

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron
Milan, 4/14/10

Text of reference: L.Giussani, “Is it possible to live this way?”, vol. 3, Charity”, p. 29-35

Song “*Quando uno ha il cuore buono*”

Song “*Give me Jesus*”

To start, I am going to read one of the questions you sent me. “As I was reading the chapters ‘Perfect, like your Heavenly Father’ and ‘Morality is to imitate God in charity’ my immediate reaction was to experience a sort of powerlessness and a gigantic disproportion between myself and what Fr. Giussani describes as experience born of the gift of self, being moved, and the offering of one’s own life. I was struck particularly, in the last chapter of charity, by the description of the new attitude, the change in mentality born of this different kind of life. To me it seems humanly impossible to live this way, and yet I am certain that in the long run a life lived for less than this becomes intolerable. What gives a person the energy to take the risk and hurl himself back into reality like Fr. Giussani describes?” Fr. Giussani describes this energy needed to risk oneself, because he starts too—as we said last time – from this impression of total disproportion. In fact, on p. 20 he says: “It’s curious that in the Gospel it says: ‘Perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect.’ Perfect like our Father: who is capable of that? This is a rash suggestion. As a suggestion it produces the opposite: fear. But a parallel passage in Saint Luke explains what it means: ‘Be merciful, just as your Father in the heavens is merciful’. Perfection is this being moved to action by man’s need.” Then he describes how being is communicated to us -“The source of being is in You” -, how every fiber of our being depends on, has its source in Him and this becomes completely clear when one talks about a baby with respect to his mother. Last time we said: man derives from God infinitely more than a baby is born from the viscera of his mother. This is so true that if the baby were conscious of himself he would say: “You are everything for me”. Someone truly conscious of himself would realize that this dependence is infinitely greater in each of us, but this becomes even more visible when the Mystery acts out of this charity totally moved, and makes all of our being vibrate. So, it is true that it is impossible; the question is if we understand that charity can be ‘only’ a reflection of the gratuitousness of His grace. Fr. Giussani quotes Peguy: “As their freedom is the reflection of my freedom, / So I love to find in them a certain gratuitousness. /A reflection of the gratuitousness of my Grace [grace is any movement with which God creates, because God’s movement is creative] As if created in the image and likeness of the gratuitousness of my Grace”. This is why we have to pay great attention, because it is here where we introduce a different method: it *is* impossible, if it isn’t the communication of the Mystery Who makes us so much His that then He makes us reflect with our being what we receive from Him. This is what we have to witness to each other; this is why I am reading it at the beginning of our SofC. Let’s hope that the witnesses we will listen to this evening may help us to recognize this, because it is true that for less than this, in the long run life becomes intolerable. Fr. Giussani describes it very clearly when he says that “If it is not actualized in love, as love, the I is unsatisfied, angry with itself, hostile to others, incapable of taking in and assimilating the beauty of reality, it is bored”. The alternative to this is an angry life. This is why it is so important to understand this passage well.

I am married and I have two children. For about forty years everything that related to the Church, the Mystery, faith, etc., had nothing to do with life. Then, four years ago, when a very dear friend died, the encounter happened and beauty entered in me. I inherited from this friend the Solidarity Food Bank, the so-called “parcels”, and with that, slowly, everything started to change for me. Then, two years ago, after I attended the assembly of all the Banks, there, for the first time, I experienced a true fullness, and

as the song said earlier, with a good heart one can do anything. What can I say? I would like to tell you about me, what is happening to me since I received – in a sense – a new life. Then you realize that you live everyday for something that is wanted, I am surprised by the amazement with which I face all this: new and beautiful things as well as negative things, that before this would have been almost impossible to accept.

“Before it would have been almost impossible”.

