

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron

Milan, 4/28/2010

Song “Errore di prospettiva”

Song “Only Our River Runs Free”

Before starting, I want to read a few lines from an email I received in reference to our last SofC. It says: “Many of us were perplexed and annoyed by so many long-winded witnesses” Is that clear? So: enough with long-winded witnesses. I ask you to be concise, to say one thing followed by a judgment. This is part of the work that needs to be done: it’s necessary to get to the point, provide precise data to understand, and say what one has learned.

I wanted to talk about an experience I had at the Fraternity Exercises. I was very struck by the fact that you ended both lessons with an entreaty to the Holy Spirit. I thought it was the most reasonable and necessary thing, absolutely not in contradiction to the work and to my freedom, and I was surprised because in the past I wasn’t like that; on the contrary, when Fr. Giussani used to tell us: “Ask the Holy Spirit”, I was a bit annoyed, thinking: “And I shouldn’t do anything?”. Now, instead, not only it isn’t annoying, but it gives me a sense of freedom and relief, because I have realized that I am unable to do anything. In fact, you were telling us to ask that we may desire it, know it, and be available. Since during the assembly at the hotel there was an objection – “How is it possible that after Carron gave the entire afternoon lesson on the fact that we shouldn’t defer, now we go back to deferring?” – my judgment is that I disagree completely, because it doesn’t look to me as if we are letting go of our freedom, but as if this is the apex of freedom.

This is an interesting question, because asking the Holy Spirit is the greatest expression of freedom, when this freedom is born of the awareness of all the factors of reality; because, if I become aware of the disproportion between what I desire and my energies, the most conscious position is asking. However, I understand that after the two lessons in which I detailed the path that we need to take, this may be felt as deferring. At times I have heard people talking about prayer and asking in these terms, considering once again as an alternative, two things that normally we need to live as one in our experience; as if to say “I ask” meant to do nothing. I understand how someone may feel uncomfortable in reducing the action of the “I” only to praying (instead of taking the entire path Fr. Giussani put in front of us in the past few days). This is why we shouldn’t look at them as if they are alternative choices, because the work we have been reminded to do in the past few days always includes the asking, at any point of the journey, otherwise it isn’t human work. This is why I arrive to the asking as the apex of this work, not as a substitution. It seems to me the most conscious position, aware of all the factors at play, and so the most human expression. I have always been struck by the moment in the *Percorso* (i.e. The Trilogy), in the tenth chapter of *The Religious Sense*, when Fr. Giussani introduces prayer; he doesn’t introduce it right away; prayer appears only after the entire journey has been made, from the initial amazement to the recognition of reality as a sign, to the moment in which one sees the outline of things taking shape, to the becoming aware that they exist

and one is grateful and glad that they do, to the moment in which the “I” is awakened and becomes aware, as the apex, that there is Another Who is making him in that very moment: prayer is the awareness of this You Who makes me; not something pious, pasted on, but the highest expression of the consciousness of the “I” in front of reality. This is why prayer and work cannot be viewed as opposed to each other, and yet many times we do pray in a devout, pious way without the whole consciousness of our “I”. This is not deferring, this is the consciousness of someone who – exactly because he didn’t defer, but instead followed the entire path, can understand why the most intelligent thing to do is to ask, to cry out. I hope that this year, working on the Exercises, we may be able to overcome this either/or approach we have habitually, but which is totally irrelevant. When you perceive this contradiction, it is because you didn’t understand. I am telling you this to help you: when we see something as opposed to something else, it means that we haven’t understood from where it originates. This is why it is interesting and helpful to identify ourselves with Fr. Giussani: because he makes us follow the entire path from its origin (and that’s why if one thinks of being smarter and so able to arrive to the conclusion without following the path, he makes a mess; but this is only the consequence of not having followed the way in which Fr. Giussani – with his brilliance, which is nothing else than his simplicity of following how things happen – makes us learn.

