

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron Milan, 11/18/09

Text of reference: L. Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", p.103-110 and p. 86-91.

Song: Mare Nostre

Song: Liberazione no. 2

As we said at the last meeting, we resume reading the text "Is it possible to live this way?", starting from the path from faith to freedom and the beginning of Poverty. Also, something else happened: we have before of us the fact of the Crucifixes and the public flyer we wrote. This is another opportunity to verify what our experience was, because the controversy had already exploded before the flyer came out, and each person took action in some way. What repercussion did the flyer provoke? What is the difference in behavior from the common mentality? What is the reason for the difference that the flyer carries within, and how did we use it? What happened when we risked it in reality?

Getting to the book, when we speak about poverty we have to be clear about this: in what do I see that I had the experience of the journey described in this brief summary? I am curious to know in what you do see this.

I would like to ask for your help regarding two facts that happened to me last week. One day I learned that my son had done something foolish and I became very upset, to the point that I called my husband at work and told him: "What are we going to do?". We were both very angry and decided to scold our son when we got home in the evening. In the afternoon I was really sad, and I started to read School of Community where it says that in reality there is an unforeseeable factor whose consequences I can see, but that I cannot see directly: it is unexplainable, but it is in reality and if I deny it I am unreasonable. As it often happens to me, I recognized that these lines were describing well what was happening to me: my son behaves foolishly like I do because Someone has made him, and was making him also in that moment, free. Before this Someone who was making my son and me in that very moment, I sort of took a step back, and I understood that I couldn't scold my son and maybe slap him, that it was not right and it would have been pointless. When I heard my husband coming in I hurried to meet him at the door and I told him: 'Don't scold him, I would like to talk to him tonight'. So, that evening we talked to him, at the end we told him that he had acted foolishly, but that our love for him is absolutely the same. And to think that only few hours before I would have liked to slap him! That evening I thought that making a judgment had brought me to recognize His presence that had made me move in a different way, and this had made me feel more truly a mother, a wife, a person. The second fact happened when the flyer on the issue of the crucifix came out. First of all I want to say that when the news of the ruling on the crucifixes in the classrooms came out, I thought it was wrong for reasons I don't actually know much about, using this to kind of dismiss the issue. When I read your flyer I experienced a great sorrow, because the judgment of the flyer is the only judgment a Christian can make, and it made me understand how many times saying the name of Jesus I had said an empty word. In fact, it hadn't even remotely come to my mind that what was truly challenged in that issue was my relationship with the One who is always present in my days, even when I couldn't care less, the One who brings fulfillment and meaning and

everything to my life, the One who just two evenings before had entered my life and the life of my family making it possible for us to look at the situation in a truer way. After the flyer, and also thanks to the difference I experienced, I asked myself what it means for me to keep the crucifix in the classrooms or to wear it around my neck like I do. Also, thinking of the mothers who send their children to Catholic School, but then don't want them to attend the Advent Retreat, I thought that, no matter what, nobody can deny that the crucifix reminds us of the most mysterious fact in human history, also because, if that Man had only died, how could we explain that humanity has continued to believe in Him for two thousand years? Before a fact of such import, every person should be able to say "It interests me", or "It doesn't interest me", as School of Community says, and it is wrong that a small group of wise men lay claim to the right of making a decision for me and for mankind. However, what I asked myself and what I would like some help on, is this: how is it possible that, after facts like the one with my son and others I have lived, in which I recognized His good presence, after all that happened in my life, I do not perceive this attack on the crucifix as an attack to what I hold most dear, as a personal problem?

And what did you answer to yourself?

In truth, the only answer that came to my mind, which I don't like very much, though, is that I have not known.

What does it mean that you have not known? Explain it to us.

That I say that I recognize Him, that I recognize His good presence because for me truly my change is always a sign of His presence (because it is impossible that one changes, especially me), but when this issue of the crucifixes comes out, I feel like saying: "This is not my problem".

This is the issue: it is not yours. And, why is it not yours?

I thought also that I perceived my son's issue as mine, I cried, that afternoon I was desperate.

