

**Notes from School of Community with Fr.Julian Carron
Milan, 12/2/09**

Text of reference: L.Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", p. 91-102.

Song: "Favola"

Song: "My Song is Love Unknown"

Let's start our School of Community work. I remind you again to be concise, with the judgment of the experience we are having.

I am starting from an experience I had last summer. During an assembly with you, at one point I started to cry because never before had I been aware with such clarity of who I am; at that moment I told myself: "You have everything. This is the only true thing in your life". Had a wizard been there and told me: "I can fulfill any wish you have", I wouldn't have known what to ask for. This moved me very deeply, like never before. The sense of surprise started from that day on because, definitely not for being consistent, but as surprise happening, I found myself facing the usual circumstances of life, the relationships with the people who are most dear to me and those I had never seen before, with this deep emotion inside, which in front of that circumstance was generating a sense of expectation that I had never had before; expectation that through that circumstance, through that relationship, He would show Himself. Because of this, things started to have a weight they never had before in my life. It was as if before, I had always faced things and relationships motivated by a certain interest; at work I had certain interests, in my family life others, with my friends yet others. Since that moment I have only one interest in life: that I may experience Him again, in order to relive the awareness that He is everything and I have everything. To pick up again after a few months the chapter on Poverty has made all of this sort of explode, so that today I speak, with the little awareness I have, of what is happening to me while doing School of Community on poverty, which awakens in me an enormous attraction, in part because it is the beginning of what I am living, and in part because a relationship with reality like the one Giussani has is the most fascinating thing I have ever encountered in my life.

Explain to me in detail what this new relationship with reality means, when you say that things acquire a weight they never had before. I am asking you this because one of the questions that arrived via e-mail is: "I react to the chapter on poverty with a brief question: 'The more you love, the easier, lighter and freer the relationship becomes'. But how can a relationship be free and at the same time fully involved with the person I have in front of me. My question is born from the experience in which, with the excuse of freedom and poverty, exactly with the excuse of treating everything and everybody for their destiny, I have seen the risk of living the present poorly, of overlooking the people who are present. In the end, the ultimate destiny is far away. This carries the risk of distancing myself, of not relating fully with my wife, of tossing everything over my shoulders, instead of living that circumstance fully with all the toil it asks of me [he is talking of the relationship with his wife]; to conclude, I think that we risk living poverty

as reduction and forgetfulness, and not as the full expression of our humanity”. It seems to me that you are saying something different.

Yes, in the sense that when I was saying that I have only one interest, when I am aware of myself, it means that there isn't any longer a circumstance that interests me more or less, because I intuit that every circumstance is the occasion to experience being moved by His Presence. And this generates a greater affection for things and people, because what dominates is the expectation for Him to reveal Himself in that, the desire to go to the core of that relationship.

Thank you. It's not that the relationship with reality is reduced, actually it becomes more intense, because when a person is so taken everything speaks, everything acquires a consistency it did not have before. This is why we have to pay attention to what happens in experience, because many times, when we describe experience things don't add up.

I am going to talk about a fact that happened to me yesterday. A lady about forty years old, who comes to see me for work-related matters, came to my office and immediately told me she needed my assistance because she wanted a divorce. I was surprised by her determination and asked her how long she had been married. She answered: "Almost twenty years; we also have three children". Then I asked her why she wanted a divorce, if something very serious had happened, and she told me it was because of problems with her mother-in-law; problems that had been going on for years that now she could not accept any longer because they interfered with what family is meant to be. She said that her husband had never taken a stand against his mother because he is too attached to her, and she feels this as a sign that her husband loves her less, that he does not love her. She added: "In time this has generated in me anger and hate, and I lost all my hope". While she was talking I was thinking: "What can I tell her?" and when she said this I thought it really had to do with School of Community. There are two passages that struck me very much, for example on page 88: "Hope is the certainty in Christ that becomes the foundation of certainty for the future; certainty resting on something I fix upon, present or future, is opposed to hope". Or, at the end: "This certainty in the future comes from a present: I possess Christ [.....]. What opposes this hope is any manner in which man places his certainty in something that is determined by him". But if this is true for me, it is true also for her; it is not a truth for CL members, it is a truth for the human heart. Suddenly, it became evident that I should challenge her and myself to follow the entire path of reason that you are helping us to follow. So, I asked her: "What is the true reason behind your desire to have a divorce?" She answered: "Anger and hate". I objected that from what she was saying it wasn't for those reasons, that the origin of her uneasiness seemed to be her need to be loved (that somehow she feels has been betrayed). And I told her that she is disappointed because she places her hope in an image of how this desire of hers to be loved should be fulfilled, for example, in a certain behavior of her husband towards his mother. Then I invited her to begin again from what she felt as most true, I told her: "Do you really want to get separated, or only to be loved more, to be loved infinitely?". She was speechless for a moment, and then said that, sure, she would like to be loved by her husband; then she looked surprised and replied: "Now I recognized this, but when I am by myself how will I be able to maintain this when anger will come back