I wanted to relate an experience I had at the Exercises. I am starting from a point that particularly struck me at the end of the first lesson. You said: “We can be different if a You dominates, and this becomes possible only if we accept to shift the center of our affectivity from the self to a You”. At the end you also said: “May this desire for Christ be born again in us, so that we may recognize Him ever more not as word, but as an experience we cannot live without, because it makes us live so differently both with people dear or unknown to us, because we love everything under the pressure, the energy of this being moved”. I am going to tell you this fact that happened. Saturday evening after the assembly in the hotel we went out with some friends to get a beer; we were sitting around a big table, a large group of people, and we started to chat, in fact it was a ‘correct’ CL conversation. At a certain point I started to feel uneasy, and across from me I had one of my dearest friends who seemed to experience the same uneasiness; so, I provoked him asking: “What’s the matter? Surprised, he answered: “I feel uncomfortable”. I asked him: “Why are you uncomfortable? Isn’t this a nice group of people? They are our best friends!”. He thinks for a moment and then says: “No, I am uncomfortable because Christ is absent.” I objected strongly: “No! Christ is present, not only because He makes everything and we know it, but also because He said ‘Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them’” Suddenly his face truly changed, he was so moved that we started to talk softly, as if we wanted to keep that silence you were talking about, and the people around us noticed it and stood up gathering around us. Everything changed, as you say, even if the ingredients stayed the same...Being moved like this hit me so much that it transformed even my position right there. The next morning at the assembly you resumed talking about the You Who dominates, that results in gladness for His presence. I experienced this absolute gladness (and also my friends around me), so I was impressed that it transformed not only that moment, but also affected all the following days, including going back to work.

One can be present even in a normal conversation, or he can be absent; but it is enough for one to be present and everything in the conversation changes; one, because we may be sons and yet be distracted, and this one, by grace – because the Lord acts always like this, this is the method – calls back everybody.

At the Exercises you said: “Christ takes hold of us so powerfully that everything is seen in its truth; in Him everything was a miracle, so, the more one lives the faith in the presence of Christ in the Church, the more the amazement in front of the signs of God will affect also the formation of the most hidden thought” I am going to school to prepare for the exam to become a judge: in the morning I am doing an internship in the office of a Public Prosecutor, in the afternoon I go to school and in the evening I have to study. I live the experience of the You that dominates especially in court facing the defendants (it is a particular section dealing with abuse, pedophilia and sexual violence, and many times I am surprised at how - when the defendant enters and we go progressively deeper into the details of the offences - I find myself looking at him with, excuse the word, ‘disgust’), when there is always an instant in which I experience a tenderness, because I discover that I have a hope for them. However, there is a big problem: in the evening I study and among the subjects I have to study there is one that I hate: I don’t like it and I have to study it a lot; I try to study this subject well because it is needed for the exam, and I may have been in front of a You Who dominates until two hours before (to the point that the need for Him is very true, nothing sentimental, nothing made up, there is a great desire to live with the same intensity), but in that moment it’s not enough; in fact, when I study I can’t wait to finish those fifty pages, and I procrastinate.....So, I say: don’t we always say that John and Andrew might have not seen Him any longer, and yet they had become different people. Are we sure?

You skipped some passages; I am going to read it to you because this is very important. “That day their heart had bumped into a Presence that unexpectedly and clearly corresponded to the desire for truth, beauty and justice that constituted their simple, humble humanity. From that moment, even if they betrayed Him and misunderstood Him a thousand times, they would not abandon Him any more: they had become His”. What did you miss? “Even if they betrayed Him and misunderstood Him a thousand times”. This is exactly what happens to you, as it happens to me; but, did this put in doubt what had happened in that encounter? To be His doesn’t mean that the effort, the difficulty are eliminated. To be His is a judgment: John and Andrew had not attained with anybody the fulfillment, the satisfaction (the experience of correspondence, we can say) that they experienced in front of this Presence, and this is a fact; afterwards one can forget after an instant, one can trample it, make a mistake, but this doesn’t change.

One thing is still missing, though. I know that the circumstances in which I arrive to say: “I am Yours” are, inevitably, when I am in front of people. The true problem is when you are alone, by yourself (in the evening when I am studying alone), in your room in front of the computer; how can you, in such a circumstance, become aware once again of One Who happens again? Do you understand? It’s not even only a matter of betrayal.