And so? In that case you were forced to take steps because it mattered to you, in this case you did not feel any urgency.

Yes.

What are you learning from all of this? Otherwise, all these things that happen to us do not help us to make a journey, so much so that in the end we catch ourselves with everybody else's attitude. And why is there no experience?

Because to me it seems that there is.

This is the problem. How is this experience reduced once again? Keep the question open. Why do you see that you grow? Because it becomes yours, it will become ever more yours.

But, isn't the fact that that evening I did something different from what my instinct was suggesting already a sign of growth? Isn't it there where I see that I had an experience?

In this sense you had an experience there, but what does this mean? That it is still an isolated instance, it isn't so much "ours" to become our normal position in front of reality; sometimes it happens, but many times we fall back into the mentality of everybody else: it isn't mine as my normal way of living, so much so that in front of all these situations we almost don't see the difference, we rush off with everybody else's mentality. This is why I say: if we do not have an experience in such a way that we make a judgment (and to judge means that I learn something on reality that becomes mine, this is where I see that I catch myself with a different attitude), where do we see that we haven't yet reached an awareness? In the fact that many times we still stop at what we haven't done. But what is the most striking thing, much more striking than what you are not able to do?

That He is .

Slow down! And why do you say He is? In what do you see that He is?

I am not unhappy that we had a flyer, because I see that He is in the flyer.

Correct. And what does this mean? That the most important thing is not that we are fragile, that we take some steps limping (and that afterwards we bash ourselves for not having lived up to the ideal), but that what takes over is the fact that He is, and that He seizes us again, continuously. But, in what way do you mean that 'He is'? He is not theoretically, but in history: He sustains you by freeing you from your reduction in order to bring you before His presence. And in what can you see – this is what we need to understand – in what can you see that 'He is' in the flyer? Where is the difference, where is the diversity, the impact with this diversity, where is the diversity? Let's leave this still open.

I am telling you of a scolding that did happen. I want to tell you about it, because I think it is pertinent to the journey of faith and especially with trust. Last Friday my boss – who is also a great friend of mine – gave me an dressing down of unseen proportions, also speaking to me with a certain violence that at the time I didn't understand, on an issue that did not seem so crucial to me. Probably he was having a bad day; the fact is that this happened, also in the harsh and provocative way he is very good at. He ended the conversation– and this was the theme of the reprimand, that I hadn't gotten to the bottom of an issue, verifying it- telling me: "Anyway, you never get to the depth of things, and this should serve to teach you a method"; as if he wanted to say 'this should be your method always'. He was saying it in relation to my work, but the way he says it is investing the whole of life. I came out of these fifteen minutes on the phone furious for the tone he used with me, but – at the same time –I kept saying to myself: "No matter what, the piece of truth he told me remains, it nails me!". However, the issue was still totally open, and that evening when I went home I spoke about it to a friend over dinner. This friend, who knows well both me and the relationship I have with my boss, brought this to my attention saying: "Listen, even if your boss had reprimanded you saying totally false things, things having nothing to do with the truth of the facts, would you have ever doubted your relationship with him?" And this threw me for a loop, and I told him: "In truth, I hadn't even thought of this". And he replied: "You see, there is a strange factor here. If what you told me were to happen to me with my boss, it would be only a work related issue and I would break the relationship from a certain point of

view, saying: "I work for you and I will continue to work, I will do what you are asking me, but that's it". Instead, look at you, you haven't even thought of breaking that relationship; do you understand that there is something like a mysterious, strange factor, and if you don't go to the core of this factor, sooner or later you will doubt even that relationship" What happened next? The following day I meet my boss outside of work and he continues to provoke me, makes things even worse, because first he tells me: "In any case you have to understand that I am your boss, I can tell you whatever I want", and then he says: "And I am happy that you are mad, because this will put something in motion". Again, I come out of this totally furious, and the next day I find myself thinking at times about finding another job, about the possibility of leaving, putting myself on the market, until in the evening I take things more seriously, I look at the problem in the face:" But, in truth, why am I not going to do this? Where do I find in the working world an experience that makes me grow like this in my relationship with reality, and makes me become fully a man starting from a particular?" The next day I told my boss: "The reason why I am not leaving is that this relationship is too decisive for me".