the next time? At that point I could not hold back any longer, and I told her that the Mystery, the One her heart desires and of Whom her husband is a faint sign, has made himself company to man exactly for this reason, because alone we would not be able to make it. Then I asked if she would like to come with her husband to have dinner Sunday night with me and my friends, telling her that I could talk to her like that because I, in turn, had been seized by a company where Another has made me understand myself. Then I said to her: "Did you get married in Church?". "Yes". "Have you ever read the Gospel?" She answered yes. "Now you are determined by anger, but in the Gospel what emotion determined the person who was in front of Jesus? Gladness, hope. Who, instead, was determined by anger? The enemies of Jesus" And I added: "I suggest that, after you leave, you go to Confession, that is to ask for the embrace of the Mystery that the heart desires, saying 'I am not able to love my husband', and then you go home to your husband and say to him 'I do not want to get a divorce any more'. You will experience that it corresponds more to what you desire". I was struck, because she started to cry and she told me she would absolutely do that, and she wanted to come to dinner on Sunday. Then, I told her what came to my mind at that moment, which surprised also me as I was saying i: that it was not me saying those words to her, but through me, through the fragile sign that I was, it was the One who had spoken to John and Andrew, and now had come to her. I was struck, because it is the surprise of a fact I had not imagined; and I felt myself challenged by the journey we have made to recognize, once again, the evidence of what corresponds to me, and to be surprised by how it corresponds to the human heart: she was moved and everything was put in motion again; she left saying she wasn't going to get a divorce any more, and this is striking.

Thank you, because only if we have an experience we can truly become companions, and take advantage of any situation to give a real contribution.

I think I belong to the group of those who, looking at experience, realize that things don't add up. In my life I have a thousand evidences that Christ is present, is thinking of me and loves me; this is an experience, and if I denied it I would have to deny half of what makes up my life. Even when there are difficulties, it never happened to me to go to bed at night feeling desperate, thinking that life sucks and there is no solution; maybe dejected, anxious, but always with a last bit of energy that asks God to sustain my inability. So, it is from my experience that I can make the judgment that Christ is present and fulfills, because I have seen this many times. However, now I clash with this thing of gladness that Fr. Giussani is talking about. From what I understood reading the book, it is a sort of lightness generated by the certainty that it is God who fulfills. Even if I can't say that it is not true, because I have seen it in life, I experience this feeling very rarely (and Giussani calls it truly a feeling: "From freedom from things a feeling is born that is possessed only by the poor"). Often, instead, anxiety and apprehension take over in me, and so I ask: what is not adding up in my experience?

What doesn't add up? Let's leave this question open: what doesn't add up? Because these are two things that cannot be separate. What doesn't add up? Let's leave the question open.

The other day, when I read the last paragraph on Poverty, the last remark “To know something it is necessary to have a detachment; it is this detachment that allows us to see things and therefore to use them and to enjoy them more”, I really experienced a sense of dismay, and I told myself:” Up to now all is fine, but this, no, you cannot ask me this, I don’t think I can do this”. This is too jarring, and so I asked myself: how is it possible to love reality and relationships to the core, and not risk being superficial? I would really like to live things to the core, and to me it doesn’t seem automatic to say that the more I detach myself the more I love them fully. So I ask myself: is this a necessary condition or often it happens to make it possible to live this detachment?