As I said other times, the problem is that the first reduction we make is in looking at people; if you were truly conscious of what happens when you are in front of people, it would allow you to face life with this in your eyes also a second afterwards. The fact that then it disappears means that you identified Christ with the sentimental repercussion you experienced. And this is the first reduction: to stop at appearances. I give you an example: you love, truly love, someone and you are truly worried because this person has a serious illness; if one day you read in the newspaper that a drug has been discovered, what reaction does this news provoke in you?

I go and buy it, and I take it to this person.

Even before, you feel a repercussion of joy at this news, thinking of the person you love. Then you get distracted, but when you see the person who is suffering – and you had forgotten the newspaper –, can you avoid looking at this person without having that news in front of your eyes? No. Why? Because it wasn't just the sentimental repercussion; reality was already different due to the fact that this drug that could cure him or her existed. It is a judgment that remains after the sentimental repercussion has disappeared. If it isn't like this, after it disappears we enter reality as before. Now, the fact that one has the clarity of this judgment doesn't spare the effort of entering reality, because Jesus didn't come to spare us the effort, but to allow us to live the effort in His company. This is the verification of faith that each person has to do; that is, if you start to study with the awareness of what happened to you. This is not something magical; at times we seem to identify the encounter with Christ with something magical in our life that would spare us the effort. It isn't like that, because if it were like that it wouldn't enter my life, it would never become mine, it would remain outside; thank goodness that things don't work out the way we think, thank goodness! Then it is there, right there in that circumstance that you start to see that there is a way to stay in reality, facing the trials you have to attend to to practice; already there you can see that you start to live with a newness you didn't have before; and this gives you hope that in time this newness may encompass even the subject you hate. But this happens step by step, and this is essential to convince you that you are not a visionary. Faith is something so real that it enters into real life not by magic, but through all the passages we have to make, crossing each of them to be able to see the victory of Christ exactly there, not nearby, not after, not before: there, through what happens.

Sunday evening I returned from the Exercises with the perception of not having grasped in its entirety the path you followed.

We have the whole year.

That's good, at least. Especially in the second lesson, when you took on freedom, I found myself lacking in experience, that is, I could not find the connection between my daily life and the characteristics, the workings of freedom as you were describing them. It was like there was a cloud between the words that I had heard from you and my daily life, my experience. The only stab at judgment I was more or less able to make was when I realized that I had taken for granted that I knew what freedom is, when in fact I didn't know it; so I found myself almost forced to look at the notes

again as soon as possible, and I did this Monday morning on the train. So there I was, looking at the notes and trying to summarize them a bit, when at a certain point I hit upon a judgment that almost hit me in the face: “Is it possible that Carrón was doing nothing in that second lesson other than telling us that we are not aware of how we are made, already made?” In fact, at the root of our humanity there are already all those workings, all those characteristics, but we just skip over them. I was surprised to find myself moved: it was a new discovery of how I am made, of how I am already made. And it also became clearer to me why you systematically, to use poker terms, go “all in,” that is, you point everything toward your humanity and so, as a consequence, toward our humanity. This is what launches me back once again with more desire, more fascination, on an adventure that I can live in a communion that I experience first of all in the relationship with you and that has a source: the tenderness of Jesus for me, an infinite tenderness.

The only thing we have to realize is that it is true that we discover what we are, what the constitutive workings of the I are, in our relationship with reality; but the issue – especially the issue of freedom and so of reason – is that it has to be acted upon, put into action because, as you are saying, they’re there, but we can skip over them. Father Giussani, as you can see, is not making anything up, but he does explain to us how reality puts all the workings of knowledge into action and how the presence of reality challenges all our freedom; it does not create my reason or my freedom: we already have them. The issue is whether we loyally identify ourselves with those workings that he puts us in front of, or we trade this for learning a discourse, instead of letting ourselves be struck by reality as he shows us. Because what he is doing is much more than a lesson: it is the witness of what an I does that is loyal to the recoil of being, without blocking it (in reason) and without shutting it out (in freedom), because complete humanity happens when the I is open. And what value does this have for us, who so often stop ourselves and block ourselves? That it is not first of all a negative judgment, but it’s like what one of you says: “You are learning mathematics: see how you usually make a mistake at this point and make a mistake at this other point; be careful here” – it is this tenderness of someone who cares so much about your destiny that he doesn’t spare you from the work, because he is aware that you are intelligent enough and that you have enough resources given to you by the Mystery to be able to do it, but he tells you, “See how where we usually go wrong is here, is here, is here,” and he makes you pay attention, because otherwise everything becomes willpower and everything is blocked. This is why he doesn’t only tell us that reason and freedom exist, but he shows us, he witnesses to us how both of them act, in such a way that our relationship with reality can contribute to the ever growing emergence of my I as reason and freedom, to the growth of my I; this is the great opportunity for each one of us, if one is willing to do it. We don’t need a who knows what; we need this simplicity of not blocking the workings that reality introduces into anyone.