Which means?

I am getting to the point. From all this I understand two things: that I still have a whole journey to make, in the sense that it is not enough for me to say that in this relationship there is an unexplainable factor, and what was revealed in this circumstance; I understand that if I do not get to the origin of it, there is still a restlessness in me and sooner or later I will break away also from this. The second thing on poverty is that I did not have the problem of a personal image of affirmation, but then I failed because I didn't go deeper to the origin. For this reason I realize that I am stalling, with a whole journey that I still need to make.

And which journey still needs to be made? How does the Mystery respond to this stalling? How does He provoke you? How does He set you in motion? Does what happened to you have anything to do with this stalling of yours?

Certainly!

Then, how is the Mystery answering to you? Do you want Him to send you an angel?! He sends you a boss! Hurry up! This is the matter: you may ignore this, or it may be the occasion through which the Mystery challenges you to do a work. If you have discovered a piece of truth in this, stick with it, start to work on it, because this is the way through which the Mystery is calling you. Would it be better if nothing had happened and you had continued to live doing things the wrong way? Well then, this is bringing you a good.

Absolutely.

So you can answer or not; this is what freedom is. But this is an example – thank you – of what happens in life. Someone wrote me who says the same thing: "My boss asked me to study a certain aspect of an issue and then to give a report on it. So I set myself to study the tools and papers that were given to me, and to find other ones, basically to go deeper, and then I decided that I was done. After my report my boss asked me if I was really sure because, considering what it was going to be used for, I had to be 100% sure about what I was reporting. So I went back to

the material and I found some places where I had treated it superficially, and I looked at other issues that I had previously left out; then, before the final report, I was amazed at myself, at how much I had worked, at how so many questions had come up about the work I was assigned, at how I had gone deeper. In the end I was much more certain about my answer. I was also happier because I had done good work; I was satisfied. Then this question occurred to me [this is all going on in a little piece of reality that we treat seriously]: Why isn't it like this in life? Why do I leave out a lot of things (for example, I have a hard time risking everything in relationships), so if there's any discomfort, I immediately treat it as a stumbling block, instead of pushing myself to work on it, getting into the relationship in a truer way, that is, getting myself more involved in it, instead of ignoring it? So I want to understand better what it means, when the last time we were saying that we have a method at work but not in life." Because this is exactly what happens: when we have to be accountable to someone else, we're forced into it – when we can't joke about it, even if it's just because we don't want to lose our job, because that's something we care about; in life, on the other hand, we can gab, say what we think, be content with a simple joke instead of working. So in the end, we follow a path at work; in life, whenever it happens. This is the difference.

On page 109 it says, "Yet if happiness, justice, truth, and beauty are beyond what we can see, what we can see and touch, what do they have to do with us?" When I read this, I thought, "Well, how are happiness, justice, truth and beauty beyond what I can see and touch? I am made for these things; you made me realize that I am made for them, and I felt them corresponding to me." But here it says something different, so I wondered, "Do I really see and touch happiness, justice, truth, and beauty? No, I hear their echo, but I never completely see and touch them. So these urgent needs that so correspond to me, I can't see and touch them because they are the criteria of Another. It seems that this Other is saying to me, "I am bringing your urgent needs to fulfillment through the circumstances I am giving you," but in the end these circumstances seem too hard for me; I don't think of this hardness as an objection, but I feel a tremendous suffering, and if He doesn't reveal Himself in all His beauty and help me understand something, I can't remain in this suffering. I wanted to ask your help with this.

How do we know (and here we're getting to today's conclusion, that is, getting to the point of poverty) that we have followed the course that he's getting back to here? What is (and I'm asking everyone this question, because later on everyone can make a comparison with what the School of Community is saying, not with what I'm saying – which would not even be interesting) the sign that I've followed this course? Because we can't give a good answer to your question if we haven't first understood this. How do we know that we've followed the course from faith to poverty? What is the powerful sign that we have done so?