The point is that I am still the same person as before, with my shortcomings, my habits, and the point is exactly this: I am the same person I was before, but I have a different heart, a full heart. I wanted to tell you some things that happened. First: a few months ago, some friends who went to the Meeting brought me a gift, a cap with written on it: “Relax: God exists, but you aren’t Him”. I have to admit that I really liked it and I wear it also at work, a construction site. One day, when I was by myself, a non-Italian colleague asked me: “Why do you wear that cap with those words on it?” At first I was speechless then I answered calmly: “You see, I wear this cap because I encountered something extraordinary, and only a short time ago I started to really feel Christian”. I continued to talk about myself and of how this encounter changed me, changed the way I stay with my friends, my colleagues, my family. The next day another worker who was close to us the previous day and had heard our conversation, approached me and asked me if I could tell also to him all the things I had told to his friend regarding my family and the way I relate with people after having encountered this reality. Well, I got huge goose bumps; in that moment I was really amazed, it seemed almost incredible that I was speaking about the beauty of Christ’s charity to two foreigners, two Muslims, who were amazed by the way in which I was relating my experience, by the fact that I was wearing that cap without a problem. Wow! How great is the Mystery?! How true is that Presence that doesn’t make any distinction, and places you in front of people so you become moved, because you are moved in front of all of this. Here I feel like saying: I have everything, I lack nothing, I have friends, companionship, I am happy to live this reality. But our humanity never stops working and continues to challenge us. At times I find myself facing situations that are a bit tough, for example because my wife doesn’t share completely my way of thinking, my encounter. How is it possible? I happen to talk about charity and beauty with people I don’t even know, and the people closest to me, with whom I am living, don’t understand me? I won’t deny that at times I suffer for this, and this helps me to understand that we don’t create the circumstances we live, they are given to us. Few days ago a friend asked me why I hadn’t attended the assembly of the Regional Fraternity, and I answered that that Sunday was my wife’s ‘rest day’, and we had organized a short outing. My friend answered that to him it didn’t seem really right to skip the assembly, not for the fact that the assembly comes before my wife, but because one should sacrifice some other meetings for certain occasions. Even if I respect my friend, I don’t think that what he said was completely correct, because the Mystery gives us daily what we are called o live, so if a circumstance happens to us, it is because He is giving it to us. What I want to say is that Christ is present daily, here and now and not in a month, not when we decide. I have encountered this beautiful reality not to be in the Movement or to ‘do’ the Movement, but to live the Movement. I don’t know if this has to do with charity, but I am certain of one thing: that all this makes you feel full of life, makes you true, makes you feel loved in any circumstance.

Thank you. It is difficult to find a more adequate answer, because it is all right there in front of us.

I want to tell about some experiences I had in the past month, experiences that helped me to understand what being moved means. Two things in particular: first, only if I experience this being moved personally, I can change the way I look at another, be free of any prejudice and become aware of the fact that also the other can be moved. Second, even if I am aware of my nothingness, yet I too can be of