I didn’t come to the Exercises because a friend had asked me to go with him to other ones. Last week a friend asked me, “Excuse me, but why aren’t you coming to the Exercises?” “Because I said yes to someone else.” But it was like this had triggered in me the desire to go, but partly because it was late, partly because of okaying it with my wife who isn’t in the movement, partly because Sunday was my mother’s birthday... I decided with heavy heart not to go, and I realized that sometimes it’s harder to

say no than to say yes. Oddly enough, after this decision I wasn't angry, as usually happens to me when I miss something. Why was I still glad? Because I knew that what I was looking for was the same thing that my friends in Rimini were looking for: to belong to Jesus; and my heart was content in this search. Then my friends happened to send me some texts from Rimini with some points that you were talking about. All of this led to me loving my wife and my children more. What I wanted to ask you was for a judgment on this.

If you ended up like this, okay. Sometimes a person has to decide. The movement offers these two activities: in a concrete moment, one can evaluate and go to one or the other for a given motive; you have to see if you, standing in front of a possibility, feel like you're losing something for you: this is the judgment. Then, you can do what you can do; it's not that you have to do whatever. What matters most is saying yes to the Mystery in the way that the Mystery is calling you now. One can be prevented from going, so the best Exercises for him is to not go, is to say yes to the Mystery. The problem is not whether you go or not; it's saying yes to the Mystery, period. This is the easiest moment for everybody, when the circumstance is unavoidable: at that point it is the easiest circumstance, when one is certain and sure that this is what he has to do. Sometimes, in other cases, they aren't unavoidable circumstances, and one can have a possibility, and there you need to evaluate all the factors so you can come to a judgment with clarity, but the issue is that a person, whether he come or not, judge. And then, even if he risks and judges, he has to measure based on the experience of what it means when he sees others who participate, what happens inside me, if I see that not participating in an activity where we are all invited to participate is a loss for me (we often realize it later, when someone who was there tells us); it's not out of some sort of moralism, because I'm supposed to present my badge or say that I belong to CL; no, it's that I'm sorry I missed this opportunity. This is the judgment. It's something you have to see coming forth from the stuff of life, so that you don't just latch on to it as an extraneous thing.

First, an observation on what the Exercises meant for me. What I saw and heard corresponds so much to my heart that nothing seems more real to me. Two examples: during the days I was at the Exercises I saw my husband's face changing, and coming back I felt very full and had a gaze that was so much sharper than yesterday, for example, I got a call from someone from whom I hadn't heard in months and who I know is struggling because of the situation he's in, and to whom I'd already given attention and help in the past; he was calling for some practical help, but at a certain point I realized that whatever practical advice I could give him would never be enough, and so I was stuck; I was dumbfounded by something he had said to me, and I realized that his desire was much greater and that it coincided with mine. But the thing that moved me the most was not so much taking note of this (the advice would not have been enough for me either); what moved me the most was wondering what meaning this fact would have had that happened right in that moment, yesterday, and my being moved happened in the answer that they gave me, because they told me, "This is how Christ reawakens my desire"; it's something I'm recently aware of: I am moved most not so much in others' needs or in my need, but in noticing that Christ loves me so much that He lets these things happen in front of me so that they will wake me up. The other thing I wanted to say is this: a lot of times at the School of

Community I heard similar things being talked about, but it's the first time that it happened to me – okay, not the first time, but I noticed this: what you're saying is true, that you can hear this thing being talked about over and over by witnesses and by your friends, to the point that you might even be moved, but then if you're not moved... First of all that your humanity is awake, that you have in front of you all the breadth of your desire, but then if there's not an I that freely clings and goes to the depth of the sign that he sees, nothing happens and it can't be for me.