It seems to me that it's the certainty of His presence.

So is this a phrase or an experience?

It's an experience.

And if it's an experience, is this something where you find the hundredfold?

If it's an experience, yes.

No, let's go back; first I asked you, "Is it an experience or not?" and you said yes. Now you're telling me, "If." Have you had this experience? Because now you're starting to "spin" your head instead of following experience, and so I'm beginning to doubt whether you've had it or not. "Are you in love?" "Yes." "And does someone in love experience life more intensely?" "If he's in love, yes." Do you see the contradiction? So how do we know that someone has really had an experience? What does the School of Community say? What is the clearest sign that someone has really followed this whole course as an experience?

I don't know what to say but what I just said.

Good enough. Let's go on; we'll leave this question open. The question came up; now everyone can answer the question for himself. The method is an event here. This is today's question, because it's a form of verification, if we have followed the course.

That I have...

Just one word.

...gladness and gratitude. You brought up the issue of the ruling on crucifixes. At first I reacted with rage.

Why?

Because everything within you cries out that this ruling is an injustice, a lie, a violence, a falsehood. But what surprised me, what left me amazed is that afterwards (and this was something that didn't happen to me before, like in the Eluana case, when I stayed stuck in my rage) it was like the question came up, "So if they won, and the crucifixes disappeared from everywhere, what could I say about my faith?" And so I literally had to go back there, to go back to everything that happened to me and is still happening to me, and this thing, this course of going back to what is happening to me, I can say it's real, it's tangible, something I can be sure about (sometimes I could even name the circumstances, the place, the hour when I experienced a tenderness), and then when the flyer came out, I said right away, "This is what the issue is; this is the meaning of the issue." And it was like a gladness rose up in me. That is, now it's clear that I can short circuit in a split second, but I can't deny this experience; I can't deny it anymore; I can't go back.

So why this gladness? What is the difference between your first reaction and gladness? What is the real difference at the heart of what the flyer is bringing you? Because this is the real issue.

That I had to involve my whole humanity. Meanwhile, deep down, for other issues, even Eluana, deep down I was able to keep my humanity out of it, because I'm not living in a situation of suffering. Here the issue gets to the point where, in the end, I am basing my existence. It got to the point of having to involve what means more than anything to me, the reason I'm here on the

path with you, and the thing that's making me see more and more that it's a big adventure which is always more beautiful.

You still haven't clearly said what the difference is.

I was so happy when I read the flyer, I had a huge party.

Why?

Because it corresponded to what I was and am saying about me. I had had a chat with an Italian friend who is living in England, who for a few years now can't stand it when every time we communicate by email I somehow mention the name of Jesus, and he asks me to talk about my husband, my children and my work, and he says that he wants to talk about things that exist, and I had told him, before the flyer came out, "Go ahead, you can even take the crucifixes away, but I am still here; I am here and Jesus is here in the world. He will always be here, which is why we have already conquered everything." That flyer was a party for me! How do we see – what was the other question? There is a huge difference between someone who has the grace of being sure that the Lord is present, who finds satisfaction and happiness in the Lord who is present, and someone who does not have the grace of this certainty. And the difference is that someone without this certainty is justifiably enraged, but he consumes all his energy in swearing, in complaining and wearing himself out, or he pretends that the problem doesn't exist so he can keep on surviving, and he fights a war that isn't even a war because he never involves himself in any dialog, in any relationship, whereas I am finding an indestructible gladness that can't be harmed by anything that happens, and I see it in other people in front of me and I say that those words are true, because I have the energy to really get involved in reality, to use every opportunity, sometimes rightly, sometimes wrongly, without being afraid at all and knowing what makes me happy. Like prayer, which years ago came out of my anguish; and now I pray because I am happy; I am totally sure that I am really being listened to.

Two things still have to be clarified. First: why did you have a party because of the flyer?

It's not an idea that has to be defended, and it's not a war we can lose; it's not an idea needing to be defended – instead, it's I; it's a presence that I can't take away.