some importance for another and can become an exceptional person. Last month I accompanied one of my classes on a field trip to Naples, which I had proposed with one of my colleagues, moved more by a concern for the students' human rather than specific education. Aware of the problems and the nothingness lived daily by our kids, we wanted to offer this class, besides visits to museums and monuments, something more, that is, an encounter with a reality made of exceptional people, like our friends of "Rione Sanita`" [Sanita` District] in the heart of Naples, friends we had met at the Rimini Meeting, and who had moved our heart with their songs and their exhibit. We were hoping this would happen also to our kids. Some background information on this trip: some colleagues, knowing that we belong to the Movement, accused us of wanting to use this trip to indoctrinate our students. I have to admit that I left for Naples full of fear that we could do something that might be recounted once back, possibly supporting these negative prejudices. My only concern then was that everything was perfectly organized without any ideological imbalance. So we left, and arrived in the evening: no problems. The second day, though, an unexpected fact happened. We went to visit the Church of the Gesu` led by a friend from Rione Sanita`; we were in the wing reserved for St. Giuseppe Moscati, with the walls filled with 'ex-voto' [votive offerings] in thanksgiving for graces people have received, when an elderly priest approached us, and interrupting the explanation my friend was giving, started to tell us about his experience in the Favelas of Brazil and about the life of St. Giuseppe Moscati. Then, speaking in dialect, he told us that every day many people ask him to pray not one, but many Hail Mary, and seeing us sitting there, he asked us to say a prayer together, which we did. I looked at the surprised faces of my students who were praying the Hail Mary and my heart gave a start and I was moved; I started to cry for the way – so unpredictable – in which the Lord was manifesting Himself. Immediately I thought of a colleague who had said that we would make the students pray: if we had really planned this it wouldn't have turned out so well! In that moment I understood that it's Another Who does, not me. What happened immediately freed me from any fear; instead, it gave me a boost of energy that from that moment allowed me to look at each of my students with a different gaze. For example, that same evening one of the kids desperately wanted to go and see the game of the Champions League, and we went - even if there was a terrible downpour - with our umbrellas, completely soaked, we went to find a place where we could watch the game. The next day our friends took us to visit the Rione Sanita`, and a friend who is an architect, before explaining to us some monuments in the area, told us briefly the reason why, after meeting the woman who is now his wife, they decided to live in that district giving up the opportunity of a good career. One of my students – a girl – burst into tears, another one even said: "You must really care about this God, you must really love Him, to make a choice like this!" The same evening we went to a concert given by Alfredo Minucci, who with his songs full of profound poetry told us how his life changed through the encounter with some friends, and the same girl who had cried in the afternoon was moved again. Her girlfriend remained still the whole time recording Alfredo's songs. There was a person with us who, seeing the kids in tears, told me: "How fragile these kids are, who cry like this listening to a song" I reflected on this and thought: but fragility is when things don't turn out like you planned and then you cry because it is as if you had lost hope; being moved is another thing. I think my student cried because she heard someone telling her something so true that the heart cannot help but vibrate, that 'something' that corresponds to you so perfectly, and which you didn't expect, that you can't help being amazed, moved, full of joy. Back home, we asked the students to write their comments on the trip, and this girl wrote: "I was struck by the architect and his wife, who chose to live together in the worst area of Naples to help their own people, and also by the beautiful melodies of Alfredo which helped to make the day fantastic". Obviously, among the many comments, the kids said that they discovered some new sides of their teachers and how good Naples' pizza is. I realized that even through me and my nothingness I can become an exceptional person for someone, so much so that even the pizza eaten together tastes better.

Thank you. At a certain point you started to look in a different way due to what was happening to your students, that is, the communication of Being that was happening made you participate in that gaze, and this was communicated also to the students, and it is communicated only through a yes, the fact that we accept this grace in us.

Let's try to be brief otherwise we aren't going to finish in time.

I went to Naples with this group of students as well, and in the wake of this exceptionality that I lived and from which I was moved, I thought: "After many years of not going, I will attend the GS Triduum". I got sick, and so - in a way - I was deprived of this exceptional gesture. I wasn't even able to go to the Way of the Cross in the evening, so apparently the exceptional occasion I was looking for - that would have moved me again - didn't happen. This struck me and I thought to myself: "Lord, it still remains alien to Me that You died for me, I am sorry for this, I don't understand how it relates to me". So, I went to a simple Way of the Cross at three o'clock in the afternoon, because I wanted to be part of this event. At a certain point the priest said: "In any case Christ lived the abandonment of the Father because of the distance caused by our sins". In that moment I was extremely moved, profoundly struck, because I thought: "So, if You had not died, I couldn't have this peace now, this gladness, this gaze, this tenderness, I couldn't be moved like this", and I felt grateful and, in a way, I felt grounded, as if I were saying: what am I worrying about? I looked at the spectacle of all that He is doing in me and also around me, because also the dawning of this community at our school is absolutely His doing; and what is the method? That He, moving me, sets me in motion, and the others recognize that I move not because I am forced to, not to organize something (so much so that last year nothing was happening). This is how I understand that the first object of charity is Christ, and I am very grateful that you are insisting so much on the fact that we have to understand this passage.

