

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron

Milan, 6/23/2010

Text of reference: "Can a man be born again, once he is old?", Exercises of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation (Rimini 2010)

Song "Luntane, cchiù luntane"

Song "Ojos de cielo"

I would like to know what you thought as you listened to this song: who has these 'heavenly eyes' able to erase the hell of life? The person who discovers these eyes can ask: "Don't abandon me"; I can enter any hell with these eyes, with Him in my eyes, I can go to the bottom of the darkness, and there, because of this certainty, cry out: "Don't abandon me in mid flight" Last time I started SofC saying this (I am going to repeat it because I was struck when I re-read it and saw how SofC went afterwards, we really struggled): SofC is a working hypothesis – Fr. Giussani always taught us – for entering into reality, and we are all called to verify it in our experience. So, we don't come here to make remarks; we come here to tell, document an experience, since few people believe that living reality with this hypothesis is truly something else, not even us. To make remarks is useless, because they don't really change our mind, our mentality; it is necessary – but, as we heard, we don't give credit to it– to supply evidences, to witness that entering into reality according to what we told each other allows one to breathe; that one can enter the hell of any situation, as dramatic as it may be. We have in front of us the beginning of the first meditation of the Exercises: "The provocation of reality", that describes what happens when I let myself be provoked by reality, and what it means that reality lived as a sign is something else. If you don't have a witness to give on this, remain seated quietly. A person writes to me: "Last time it seemed to me that you were "intensely" interested in making us understand the work we need to do. I thank you for this, because I understand that it is the only hope, otherwise reality suffocates us [reality becomes hell], reality stuck on itself, on its exterior image, suffocates you. What's the point even of the beauty of my wife, of a sunset, of an encounter, of something that goes well at work, if the hypothesis with which you look at it is that it will vanish and doesn't have something that sustains it? [This is what provokes you to look beyond when you face difficult situations]. Sometimes it is enough to read a passage of SofC for everything to change [letting a crumb enter!], it changes you and so it changes everything. Since I am slow to understand, I am asking you to elaborate" Already last time we heard one of our friends witnessing the change he experienced between the first day of his cleaning job and the day when he let this hypothesis enter. This is the verification we have to do, otherwise – as we said at the end of SofC, we don't give credit to this. Where do you see this? Not in the fact that we question what we say, or the Exercises booklet, or SofC; simply we don't take them into consideration in the way we face reality. The break between knowing and believing lies here: it isn't a knowing so completely mine that I cannot enter into reality without it. This is why I want

our friend to come up and explain what he told me earlier. It is an example that can help explaining and understanding the way in which we should work.

A few days ago, as part of my job, I had to put together a door in the shop. I had already done it other times, this door was just a bit different. I got there, I unwrapped it and, as usual, inside there was the user's manual for assembling it. I put the manual aside thinking "I can do it by myself", and I started to put it together. At the end I was left with some parts in my hands, but I didn't say "There is something wrong here; no, instead I said to myself: "Good job, you did it by yourself; these must have been some extra pieces". The manual is still there, it may happen that a corner doesn't stay up and yet you say: "the usual manufacturing flaw". It was just an example to tell you how I think.