It's not an idea... So why are you saying it's not an idea? I'm saying, what is the difference that culture wants to reduce the issue to, and what is the novelty that we put into the flyer? Because this is what we have to understand first, so that we can bring something different to the issue.

The difference is that the Word was made flesh, that Jesus is here.

But even those who say that the crucifix is a cultural fact agree that the Word was made flesh. What is the difference?

It's that we are already sure, in the sense that I am defending my experience, I am defending my life.

But the others are also sure that Christ was made flesh, that He died, so much so that they are defending the crucifixes. It's not like they're not defending them. Many Catholics and many of us have defended the crucifix as a cultural fact.

But they do not have hope with certainty...

And what's wrong with that? What are we saying? Because if this isn't clear, we don't know the reason for the party.

We are saying that it's irreducible.

And what does that mean? Why is it irreducible? Because it's not a cultural fact; it's not a fact of the past, but a present fact. Thanks. Now we have to know why it's a present fact.

It is a present fact because it changes me.

How did the flyer change you? Because if it's present, it changes you. How did it change you? What did it shift in you?

It made me more calm at work, where nobody's a believer; on the contrary, they pretty much make fun of me. Having that flyer in mind these past few days makes me calmer. I may not convert you, I may say nothing to you about Christ, but the fact that I'm here is the evidence of something. I see that my bosses are looking at me differently, and they see that I am different in front of things. They are amazed, then someone says it more or less in his way. Thinking back on these past months, I realized that at first, I don't have an attitude of poverty in the face of what goes on. I'll give a silly example, the most recent thing that happened to me, really a stupid thing: last night I realized that I absolutely have to quit smoking, and right away I heard myself saying, "What an awful life: I can't even smoke anymore!" But this is where I recognize the importance of the work that you are having us do on judgment and experience. I didn't drop that sentence, and the questions started coming. "Is what makes you happy a cigarette? Has lighting a cigarette ever made your heart tremble? Are you moved when you see a smoke shop?"

Only smokers can understand these things...

Everyone has his own path, so even a cigarette matters. So, I got to the point of saying Christ because, obviously, He is the only one who answers my need for happiness. He is the only one who makes my heart tremble and moves me so much that I feel like I have everything. Like I was saying the other night to some of my friends, "What has been moving for me these past few months is realizing that there is no contradiction that goes against my desire for happiness." But I can only say this because Christ is in my life. This is a fact that changes my face, but it became a fact because these last few years I decided to risk everything on the work that you are asking us to do. This is the only reason I started to know and grow in affection for Christ. So these pages on poverty haven't become a verdict on me because of my being incapable of it; instead, they became a place where I am moved, because with a little work I once again said the name of Him who gives me breath in truly everything, and it's like a party for Christ. This makes me

grateful for this moment, because it's the opportunity to see Him again and to see what He is doing with my life. Even a stupid cigarette becomes an opportunity to remember.

What makes you see that you are following the path proposed by School of community, and that we have followed together? What makes you see this, regarding poverty?

The certainty that I see in me - and that, make no mistake, is always a work, because it's not something immediate, but I realize more and more that I am a lot more fulfilled if I live what I am given to live than if I avoid it.

What makes you see that this certainty is fulfilled?

I see myself more at peace, more glad - like the young man before was saying- I am less anxious.

What makes you see that you are freer, that is, what makes you see that you are poorer?

The fact that I live that thing; I live it.

We have to get to the heart of the matter. Thank you.

I say that what I see (which is an experience), that is that I want to be with you, in the Movement, because you open up my mind. For example, I reacted to the crucifix issue just like everybody, as if it were a cultural problem; I didn't think about Jesus, about the living Jesus. For this reason I want to come here, I want to work on School of community. What I wanted to tell you is that today my third son left to go to London. The departures of my sons have always been painful to me, like they are to any good mother...

Imagine my mother, who saw me leave for ten years!

I can't even think about it! I became aware of a change in me; not that I don't live this separation, but I don't feel pain because a relationship is really free when it is poor, when you don't want to possess it. Our sons belong to Another...

Which means: what is the sign that one has an experience in front of, for example, this deal with your sons?

I live it in a different way.