Why did you perceive something during the Way of the Cross?

Because I was aware of my need, that is, because for the first time in my life I told myself: "It bothers me that You are alien to me on this point", and so I didn't take what I felt as something alien to me, but I was very attentive to try to understand how the Lord would answer me".

This is part of the story, He can enter into you only through your need and then it is a grace.

It is the Other who is contemporaneous.

This is what I wanted to say to answer another letter, which says: "The new law isn't a more radical commandment, one that is more complicated to follow; the new law is the grace of the Holy Spirit. The new law is not yet another commandment, even more difficult than all the others; the new law is a gift, it is the presence of the Holy Spirit." The Spirit is the way through which Christ penetrates the very marrow of our life, making us truly His own. After you talked about the mercy of God, who became flesh to cry and eat with us, this may seem like a step back from this concreteness; it feels like going back to the Old Testament, when God showed Himself to the prophets as Spirit, not in the flesh, with His face, at the same time human and divine. It seems to me that this way to define charity, as linked to the presence of the Spirit, eliminates the carnal dimension, which I need. I would be grateful if you could help me understand this better, and I apologize." First of all, nothing of the carnal dimension of charity is lost; on the contrary, it is communicated through a person: what she, for years, had felt as foreign has finally become flesh, is finally her own. This is what I call the Holy Spirit.

I was deeply struck by what Fr. Giussani writes on pg. 24: "The source of this movement, in Christ, just as in myself, is the Spirit of Christ. The Spirit of Christ is the source of compassion and of being moved." Right before

Easter you told us: "Ask for the gift of the Holy Spirit," and because of this suggestion of yours I understood that the only way to possess Him in a more carnal way, to know Him in a more carnal way, is to invoke Him.

It would be better if we understood that we are not able to make Him become ours, and that it is something we have to beg for.

For the past ten days I have been reading over and over the article you wrote for Easter, entitled "Let us return, wounded, to Christ." I was struck because, in front of the scandalous provocation of the child abuse story, we too felt tempted to be scandalized just like everybody else (even if we immediately understood the instrumental use that was made of it) The first thing that struck me in reading the article was that you started from the word "dismay" and the beginning of your recount delves deep inside the matter; you kept repeating the words "dismay" and "justice" that, by the way, precisely re-echo the words of the Pope.

Why were you struck by this?

Allow me to add something else I was struck by, then I'll try to tell you what I tried to understand. In the article you did not mention the attack against the Church, instead you started from a dramatic idea of life. This is what I understood: the drama does not lie in your cry for justice, or in your being scandalized by the events, or even in your anger for the overt attack against the Church; the drama lies in staying in front of this enigma: "Who will be able to answer this suffering, this bottomless question?", that is to say, staying in front of our inability to answer this question. I think that what you were trying to say is that only that awareness can make us beg for Christ, can make us beg that He bridge the abyss that opens in front of us, the abyss of evil, of sin, as well as the abyss of this disproportionate judgment on the Church. I want to understand how you got to this position, while everywhere else the topic is dealt with in a totally different way. Let me rephrase: while the world (and instinctively me too) is torn between being scandalized and being defensive (at this point these are the two opposite positions), I was struck that you dared to unite perpetrators and victims in front of the incommensurability of this wound, that is inflicted and suffered, and that is always this returning to Christ, Who alone can bridge the abyss. I keep reading it and I tell myself that I feel it has something to do with being moved, with the moved gift of self.

I ask you all the same question: where does this way to look at reality spring from?

I am telling you what the article provoked in me, because it has been a fact that widened my horizon and let me breathe again. Before reading it I had accepted and given judgments very similar to the ones printed on the various newspapers.