This is an example of what we do with SofC. We make remarks and we reflect on the instructions, but we continue to enter into reality (to relate to the object) according to our imagination, our intelligence, our gifts, whatever you want, all we have learned. This is dualism brought to perfection. What's the point of making remarks? At one point we become bored with making remarks, because we continue to avoid entering into reality, to not live things well. Instead, what do we usually do in front of a device? When we can't make it work we look at the instructions we had put aside, we start to take them really seriously as a working hypothesis to make it work, not to reflect on the user's manual. In the same way, in life a friend is someone who offers you something to enter into reality. When one can't make it, he goes back to see again the small next step he has to take until he gets stuck again, and so on. It is a working hypothesis to enter into reality, to see that life works. This is why I like so much Fr. Giussani's expression. Why does he talk of a working hypothesis? Because what one has acquired in life – and he is certain that it was acquired -, he offers to another person as a friend: "Look, doing this life works, you can face any situation, any circumstance, as bad as it may be". The person who does this is truly a friend, because he offers to us all the experience he has had. What is SofC? The lived experience of Fr. Giussani communicated to us; but it cannot become ours if we use it according to a modality that is not the one for which it was given to us. He calls it working hypothesis exactly because we can verify that if we live like this life becomes clear, life starts to become interesting. This is why if each person reacts according to his own mentality and doesn't take this hypothesis seriously, it is useless: at a certain point nothing happens any more. But, how can it happen, if we didn't even consider this hypothesis to enter into reality? What do you say to the child who is crying because his toy doesn't work, his device doesn't work? Do you pray? The first prayer is to take the instructions seriously. The first acknowledgment of the need we have is not to be conceited, and try to enter into reality with at my side a presence to whom I can ask. This is why it is decisive, now that we are at the end of the year with these months ahead of us, to understand clearly the way to live reality. This is what a person wrote to me about the last SofC: "The last SofC was an intense provocation for me, and I lived the following days with your reminder "SofC is a hypothesis to enter into reality" always in front of me. I would like to tell you what happened. At work something very unpleasant happened: I had some

difficulties with a colleague, our relationship is not easy; she is an irritating person, a pain in the neck who is often trying to keep a distance. I share many activities with this person and I cannot avoid her, so I tried to ward off the blows with a heavy feeling in my heart [one tries to handle the situation]. The last episode annoyed me a lot, and instinctively I felt a lot of resentment. Some hypotheses started to come to my mind: I am closing the door to my office and I am going to try to limit any contact with her. Other hypotheses were: I cannot stand this any more, I am going to ask the manager to let me stop sharing things with this person. However, your words in the first lesson (“Upon gazing at reality, I have before me something which produces a provocation to openness. [...] Reality solicits me to engage in a search for some other thing, something beyond immediate appearances.”), and then Maria Zambrano’s remark (“Man will not turn to reality in order to know it, well or poorly, unless first, and as a starting point, he senses it as a promise”) provoked me to stay and face these things. What was my position? Blocked in a perception of reality reduced to its appearance and of my ‘I’ reduced to a sequence of reactions. I was the one who was deciding what was a sign and what wasn’t. [what bears a promise and what doesn’t: we live reality like everybody else, we decide, we block it to its appearance, we decide what is a sign]. This fact [this is the sign: that something is not working] was hurting me [the warning lights, thank God, still work]. I discovered that the action immediately following this basic option – because I think this is truly an option I discover if I observe myself in action - is to block the path between myself and reality; in fact, I was choosing to cover my eyes in front of reality (limiting my contacts with this person, asking to stop dealing with her), but your reminder was still an open wound in me (“I have before me something which produces a provocation to openness”). I tried to make room for it, to let it enter, to sharpen my gaze. I realized that my first forgetfulness, my first distortion was directed at myself, because it wasn’t true that I had stopped to desire a relationship of collaboration, solidarity, respect with this colleague of mine, that is, to desire something good. All the hypotheses [because we substitute a hypothesis with other hypotheses, also ours are hypotheses!] for avoiding this person that were coming into my mind weren’t adequate answers, and the unease I kept feeling was a clear sign of this. With a clearer gaze on myself, the hypothesis of SofC (“Reality solicits me to engage in a search for some other thing”) seems particularly clear [then one starts to understand the value of what is being proposed, because once he has seen that all his attempts are brought to nothing, one starts to go back to the instructions, to go back to that hypothesis offered to me by a friend who has already made the journey]: truly, a hand stretched out to help me [this is SofC: a hand stretched out to help me]. The following days I had to discuss some patients with this colleague, and I was able to face her as if in front of a new event, full of possibilities, not stuck on the unpleasantness of the previous days. Another colleague who was present as we were working, commented: “Today you are particularly calm and patient”. Actually, I was able to work with her without experiencing that aggressiveness and anger that – you were telling us in Rimini – characterize our feelings when the center of our affection falls back from the You to ourselves. I felt very well, very free, adhering to the present instant, and not blocked on useless analyses of previous events. I saw that also my colleague was more open [the other opens up: our contribution will be

