

**Notes from the School of Community with Fr.Julian Carron
Milan, November 4, 2009**

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- Song: "Non c'è nessuno"
- Song: "Over in the Glory land"

I work at a school [I am a secretary], and this month a young woman has come to work with me to help organizing the archives. During this time we got along very well and we became friends. The other day she found out that her job with us was ending, and we went home feeling pretty sad. The next morning I got to the office and she told me: "You know, I decided to go to Mass in Trivolzio" [note: Church of Trivolzio near Milan, where the body of S. Riccardo Pampuri is buried and venerated]. She is not a religious person and she has nothing to do with us, but after hearing me talking about Trivolzio at school, she had felt the desire to check the Trivolzio internet site and she read everything. She had looked at the entire Trivolzio site and the entire CL site! After a moment of silence she added - these are her exact words-: "It is too beautiful. Actually, if you look at me you see that my face is different". I was deeply moved because the day before she had been fired and nevertheless, the things she had heard, often not even addressed directly to her, corresponded so much to her desire, that this beauty prevailed even over the loss of her job. In front of this my heart truly jumped, and to be honest, for the first time my thought, not tacked on, not invented, was: "It is Him, it is Jesus!" It could not be anybody but Him, so attractive that my friend could meet Him even through my limited person, and He could be far more fascinating to her than the seemingly more important desire for her job. From that moment when I get up in the morning to go to work my first thought is for Him: it is this enormous curiosity to see where and how, again, today, He will make Himself known to me. I understand that this is possibly the beginning of experience because it identifies a step from which one cannot go back any longer.

That is, judgment is the least artificial thing that exists.

Yes, because it is a recognition, it is like saying: "Wow, it is really Him!"

"Today my face has changed": if you do not arrive to this point you miss the best of experience, because the sign that one has recognized something when circumstances do not change - as in this case, it's not that she found a job - is the change that happens in the person. Then she will have to discover slowly all that is inside that first jolt. This research she has done is already something, she has intuited something, but she will have to look more deeply into what has already happened, the nature of what happened, become aware of all of this. Thank you.

I would like to give witness as well on the outcome of my personal work on School of Community. I want to say that it is possible to live this way, really, like John and Andrew, with the immediate recognition of the exceptionality of this Presence, and it is simple also for someone like me, who structurally is anything but simple. I was thinking of this the other day when I was talking with some friends about Fr. Gnocchi who said: "It is not possible for a person to live an entire life of suffering without a meaning" And then I thought how the world today, as you also said at the Fraternity Exercises, with the collapse of old certainties, is a continuous absence of meaning about everything. Instead, we have encountered a Presence that has looked upon our misshapen humanity until He made it blossom. And this awareness has set me in motion in the last few days. I am grateful.

Thank you. Come on!

At the last meeting of the small group I belong to, a friend expressed her sorrow for the fact that her daughter wants a civil marriage, without the sacrament of matrimony. We started to discuss our response to this fact. At the end I think I understood that one makes the comparison with everything, but it is true when it becomes true for me, if it changes me; the rest, for example the decision of expressing the judgment, how to express it, it is all a consequence of the fact that it is true for me. One of us wrote this e-mail: "I look at my experience. If I judge someone for the good or bad he does, I often slip in some good old moralism. Instead, if I judge with the heart I can only understand if something corresponds to me or not. Then, with one of my children or a friend who is making a mistake, I can only ask them to judge with the heart, that is to understand if what they are doing corresponds to their desire for happiness, truth and justice; and the path to this depends on circumstances" Now I wanted to ask you to help us to be less confused and theoretical on this topic.

Let's start, then. What brought you to discover the value of the sacrament of matrimony? Because, if we do not start from this, we do not know what to do. In fact, I move according to the awareness I have of whatever happened to me, of the experience I have made. Often it is as if I haven't had an experience that has made me aware of what brought me to recognize the value of the sacrament, of why I have needed the sacrament and why I arrived at the sacrament. Since often we have made this journey of recognition only in a mechanical way, when problems like the one your friend is facing arise, we find ourselves with only the correct answer, the correct doctrine, without helping people to make a journey. What does this kind of sorrow challenge in you? Where does it put you in motion? Because, my friends, when you ask this kind of questions, I always think of Fr. Giussani. Do you think that if someone in 1954 had seen a guy wearing a cassock carrying a gramophone along the streets of Milan, that person would have ever thought that this was the way of communicating Christianity? No. But we are here today, so many, exactly because of someone who generated a way of communicating Christianity that had such an originality and an attraction that made us fall in love with Christ. We think we can always get away with it just repeating things. But if we want the charism to continue to be alive we have to re-invent it continuously [in the sense in which