What does this tell us? It tells us that, as I will explain in details at the Exercises, our face is not different from anybody else's, that we all side with the usual suspects; don't be scandalized, we are like everybody else, hiding behind this alibi or the other. There is nothing new under the sun. This introduces the real question that we have to ask ourselves, and I say this so you start preparing for the Exercises. Because if, anyway, at the end we are not different from anybody else...

I was mostly sorry for the suffering that the Pope was going through; I felt the blow of the violent attack against the Church and I thought that in these evil times the defense of the faith starts to demand more and more the price of a great sacrifice. Nevertheless, despite these feelings, I wasn't completely satisfied by the way I was facing the issue; I sensed something was amiss, but I couldn't understand what that was, and most of all, I was stopping short, I was making do. Only later I understood how far I was from listening to my heart. When you pointed out the infinite nature of our need for justice I finally understood the source of my uneasiness: in all my attempts I had not realized that the answer could only come from something outside of me. The awareness that I had left out my very self, and therefore the hypothesis of an answer, became a judgment that gave back dignity to all. I am not afraid of certain things that happen or of the coming of evil times; I am afraid to discover that faith might not be able to stay in front everything, and this fear starts to take root the moment I stop verifying the validity of faith in every circumstance. I can say that I have truly experienced Easter; through what you and the Pope have told us I've had the opportunity to be in front of a new humanity and to look at it. Your judgment has been an event; you were able to see where we couldn't see. Your judgment has been like a newness bursting into my life and filling it with joy and awe. I am fascinated by the possibility to learn this new judgment more and more, through the

method you are pointing out for us. The work we did for the elections has been an example of this; giving the flyer to people at the market, and to the shop owners I frequent on a regular basis, has introduced a new judgment, a discovery of reality. By welcoming other people's humanity I became aware of my own humanity, which is precisely the same as theirs, except it has been taken by Christ.

This is tantamount to saying that we are starting to realize that this inability of ours to stay in front of reality has something to do with faith; we realize that we don't simply take sides just like everybody else, but that this has something to do with faith. I want to linger on this point because it makes us verify whether or not there is the possibility of newness, of what School of Community now calls the new mentality; it makes us verify if this is really possible. Because if that's not the case, what are we here for? This is a radical question that goes all the way to the heart of the matter. Let's start getting ready for the Exercises by looking at this, because we will then realize what the challenge is that our faith puts in front of our eyes, and what faith gives us to help us face the current situation.

I am very provoked by what you were just saying because from last time I was very struck by this sentence you said: "we live under the pressure of a being moved," because it described two aspects: on one hand, many people to whom I am very close in these days keep coming to me with a question that is always more real, more profound and which must be answered, and so that has also a great expectation. An example of this: I am becoming friends with this guy who has some very serious problems at this time, he is unable to get up in the morning, he has total diffidence for everything, he has not had an experience of hop for himself and last night I thought I'd go by to help him out because I have really come to care for him. I found myself in front of a man with a huge question, so real, even bigger than my own question, so much so that being in front of it I felt like I was being backed into a corner the whole time. On the other hand, I had this irrepressible desire for the mountains, in this moment when I am very stressed and pressured at work, I really want to go to the mountains for one last trip to the ski slopes. So, at the end of the fraternity, with a few friends, we went. Since these are real friends who love me very much, everything was beautiful: discretion, topics that we spoke about, the beauty of the environment, going to mass at the end. I got home and I was so happy that I went to see my dad who is not well and there I found the usual situation: his disease, his deep depression, his unwillingness to smile at me not even for a second, and so I felt like this recoil that I had already felt during the week, I really felt the need to find Christ everywhere. When just now you were speaking of faith, I was struck by the fact that I cannot give up my desire that my father be able to face to this difficulty with less sadness. Even if I believe in Jesus, that is not enough, I have to face and answer to this sadness, at some point how is that I am unable to answer to this sadness? And yet, how is that that beauty that I brought with me brought me there? What can I do? My need is that I have to look for Christ everywhere in order to be able to stay in front of this situation and that that which we have in front of us is much greater than that which we can imagine. There is on one side the humanity with its infinite desire and, on the other, the Only one that answers.