Let’s leave these questions open; let’s see if some answers will emerge from other testimonies.

For me it happens that only when I live that relationship which is indispensable for my life—when I say to a person, “I can no longer live without you”—that I am free from that person. The possibility of being able to say this is the fruit of something that has imposed itself on me with that person and is therefore within that event itself; immersed in it in an evident, a way that is impossible to misunderstand. This is the truth of myself and only when the truth of myself emerges (that is, that which completes me); it is only in that moment when I am free, that is, poor.

Explain this.

When one has an overwhelming experience with a person (and to that person you can say, “You are indispensable; I cannot live without you”), at a certain point it’s clear that Christ is unmistakably present in the experience.

Why?

Because not even this person can fulfill me, but in a relationship with this person the truth of myself comes out, that is, that which completes me emerges.

Does it happen in that moment, or is it because you have encountered Christ?

It happens because I have had an encounter with Christ, because I have already been marked, there is already a scar in me that allows this experience to emerge, something always new, a newness that is fruit of a relationship, of a history.

What is being said—and I don’t know if you’ve understood or not— in my opinion is fundamental, because it is right in the culminating point of a relationship when I am become aware of the limit of the relationship; not when things aren’t going right, but when they are going well. There, in that moment, it is evident that the other person (who I feel so connected to, to the point where I say that without her I cannot live) isn’t enough. This happens more so with the greatest fulfillment, not when things don’t work

out, but when they do. Therefore, it is in the greatest fullness that I understand the difference between this thing and Christ. Often we think that they are the same, but the more unmistakable an experience like this is, the more affective it is, the more is it clear that Christ is something different. If one is not able to have an experience like this then he is not able to recognize this difference; the difference between all of the faces I recognize and that Face; I can grasp this only if it is an experience. The drama of living begins when we get to that point. In regards to this, a letter says, "I want to ask what this position of poverty means, above all in regards to affective relationships. When I read the piece in which Giussani asks, referring to what we can see and feel, "if happiness, happiness, truth, and beauty are other than what we are able to see or touch, then why care?", and then, "We care only when we things "get in the way" and we need God in order to work". Really, when I read this my blood began to boil and I said, "But how is that possible? With all of the things that I have, my work, my children, my husband; they cannot be things that get in the way; it is not enough for me to say that these things are the not the most dear things in my life, that they don't complete me, even though this is the experience I have every day. So, can you help me? What purpose do things serve? What is this work? How can I love my husband, my children and my work as God loves them? And how can it not remain that these things merely serve the purpose of making me aware that they don't complete me so that I will look for Another? Why did God give so much, such a variety, and so much beauty?" This is the question: what is a true relationship between people and things? If you re-read p. 256, Fr. Giussani has a word that he continually repeats throughout these two pages: a certain possession, certain, certain, that is, "poverty is not to hope in a certain possession". And, "*certain* is a possession fixed by us, decided by us, chosen because it is comfortable for us, chosen because it is appealing to us, chosen because it is what gives us the most wealth and thus economic security". "Certainty is in what we decide". Why? Why is it in the most important moments of our experience, as we have seen, these things do not complete us? Two reasons. First, because of the nature of our desire; there is never an experience like this one that makes it clear that my desire is greater than everything I see; things are not able to fulfill us because every one of them is limited. Therefore, to expect fulfillment from possessing things or people always reveals itself to be incapable of fulfilling (this is so true that it is enough to think for a second of the majority of people, as I will say later, 99.9% of people lived relationships expecting everything from them, as if everything is there). How can it be that an experience like this,—that in the beginning we said, "I could not live without this person"—that in time becomes something that says nothing to me, even to the point of divorcing? This does not mean that I need to hold back from the relationship, but that I need to live the truth of that relationship, and the truth of that relationship I can live for Christ who is present, who will make it possible in his truth. If I am not able to live the relationship in his truth, then time, circumstances and insufficiency will make them less interesting for my life; not because I want them to become less but because they are not able to address my whole self, they show that they are not what I am made for; not what the other is made for. The question, therefore, is how to live a relationship in a perspective of which fulfills both things, and this gives witness to the event: how I live a relationship in such a way that it is always interesting and doesn't become less? Because, if it's less it means that there is a way to live things, a certain possession of things and of people that inevitably places my hope in being