You said it before, repeat it! You can't pinpoint the issue even when you get it...Look, let's go to page 90: "The foundation of poverty is the certainty that God fulfills what He makes you desire. If God, God present, Christ – because God works through Christ – if Christ gives you the certainty of fulfilling what He makes you desire, then you are extremely free from things." The test that proves that we have followed this path from faith to poverty is not that we now start talking or meditating on poverty: the test is whether or not poverty happened. I see that poverty happened if I see myself being freer, extremely free from things.

I have experienced this. I am a lawyer and three years ago I started my own firm. Previously I was working for a big firm, where I dealt with very interesting cases, that required us to be always alert, always ready to fight. Now my reality is small, I have small jobs, and I am very frustrated because of my wasted intelligence. One morning of last week (I always get up early in the morning to read) I was reading precisely the point on “do not hope for future happiness based on a particular present possession” and I meditated about it. Later that morning, thanks to some friends in Rome, I had an appointment with a very well known Milanese lawyer who had recently dismembered his firm and was looking precisely for somebody with my profile. This wasn't something I had gone looking for, but my friends in Rome had told me: “We have worked together for so long, why don't you join this hypothetical network that we might start?” I went to the appointment and I liked him from the get go; he was just like the people I was working for before, so I was intrigued by the work he was doing, as well by his theoretical proposals, and I had conflicting feelings: telling him about myself and my actual situation (for example, that my secretary didn't even go to high school) I became less and less enticing in his eyes, and our meeting started taking a downward spiral. At the beginning he was enthusiastic because he had seen my profile, but at the end he pretty much brusquely dismissed me, and I left even more frustrated. I needed to vent so I called a friend of mine, who was at work, and the poor girl listened to me. I was upset for the rest of the day and I worked very badly. That evening I went to my parish, which was having the forty hours adoration. During the adoration I said to myself: “You are not a failure for disclosing your real situation to that man. You gave witness to what you really are and what your values are; to what you are building, and to the reason why you work this way; to the reason why you respect, encourage, and take along your uneducated secretary - whom you wouldn't part from despite her many limitation - and to the attitude toward your job, which is absolutely different from his (he does this job for the money)” Since the Lord never leaves you with the doubt that you might have made a mistake, when I got back home from church, at eleven at night, I received a call from one of my old colleagues whom I had not heard from in months. I told her about what had happened and she – a career woman, who made a choice opposite to mine, and who I thought would encourage me to re-contact him – told me: “Stay where you are.” I said to myself: “Thank you Lord, because I had already understood, but this is the confirmation I needed.”

What is the difference? It isn't what I do that matters, but the way I do it. The following day I was full of enthusiasm. Then my center of gravity shifted toward what counts: what's important is not what I do as a job, but the way I work; it is important to have a job, since so many do not have one, so let's thank the Lord, because this job feeds four families. My freedom in doing things comes from the fact that He will take care of making up for my limitations. At the end the most important thing is the project I have going on with God, which means that whatever I do, I do with Him and whatever will be, will be.

Is this because of your temperament or because of something that happened?

My attitude changed completely in front of the Eucharist.

What do you mean in front of the Eucharist?

As I was praying I re-read what had happened with new eyes.

Don't get confused. Your freedom happened before going to adoration, because the problem was your freedom in front of your hypothetical employer. You were free there. What was the origin of that freedom? If we don't understand this, we don't understand why we say these things. Did it happen simply because you were good, more prepared, because of your temperament? Why? It is on this that we all have to make a comparison now. At the beginning I was saying: what makes me see that I have followed the path we have indicated?

This is the question I have been asking myself for the past week, because I knew I wouldn't be able to conclude my intervention.

