening, and you can continue to be very angry because of your grandmother without realizing what is happening in front of your eyes. If you don’t go deep into people’s change, into what they experience, into their witness that there is something more than what you can see, because you are stuck there only thinking about that pain, if you don’t look around...

Where is it that I need to look? Besides an affection that is about to die, what else do I have to see?

Exactly because 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. Because if that is all, then there is no hope for your grandmother or for you, or for any of us. But if that is not all, and Christ is risen, then there is hope for you, for your grandmother, and for us. Can you understand?

If Christ is risen?

Certainly! And you can see this in the facts and events that prove His presence and His work here and now. The question is that, considering what I said in the Beginning Day, we can’t see all these facts. You are stuck there looking at reality only through a keyhole. And this is not everything, do you understand? This is not everything. It is as if you were seeing a reduced reality. And this is why you can’t be absolutely sure that what you can see is everything. You must be loyal at least to yourself. So I say, begin to do this, because there may be more than what you can see, and that gives you the hope to look at your grandmother.

What shall I look at?

You have heard some witnesses here of people whose lives have changed. Did they change because they are better? If you are present in the life of the community, you can see facts that are not reducible to just any explanation, but that witness to something else. Is this clear? Have you

seen, have you heard? But for you this means nothing, this does not prove that Christ is risen; since you can't see Him and don't want to recognize Him, when you go in front of your grandmother who is dying, you have nothing besides what you can see. But there is more reality in heaven and on earth than in your little head. Are you ready for this conversion or not?

No.

That's it; this is the point. Then, even if a dead person should come back to life, it would not convince you. This is a proof of what happens; a drama, because, to be honest, it's not that our friend is not sincere. The problem is whether what we say sincerely is true! And, as you can see, when we get to the point, we think there is always something more interesting to do than what Father Giussani suggests to us. Then we drown in the reductions I was talking about at Beginning Day, and we can't handle pain. We can begin to understand that we'll be in the same situation if we don't follow this path proposed by Father Giussani. Each of us must decide, otherwise you can't complain when everything gets dark. But when someone challenges you, if there's just this little bit, at that point, if you are the least bit loyal to yourselves, you can stop. It means that there is a glimmer of hope, some chance.

School of Community: Since, as you can see, there is still a lot to do, let's continue taking into consideration the lesson and synthesis of La Thuile, at least for those who have already worked on Beginning Day.

We have activated an e-mail address to gather questions and brief comments for the current School of Community. Please use it exclusively for the School of Community, to send questions and witnesses like those that I read today. The e-mail address is sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org.

Book of the Month for October-November: *Marija Judina Più della musica* [*Marija Judina: More Than Music*], by Giovanna Parravicini (published by La Casa di Matrona). Many who have seen the video got excited, and it was just a small sample of what the book tells more extensively.

Cultural Centers: The people who work at the Cultural Centers try to express in all the various cities, through meetings and witnesses, the experience and the judgments we make as we work together on the School of Community. So I ask you to pay attention to their proposals. On Tuesday, October 12, at 9 pm in Milan at the Teatro Dal Verme, there will be a meeting with Cardinal Angelo Scola to present his latest book, *Buone ragioni per la vita in comune. Religione, politica, economia* [*Good Reasons for a Common Life: Religion, Politics, Economy*] (published by Mondadori), organized by the Cultural Center of Milan.

Veni Sancte Spiritus