decisive for the other only when we do this, not when we preach to him when he makes a mistake; if we become unblocked we contribute to the opening of the other in a relationship that is always possible], maybe because also her perception of herself changed”. This is the promise, this is the verification of a working hypothesis available to anyone, not because we are spared life, no. But a big part of the difficulty we experience is because our usual way of entering into reality (our hypotheses) makes us suffocate, makes us angry. When one understands this, he starts with simplicity, as a beggar, to take seriously the hypothesis offered to us by the charism. Then the true verification starts, the work starts. It is in that moment that the journey begins: the adventure of a new knowledge. I thought I already new reality, I had decided what was interesting and what wasn't, what was a sign. We think we know, then we realize that we don't know anything, that we are using reason the usual way, that we behave like everybody else in front of those who constantly challenge us. This is why if we don't let ourselves be generated by the one who proposes this to us, then we say that nothing is changing. But, why is nothing changing? Because we don't let ourselves be generated (and then we lay the blame on all the saints because nothing changes). Christ came answering, making Himself contemporaneous, and He continues to accompany us by giving us a charism so that all our humanity for facing reality may be awakened. Grace is already here; only the divine can save man, the true, real dimension of man and his destiny; it's not possible for us to do it by ourselves, only the divine can stay in front of reality in this way. Only if Christ remains as a real experience in the present, and the intelligence of faith becomes intelligence of reality, we can acknowledge all our needs without fear, and put them into action. This experience of Christ present now allows us to enter into any darkness like men, with the full use of reason (not continuing to look at reality as before and then pasting Christ on it, because if Christ doesn't introduce us to a new knowledge of reality, to a new way of looking at our colleague, of looking at the situation, of looking at the circumstance, we continue with the usual dualism. Christ doesn't introduce any novelty in our life and then, in time, even for us He will not be interesting any longer).

Yesterday, during my lunch break at work, I went to eat my lunch like always on the bench where I usually sit, except that yesterday a gentleman I'd never seen before stopped and sat next to me. I realized he had the desire to exchange a few words and I left the door open because I said, "Maybe something good for me can come from this unexpected conversation." And he began to tell me a little about all the ups and downs of his life: he no longer has a home and he lost his job, and all these ugly things that happened to him have caused him a great lack of confidence in life. And as a first step, because I wanted him to recognize a companionship in this need of his, I asked him if he wanted to go get a coffee with me to keep on talking about these things, and I brought him to the coffee shop where I usually go, unashamed of being with someone who was kind of shabby, something like that, because he was important for me, and what he was telling me was like a plea. His need was a plea that challenged my security: "How can I be secure, without having undergone a trial like the one he is going through? How can I face someone like this?" And right away I realized that it was like I was standing there, bridging a ditch: on one side, I could give him a pat on the back, maybe even dish him out a few dollars and so get rid of

him; but I immediately sensed that this did not match the way I had been looked at in my need, and I realized that what was being put to the test was whether I could expend the name of Christ in my relationship with him or whether Christ could only respond to the little, modest needs that I have to face during the day. This was the only response that was truly adequate to him, and I told him, "Look, I'm telling you that I am a Christian. You can't give up hope, because something good can unexpectedly happen in your life and change it, and I'm not telling you this because I have a job and I have a house to live in, but because this is the truest thing in my life." Then I even came to the point of giving him something, because I thought that it must be terrible going around the city with empty pockets, but this came from the judgment that I made before. And when he said goodbye (because I had to get back to work then), he told me, "I thank you: you did something good for me, and I will surely return the favor in the future; or maybe some day you can help me again." I told him, "And who knows if it won't be you who helps me out tomorrow?" It came to mind that perhaps, despite all the evil that I'm capable of, because of a single gesture of charity, he will be the one to open the gates of Heaven for me.

And what did this teach you about the lesson from the Exercises?