Where do you get Christ out of everything? Where do you pull Him out of? Because this is the issue, because otherwise it is as if faith had no hold on reality, and in front of things we are like everyone else. Friends, this is the issue.

I'll begin by recounting a fact. The other day I can back I came back to hospital after my rest, a patient was waiting for me in the hallway and upon seeing me she started running towards me saying: "finally you've come back". In that moment, I was struck (I mean... someone who is waiting for you...) and this kind of pumped me up too. So much so that a couple of days later, I was working the night shift and this patient rang her bell and when one of my colleagues went to assist her this woman said: "no! send me her!" So I went into the room (by the way, she had called me with a lousy excuse, she needed someone to open her water bottle) and all of a sudden she looked at me and said: "but does Heaven exist?" from

there we began a certain dialogue. I was struck by this because that night I lived a leap, a jolt with that woman and this changed a feeling that I had within myself, it forced to regain consciousness.

What is that? What is this jolt? I want to understand it well: why do you feel it with certain people and not with others?

In fact my question comes out of this, because if I think of myself, I think I am very unfaithful and I realize that this faith is hanging from that jolt, so much so that my preferences were not chosen by me, they just happened to me, but they are tied to me, they are like that jolt so that, rereading this chapter I was asking myself: in front of my unfaithfulness, therefore even regarding my favorite relationships, in front of all those that one meet, what am I giving that is mine? Is the only thing that is mine the expectation of this jolt? Also because I realize that when I am not living this jolt the whole thing bores me and I let it go, but I want to understand.

This jolt is nothing other than the communication of Being, the being that allows you to be more, the Being that makes you more yourself, as Don Giussani says, that inexpressible and total vibration in front of things and people; this is the communication of Being. This is not an abstraction, that is not a feeling, that is not a mood: it simply is more human intensity that communicates itself! This way one understands the great passage: “Man lives to affirm an Other who is called God. This is the truth that moves the heart, moves and sets in motion (that jolt of which she spoke). True love, that is the true enactment of the law of man, that is the aim of living, is to affirm the Being, is to affirm the Other, is to “affirm You, God’. Analogously, dedicating oneself to a brother, to another man, living for an other, acting for another, moving for another, is true love in as much as it desires that the other meet the truth of his Being fulfilled”. And once this jolt has been perceived—since this dialogue is a two way dialogue—if another does not want to stay at this level, I don’t care anymore, it is not able to grab me, and so I am not able to hold, if the Being is not constantly communicating to me and is bringing me to love. But we can love this way because the Being communicates this to us, this intensity. We can love other only under the jolt of this being moved, under the pressure of this being moved. For this reason it is possible, not because it is ours, but because this being moved is the reflection of that which the Mystery does in us, of that with which the Mystery communicates to us. The true attitude is being available to receive this gift through the way in which He gives it to us, because as Don Gius always taught us, the first action is passive, it’s welcoming, it’s allowing ourselves to be struck by something, letting ourselves be moved by Being, accepting that which is more than being and this brings us the reflection of Him.

Let’s prepare for the exercises asking this: that each one of us, in this gesture in which we will partake in 10 days, will be able to participate more to the Being, for us and for the world. The desire we have to live this gesture is made clear, right away, by our “I” in action, but how our “I” moved even in terms of the sacrifice that is being asked of us to be attentive to the directions; it is a gesture of such great dimensions that it can’t exist if not without our individual contribution of the sacrifice, and this sacrifice is the modality of our question to Christ, that He have pity on our nothingness, the modality through which we beg to not fall into nothingness, that is give us that participation to the Being that makes life really worth being lived, for this reason, being attentive to the moments of silence, to punctuality, to the announcements, they are all opportunities for this prayer, for this question until the circumstances may become “friends” to our heart.