fulfilled by them, as in the example of the boy: “the boy has a girlfriend—he is set! Some months or years pass with the certainty of having everything: this is a non-poor relationship. Not because one should not have a serious girlfriend but because it places the certainty of hope, the certainty of his future in it, and this is what happens 99% of the time... point 99”. It seems that all of us have confirmed this in our experience, and for this reason to live a relationship in its truth spares it from falling apart, not from pulling you away from it. It is to spare this affect, this beautiful thing that happens in life, from becoming less.

Recently it has become really clear the difference between what is for you and what is beginning to slowly come to us. This became evident to me in your talk at the Compagnia delle Opere (Companionship of Works) meeting last Sunday in which you quoted Giussani who affirms that “in order to love one’s self, to be able to work a lot, you must be together; to be together you must recognize a love you have been given which allows you to love others which then operates the great change that is the love of people and of ourselves, seen as a relationship that guides us to our destiny; and this is not possible if it weren’t for a Presence, it is not possible if Christ [...] did not resurrect, that is, if He isn’t contemporary. To recognize this contemporaneity, this presence in my actions, this company in my journey, is the first fundamental gesture of freedom that allows all of the others; no, that allows and incites all of the others”. This is the striking thing that I am beginning to understand—thinking about what was said earlier; something begins to come back to you; being preferred one begins to prefer.

Here is another issue that shows up in your questions. “Reading *Is it Possible to Live This Way?* I was struck by this passage in the corollary on poverty: “We are called to carry out a task: this is a concept that you must add to last time’s discussion. Poverty is not automatic. It is not like one in the gutter who’s got lice and a few measly rags hanging from him. Poverty is the *use* of reality according to the destiny that, with certainty, is proposed to us and awaits us.” I was struck by the fact that poverty, according to Father Giussani, is not non -possessing, but possessing in the right way (like we said before); it isn’t non-using, but using the right way, that is to say keeping into consideration the destiny of reality in its entirety.

Furthermore I want to ask you to clarify the work that you are asking us to do in order to become poorer, because this passage contradicts what people that are for me authoritative said, like: “The most immoral thing is to commit to reality, because everything is the fruit of grace.” On the contrary, it seems to me that this work on poverty coincides precisely with this tearing ourselves away from what would hinder us in our following and our asking Jesus, present in our companionship. This is an issue that frequently comes up.” These questions show a widespread difficulty in grasping the relationship between grace and freedom, a difficulty in grasping that poverty is the fruit of hope. Because, since I am certain that there is a Presence that fulfills me, I can be free in using things; this journey happens like a grace, like the consequence of a grace. Then, if it is a grace, does this mean that it is not my initiative as well? That is to say: when I use of things in a different way, isn’t it still I who is using them? I am using them. There are two things that many times are thought of as contradicting each other: if something happens because of grace, this means that I don’t do anything. Think if there is a greater grace than falling in love, and tell me if, after you fall in love, you don’t do anything; it is the other way around, it is only then that you start doing something! One becomes aware that something happened to him, precisely because he starts to take initiative toward what happened. Do you give this falling in love to yourself? No, it is pure grace. Does this mean that you love the other person without you? No way! You are the one saying “I love you,” and you are the one looking for her, you are the

one who calls her. These two things can never be in contradiction; I can be increasingly freer from things, and precisely because I am freer, I can take the initiative to use things in a truer way. Who can stand in my way? This is not a contradiction; it is simply that on account of grace, I might have acquired a freedom from things that makes me use everything I use according to a modality that is different from the one I used before. I am the one doing this (like somebody responding to the loved one: he is the one doing it and taking the initiative, not his neighbor.) The fact that this is something that at the same time is a journey of grace and something that I desire for myself more and more, sets in motion my whole freedom; and the fact that this sets in motion my freedom is a sign that something that I don't want to lose happened to me, therefore I want to use things this way more and more. This is why there is no contradiction between the two things; it is just the expression of that dynamism that we couldn't give to ourselves but that, because of grace, comes into play in the way we enter into relationship with people and things.