First of all, that what moves me is events that happen and not speeches, because every day I do the School of Community on that blessed bench, but I understood what I had read much more that one time I couldn't do the School of Community by reading the booklet, but by living it in my relationship with him.

It doesn't happen with a speech, but with reality that challenges us.

And then something else that struck me is that in the afternoon when I went back to the office and later on that evening and this morning I kept on thinking about this person again: who knows how it ended up, how he's doing? But this created a sort of a burden inside me that I couldn't carry, because I kept telling myself, "Man, I didn't even tell him about the Food Shelf!" and I thought of a bunch of ways that I had failed. But when I was talking about it with my girlfriend, she helped me to realize that I don't even know how to look at my own need by myself and respond to it by myself; it is only the divine that can save man. I am truly inadequate, because I am deficient from all points of view, but mysteriously...

What did you not take into account? That the unforeseen goodness was in you.

It seemed so absurd, because if I think about myself, I see myself as very incoherent; but he wanted it like this, and I simply said yes.

He left you this wound in order to go to the depth of this awareness.

In fact, what stays with me now is the desire to know Christ better so that I can be even more transparent, so that when someone sees me, he can see Christ more easily. Like today's Morning Prayer said, "... so that our action be sure and our witness clear," because by myself I fall right back into confusion.

Thanks.

I wanted to tell you about an event that happened to me after I came back from the Fraternity Exercises, where you had provoked us right from the start by reminding us of the Resurrection.

In the small Fraternity group afterwards, going over your introduction, I actually said, "I don't know if I really believe it deep down." I felt somewhat conventional in saying this, so I said, "Yeah, well, okay, He became flesh, there was the cross, and then..."

Do you all see? This is the issue: can I entrust myself to this deep down? Can I have certitude about it beyond mere devotion? Can I affirm it in the same way that I am affirming that this table is here in front of me? And so?

And so an event occurred that was particularly dramatic for me, which put my back to the wall on this issue, because a little while later I came to know from my mom that there was a really serious situation at home, more serious than usual. When she told me I was a little, you know... My mom had to go to work, and I felt overwhelmed by the situation; I felt suffocated, but I didn't want this darkness to win. I said, "So, I want to see the Resurrection; I want to see if it wins here and now in this situation." Because I felt a crazy panic rising in me, where it seemed like I couldn't get out of it by myself, I picked up the telephone and I called someone who lately, and especially in Rome, I was really thinking of how he had witnessed a solid faith and certainty to me, and I just asked him, "How on earth can I go back home now?" Instinctively, I would have gone home and screamed at my father. When I talked with this friend, I right away felt loved and embraced in my panic. With this gaze on me, I was able to go back home and realize first of all that I didn't have to complicate the situation any further, and that I had to obey that circumstance and what the Lord was asking of me; and not by chance, in the place where drama and oblivion seemed to be flourishing, grace started to flourish even more. I was at home alone with my dad. I actually started to say, "And now what?" I didn't know what to say to him, because I was really afraid of falling back into my rage against him. So I started to pray and to offer what was being presented to me, that is, that there were two weeks of his shirts to wash, and there was the house to unclutter; and I started to take care of the house (because my mom wasn't there and because, for obvious reasons, she didn't want to do it) and to offer it, but without expecting him to thank me. (In fact, he didn't.) What changed is that I, in that situation, out of initial panic and anxiety, found myself actually grateful, almost to the point of feeling wrong about it: they were about to self-destruct, and I'm grateful to have a gaze like that on me? So I realized that this drama that I wanted to get rid of was precisely the way the Lord was letting me see His mercy on me. Then every so often I get scandalized by the ways the Lord uses to educate me. I would like to get rid of the drama; I would like to arrange my life; I would like to have a softer life, a flat one, which would be simpler; but this grace would not have been possible without my freedom and without the freedom of the people who bear witness to Him for me.

So, in short, what let you see that Christ is risen, to recognize that Christ is risen and at work?

That I began to see this situation in a new way.