It's not for me; what I see happening in others will never be mine. You see, the issue is that we start to identify with what is being proposed to us; at a certain moment, as is happening to you, there comes a surprise. This is the outcome of an education, of following a course. You can't measure: "I'll get to work and I have to see the fruits right away." They come according to a way that is not what we have in our heads; if someone says, "Since they don't come right away, I quit," they never come. Why? Because growing slowly is the way that is most in harmony with humanity. Giussani makes a very beautiful *excursus* on this concept of "slowly" in the fifth chapter of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*: slowly, because this is the way that is most in harmony with us, so that it become ours. It means being open when we face our work, in the certainty that it will bring us to where we've been promised, but according to a plan that is not our own.

And then, about the other thing you were saying first about judgment, someone said, "But what can I do when I'm alone so that I feel moved in the same way, when I'm doing stuff?" I noticed something else, at least for me it was like this: if we're not open to continually doing this work, even judgment gets lost along the way. It's happened to me that I have times when, in really hard situations, I've been able to stand in front of them even without having anyone there at my side helping me, and then there was a long time when I no longer had this capacity yet there were always moments in the School of Community, there were always my friends, there was always everything; I think that what I stopped doing was the work; by stopping it, at a certain point even judgment gets weak to the point of becoming so inconsistent that you go back to being at the mercy of the circumstances.

That's exactly how it is. Thanks.

I wanted to tell you the experience that I am having in these days. My dad is sick and today he was given the Anointing of the Sick and what was striking was that, even in the complete sorrow I'm in, you're surprised by the presence of the Lord, and this is something real. The priest said, "Let us accomplish this gesture as Jesus did when He met the sick," and in the simplicity of that gesture the Lord's presence became known, so much so that my father, who was sitting in a wheelchair, asked at the end to go with him to the door, and this is a simple fact, that would not be explicable because, especially when he's in pain, he prefers to lie down. And likewise I could recount many things that have happened, and what was coming to my mind also about the Exercises was when you were talking about the Fraternity and in particular you were giving the example of the host, you were saying, "Christ is present in the host" and then you were saying, "Do I put all my hope in the host? No, Christ makes use of the host; I adore Christ present in the host." This, in effect, is the experience I am having.

Thanks. This sums up the proposal: what the sacramental method leads to is precisely that we do not put our hope there, but we put it in Him, as we were saying, who is there. If there is a shred of reality where we do not use the same method, we stay at the level of appearances and so we cannot stand in front of all of reality, of all our desire and of all the drama of life.

The booklet with the texts of the Exercises will be included already in the next issue of *Traces*. As always, I am asking you to keep from having “apocryphal” notes going around; everyone can use his own notes for personal work, and in a few days we will be able to work together on the official notes. Next time we will see one another on the Introduction from Friday evening. Sunday May 16 we will meet in Rome. Going to Rome and praying the *Regina Coeli* is the pilgrimage we want to offer, with the Pope and for the Pope. So let’s favor this gesture over any – and I repeat, *any* – other initiative, even if already set or fixed beforehand, because this is a gesture that we are proposing with this sort of clarity precisely out of a desire to affirm the link that leads us into reality: a historical Presence, guided by the successor of Peter. We want to affirm what keeps us from giving in to confusion and to all the possible and imaginable interpretations that we would inevitably fall into, were it not for a historical point of reference that tells us the truth about Christ. Without Peter we would be in more total confusion! This is not a gesture meant to give one another mutual encouragement, but a gesture that at this particular moment of history affirms with clarity where the historical anchor of our faith lies. Not unconnected from this context is the proposal of the book of the month for May and June, the *Choruses from “The Rock”* by T.S. Eliot. This text is extremely pertinent, where the question dramatically echoes, “Is it the Church that has abandoned mankind, or mankind that has abandoned the Church?” The answer is affirmative in both cases, as Father Giussani said in the last interview that he gave: “First of all it is humanity that has abandoned the Church, because if I need something I go after it if it goes away.” And to the question, “And when did the Church abandon mankind?” Father Giussani answered, “The Church began to abandon mankind when it forgot that it was Christ; it was ashamed of Christ, of saying who Christ is.” This is why it is particularly meaningful to read this text now.

•*Glory Be*