My son had homework for school in which he had to answer some questions. In one of his answers he asked himself why he goes to school, and he gave himself this answer: "To learn new things, to know," and he said that he would like to talk to somebody about these fundamental questions. This was a shock for me, because I have always been there for him. He is eleven and attends secondary school. I make his lunch every day, I help him study, I am with him every afternoon, I take him wherever he needs to go, etc... but in this answer that he gave, he expressed a greater and more fundamental need. I want to thank him for doing it, because probably I often breathe down his neck, I help him, I almost want to solve the problems of his life and I forget (I realize I forget) that it is an Other that he needs; then I understand, or at least I try to understand, that detachment within a relationship that Father Giussani talks about, and I understand that I have to take a step back and look at his real need, his real desire, in order to know him better, to know him and myself better.

Thank you.

Reviewing the chapter on poverty, I was struck that at a certain point, toward the end, something fundamental is stated once again, that is, that poverty belongs to knowledge, that it is a law of the dynamic of knowledge. There are lots of very fascinating moral intuitions in this chapter, but he says that it is a dynamism of knowledge, exactly like faith. Then I said to myself: if that's the case, I need to apply it, to verify it, and I tried to apply it to a certain situation of my life, my work. At the moment I belong to a work group that is experiencing difficulties with our superior; it is clear to everybody that we are right and our boss is wrong.

Except to the boss...

But there is a detail: we are so convinced we are right that we are angry, there is no gladness within this group of people that are so certain to be right, and probably are. Evidently something doesn't add up. I said to myself: "I'll try to enter into a dialogue, applying that method," that is, poverty as a method for knowing. I want to understand the reason for what is happening, so instead of lingering on the fact that I am right, I want to focus on what Father Giussani says: gladness vanishes because I am completely absorbed by the fact that I deserve an acknowledgement for working well. I tried, and it worked, meaning that I was able to enter in a relationship because the other, that up to that point was the evil I was fighting against (deep down I was just holding on to my reasons), became the possibility for a concrete dialogue. This past week became more livable than the previous one, precisely because I took a risk. I tried this method at work, now I will try it with my wife and my children, and maybe in a while I will tell you how it all ended.

In your opinion, do we have to wait for the aftermath?

No.

The point is if, when things don't add up, we are free or not. This is the issue at hand. What allows us to be free now, not just when and if things work out (sure I want them to work out,

don't misunderstand me)? What if the boss gets stuck and doesn't move one way or the other? Or if the other – your wife, or your son, or your friend - doesn't want to change? Or if things don't work out, as often happens?

What if you have a disease, or a situation that doesn't change: what does that journey bring into play? How can we see that we are poor in that circumstance? Where does our freedom come from, in that circumstance? What allows us to start up again? Because, in order to say what you said, deep down, you had to start up again on account of something else. In my opinion it is interesting to realize this, because otherwise, as it always happens, deep down we expect correspondence from success. This means: what does a real experience of faith introduce? We react just like everybody: when things go well we react well, when they go badly we get stuck. *By the way, it's very easy to become accomplices when everybody fights the same target.* Evidently; in that scenario freedom is a good that rarely comes around, because everybody is caught in that thing. We will come back to this.

When I went back to work after my last maternity break, because of a shortage of personnel I found myself forced to work long hours. Yet, instead of feeling tired, I felt increasingly happy, even glad. A friend of mine asked me why, and I couldn't come up with an answer. After the last School of community I think I understood the reason for my happiness. Every morning, when I walk from the parking lot to the entrance of the hospital where I work, I ask myself where I will see Christ that day; but at the end of the day I always feel like I haven't seen Him anywhere. Then why am I glad? I understood that I am glad because I am in awe in front of what happens. Throughout the past months of work, there has not been a single instance when I didn't act in a way different from before. In the past two years, since you started accompanying us on this fascinating journey, I realized I have changed, but I didn't know how much. Many are the moments during the day when, faced by unusual situations, I behave in a way I can't foresee, which forces me to ask myself who is it that makes me be different from the way I have always been; who is making me in that very moment? I then realized that I don't need extraordinary events (or something I have in mind) to take place in order to see that Christ happens. Only now I realize that my gladness comes from seeing the way He changes me throughout my day; it comes from seeing that it is Him present who makes me. This – because it happens to me, not to somebody else! – will never cease to fill me with awe, and makes me ask for it to always happen, in every moment and everywhere.