A new way of looking at reality; without it, you would have been crushed. Our lives aren't spared the drama; the whole drama of living is not resolved by a magic wand. What Christ brought into life with His incarnation, death, and resurrection is a novelty that allows us to live everything that life is, the drama of living (because all these things can happen), with a different

outlook on reality. It's not that we want these complications; it's simply that we're not crushed by them.

I understand that Christ here and now gives me the ability again to face relationships, but at the same time – I'm asking you the question – about the “I,” it seems that at most, as you were saying, it's hanging over a fullness, in the sense that I say, “Lord, if You are capable of keeping these things in place, then save this relationship too.” But every so often I suspect that distance wins out.

What you're saying is true: a person cannot face his need without Christ being here and now. The problem is that we can often reduce this totality, this need, to an image; and so it does not remain standing in front of things. Beyond the forms it takes on, the need for totality in the relationship is not affected. And this is crucial, because sometimes we identify totality with the image of totality that we create. Thank goodness that the Mystery does not allow us to give in to the image; and in any case, when we give in to the image, we realize that it's not enough. This tells us that, in order to truly remain in an attitude at the level of my needs, something is needed other than the intention to do so: what is needed is a Presence that is so present that it throws me wide open and does not let me give in to the images of the need that I create for myself.

Let me tell you what happened to me last night. A friend comes to visit us, and I knew that he had really big problems at work: he has a store, he was supposed to retire in the next few months, six or seven of his biggest clients are going broke and so they are not paying him for the merchandise he gave them, and he is overdrawn with the banks, which are telling him, “First, give me everything you set aside; second, keep working till you've rescheduled your debt.” He comes, and I'm expecting him to tell me about this problem, and he goes, “You have no idea how beautiful these days are!” I thought he wanted to tell me something else, but he says, “I'm having an incredible hard time at work (which is crumbling before my eyes), and this hard time has given me the opportunity to realize that this year's work on the School of Community is inside me; it is mine: I am this work. And I realize it because in the last few months when problems came up, in front of that hard situation, I remembered all the facts from this year...” And he starts to tell me about a bunch of incidents until tears come to his eyes and he says, “I realize that the big grace that I have had has been the opportunity to take part in Carrón's School of Community through the broadcast, because if this business disaster had taken place a year ago, I would have been destroyed, humanly speaking” (and this guy's been in the movement for at least fifty years). Let me tell you one event that he told me: he had an employee (who knew the situation very well), he had to let him go, and they come to a severance agreement (a certain sum). The next day he goes to bring him the check and the guy sends him a letter from his lawyer with a complaint, and so on and so forth. All his friends and relatives tell him, “You have to destroy him; he doesn't exist. You brought him up since he was a teenager, and now he's stabbed you: go to war with him!” He answered, “This morning I brought him the letter with my

lawyer's response – because this is how it's done, no joke – and when I had him in front of me I couldn't help but love him.”

He couldn't help but love him. This is the promise for anyone who takes this hypothesis that we have received seriously, the teaching that has been entrusted to us.

School of Community: Until the end of summer, work on the Exercises booklet continues, and starting in September we will go back to working on *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, starting with “Sacrifice.”

At the last National Council with the responsables it was decided to continue the link to the School of Community as an opportunity for whoever freely (freely, I emphasize) wishes to take part. We will start again in October. We will provide you with details later on.

Vacation: “Vacation is the time of freedom... It is the time when what you really want is revealed.” This judgment of Father Giussani always surprises us because it makes us aware, as we watch ourselves in action, what we really want in “free” time, on vacation, that is, whether they are a scattering or an opportunity to deepen what we have met.

Meeting: “The nature which pushes us to desire great things is the heart.” The title of this year's Meeting leads us to look at the fact that our humanity is an aspiration and an expectation for something great. This is not an obstacle, or something that complicates our existence; it is the specific sign that man is a relationship with the infinite. This is the point that all men have in common and it is also the beginning of a real dialog with everyone. So, by taking part in the Meeting, even for a single day, we can see this being shown in today's reality.

•Gloria