Right, where do you see it? We are now working on poverty; we can't see whether we have followed the path just from our ability to point out all the logical passages (because one can be able to pinpoint all the logical passage of a discourse, but that's not enough to have an experience). This is the difference between using the book just as an instrument to learn something, and using it as the tool to have an experience, as the instrument that launches me into experience. What is the test that School of community itself suggests? If Christ gives you the certainty of fulfilling what He makes you desire, then you are extremely free. I know that I had an experience if I catch myself free from things: "You are bound to nothing, you are a slave of nothing, you are enchained to nothing, you depend on nothing: you are free." This is the thing that is most impossible for man to give himself, because many people in front of poverty or in front of things can be generous, can try to achieve detachment, and deep down they do it on account of virtue (which is the value we need to adhere to); but freedom from things is something one cannot give himself, because it can only come from a lived experience, from something that fills me so much that it makes me free. This is the test of faith as an experience: I experience such an overabundance that I find myself free in the way I treat things. You are free, you are chained to nothing. Each of you can see now, in yourselves, up to which point this happened, and happens now: "Now, you are not a slave to what you use, because you are *only* a slave to Him who gives you the certainty of your happiness. Poverty is revealed in freedom from things inasmuch it is God who fulfills desires, not the *particular* thing that you are aiming toward." This is Christianity as an event, not just as an ability of mine, not just as a moralism of mine, or an attempt of mine, because here and now we were able to follow the path of Christianity as an event, starting from exceptional facts, from something different, from exceptionality. Now we could go back to poverty and once again change the nature of Christianity, foolishly trying to pretend to be poor. No! Poverty, in the way it is made a part of this path, is the test of the path, the test of how I live the circumstances, the test that makes me able to recognize that it is a present experience, that faith is the recognition of a present presence: because I am free. Look, this criterion is infallible, this freedom is the sign of His presence, it is an experience that I have to recognize; in order to explain this freedom I need the presence of something I can neither see nor touch, but without which I wouldn't be able to experience this freedom. For this reason, why can we come up with a flyer like that? We can come up with such a flyer, rejecting the playing field as defined by the European Court – because even many who are in favor of the crucifixes, accepted to defend them according to the same narrow mentality of the verdict – because Christ is not a fact of the past or a cultural fact! The flyer is different precisely because of this, because it speaks about a present experience. In order to write such a flyer what is needed is Christianity as a present experience, like Father Giussani witnessed to us. Therefore, instead of complaining now for what we didn't do well or for having being corrected,

it is far more important that we once more celebrate that there is Another who takes us by the hand, that a Presence is present. Without this present Presence there could be no flyer. It is yet another witness of the same level of poverty, of freedom from things, because in order to be able to compose it that way all our education is not enough (many are far more educated than us and yet they ended up reducing), all the libraries are not enough, all the theology is not enough: what is needed is a faith as Christianity. Once again this becomes now a verification of what faith is for us, in order to put it into play in the present; because it is the way through which – not with a demonstration, but being a presence at work, among our colleagues, among our friends – we can give, to those who reduced it, the full reason why we care about Christianity. We face a beautiful opportunity to experience all this.

The next time we will work on page 91-102, finishing the chapter on poverty, but most of all trying not only to meditate on poverty, but to see if poverty happens to us, like something surprising - because the so-called Christian values are the signs that He is present. Without having Him as root and as presence, nothing happens (despite what they thought at the time of the Enlightenment, and, along with Enlightenment, what we think every time that we dream to generate things by ourselves, only to end up sad as everybody else), or it isn't something surprising, like the overabundance which, like a surprise, generates an event, an unforeseen consequence: freedom from things, from people, from circumstances, from everything.

The Christmas poster has arrived. It well describes the human experience that we all live and to which Christ answers now coming to us: it is an experience if "I can love myself now." It might seem obvious, but we all know it isn't so; there is a difference between loving ourselves now and loving another now.

As far as the method is concerned we can't fall back from the experience we have talked about; I am not interested in the mere repetition of the right things, I am interested in having an experience of this, because it is what pushes us to follow the path proposed by the School of community. The poster represents our journey today, therefore hanging it up and using it is an opportunity, just like the flyer on the crucifix, to communicate with increased awareness an experience that is so great that it makes us free in reality. Otherwise, it isn't even necessary to remove the crucifixes, because Christianity is absent from the places where life is played out. This is the challenge before us: did we experience this overabundance that makes us free in reality, or didn't we? This is the verification.

• *Gloria*