This is what freedom gives you. And this is how we help each other to learn. We cannot separate the issue of poverty, as if it were something isolated from our "I". And what is the nature of our "I"? That our "I" is need for fulfillment, and with what can we fill this need, this *quid animo satis* he talks about at the end? What all mankind tries to fill this need with? With the two possible things: either things or people. This is why we expect fulfillment from the possession of one or the other, of our son or our husband, or our wife or the people who work with me or my colleagues, or from the accumulation of things. Why does it work this way? Because I cannot get rid of this need for fulfillment, it is impossible. So, why aren't values enough? Because with them I cannot avoid this desire for totality, and so nothing is enough. This is why, if I do not experience a positive answer to this question (that is, that something happens in the present to fill the emptiness I am made of, that is able to fulfill my desire) I can forget about being able to have a free relationship with people or with things. Poverty is not a value that can be separated from the journey of faith, it is only Christ who makes a different kind of relationship possible; if we separate the value of poverty from Christ, it becomes something impossible. This is

the greatness of the journey Fr. Giussani is making us take: that this is the outcome of faith and hope because I live with this certainty. He says it in many different ways: “I can be free for the possession of Christ present”, because only Christ present is able to correspond to all my expectation, and because of this I can relate to my husband or to my children not as if they are something to be managed, but looking at them for what they truly are, not using them to fill my existential voids: I can treat them for their true essence, according to their destiny, I can treat things according to their destiny. Otherwise it is only my attempt, an attempt – still at the level of the mere religious sense – to free myself of this void. But I am not able to. Why am I not able to? I can become able to live with less money, but not to be free and glad. The three characteristics Fr. Giussani mentions are decisive to understand if we are talking of a Christian experience. Look: freedom from things, gladness, possession of all that is necessary to us. And each of us has to compare himself with this, because otherwise it is something impossible. In fact, either this is given to me as grace, as the outcome of this Presence that imposes itself on me, or this freedom and gladness are impossible. God, having preferred us, made us partake in that fullness that makes us able to have a free, gratuitous relationship; otherwise it would be impossible. This is what is striking about Christian experience: for the ancient civilizations the gods could not love, because the only concept of love they had was *eros* (the concept of desire): I desire something I am missing. And this would introduce in the divinity a limit, something missing. According to this concept the gods could not love, because by definition they could not be missing something. The Christian had to invent another word: *caritas*, to express that God’s love for us is born of an overabundance. And the human being would have not been able to understand this without the coming of Christ. But we are not God. This is why the first step we have to take in order to be free is to acknowledge that we are full of need. Only God can live such a great fullness to live a gratuitous relationship, to love things for their destiny, because He coincides with fullness. We are in need, and so we need to receive this *caritas*, this absolute *caritas* that the Mystery has toward us, this preference the Mystery has for us, so that we may imitate God and give in our relationships with everybody what overflows from what we receive. This is the test of the journey we are making. Where do you see if we are making it? First: if I am free. Then: if I am taking the initiative, if I start to relate with things in a different way, according to that ability that is not mine but introduced by the Mystery (as Pope Benedict said in *Caritas in veritate*: we can become protagonist of this *caritas* exactly because of the *caritas* we receive from God). This is why we will reach the ultimate point when we will talk about charity, because without it nothing is possible. But, if we do not grasp all these passages, in each instant we affirm only a particular, forgetting the whole. Because it is the “I” that has all the desire for fullness! Either there is Him who fills it continuously, or I can forget the possibility of relating in a free, glad and gratuitous way with people and with things, despite my good intentions. Is it clear? The true decision is if I accept to enter in this relationship with Christ, a relationship so constitutive that allows me to have an experience of life so full and glad that I relate gratuitously with everything.

Veni Sancte Spiritus