Fr. Giussani said that the Church needs to be re-invented daily and personally, if it does not want to become stereotypical and schematic], we need to “re-generate” it constantly, as sons and daughters, not as people who repeat! Then, in any circumstance like the one you described, each of us should think about how to face it, identifying himself with the creativity we have seen in the one who generated us, setting us in motion. The alternative is to proclaim to the other the correct position, get angry because he does not accept it, then go to bed feeling at peace because we did what we had to do. Not at all! If Fr. Giussani had treated us like this, none of us would be here today. So, think of what kind of novelty is necessary to start to interact with so many people who now meet us, and then come back to tell us, so that we may learn too.

A month ago I said that my family started an experience of hospitality with somebody, and you asked me a precise question: “Why is this an experience?” I thought about it and now I am trying to answer. What is missing is that, actually, behind this proposal made to us my wife and I have somehow recognized Him, and I see this because it has put us back in motion in an experience of gratuitousness, it has put us back in motion. However, I noticed that I have a sort of reserve to say it openly, to say exactly this: “That’s it! It is Him who is knocking again at our door”. You almost stop believing it even as you are living it, and at the end, maybe it is a diabolical temptation, but I ask myself: “It is such a huge thing that it makes it hard to believe it, or is it hard to say it? What is the point of the matter? I think I found part of the answer in what you often say recalling Fr. Giussani: either He is or He isn’t, either He is now or He isn’t. I am interested in this merciless approach. Then, I have to have the courage to say to myself that it was Him knocking at our door, but saying it not as a visionary, not as an excited kid.....In the movie Lethal Weapon a character says literally [and I recognize myself in this]: “I am too old for this BS”. That is, it is not enough for me at a sentimental level, I need to say it as an adult, with a sort of reserve but with certainty. I am saying that I am having an experience because I am reborn, in my home we are reborn, we are breathing, for this I think I recognize Him.....

What is missing again?

Ah, the challenge continues.....

You are saying: “We recognized Him”. How do you see this? In what have you recognized Him? Exactly because you do not want to be like a kid and you want to be an adult, I ask to you as an adult: how did you recognize Him?

If I say: “I am reborn”, I am saying for example that the relationships in our home are different, the way I relate to my wife, for example, opens up a perspective of gratuitousness that.....

This is part of it, but which was the starting point? Because what was the ultimate reason that made you.....

It is the ideal. In this proposal made to me I did not recognize something good to do, I recognized what I am searching for my life, a correspondence with what I am at the core, I am made for that, not to do some good in the world.

And this is enough to accept such a difficult responsibility? It is the same question we saw last time in the comparison between Eluana and Fr.Giorgio. Let's leave the question open.

I want to refer to the first question, because at the end you reaffirmed that the judgment gives a jolt, it provokes a change. At present my job is not going well, my company has difficulties and in the past year I have been trying to change job, but I haven't had yet any positive outcome. This situation is undeniably not easy, and each time what comes to my mind and what I recognize is that it does not depend on me, this circumstance is given to me, so much so that in spite of all my efforts to change job, to find one that I like more and is less stressful, after an entire year I am still at the same point. I wanted to ask for your help, because I think that recognizing that this circumstance is given to me is at least an attempt of judgment, but it does not become a jolt, it is not enough for me.

And what does this make you understand?

That there is still work to be done.

There is still work to be done. We have heard this last time in front of the death of Fr.Giorgio. What did everybody have to do? What have you done? And, can you continue to stay in front of this circumstance like this? Do you understand what I am saying?

In front of this circumstance I continue to ask myself what is being asked of me, but in practice I do not get that added jolt.....

Because to arrive to the jolt you have to imply the ultimate factor, and this is experience, as we have been saying all this time. But the ultimate factor doesn't even remotely come to your mind, or does it?

Obviously not, considering the outcome, it is evident.

The outcome is evident, is it clear? Many times we reduce experience to the reaction that something provokes in us, and we do not make the entire journey to imply the ultimate factor. Because the ultimate factor of experience is present also in this case, or is it not? Otherwise the only alternative is that the jolt happens only when our problem is resolved.

Actually, that is the risk.

That is the risk, most of the time that is the risk. But what do you have to block in order to stop too soon? This need in you that asks for an answer. What instrument do you have

to make this journey? To be loyal to this need that you have inside. As we saw last week, one visits all the hospitals of Milan, one looks for and reads what Fr. Giussani writes to find an answer to his own urgency in front of death. If you don't do this, you remain stuck until circumstances are resolved positively. This is the reduction of the "I" to previous psychological and sociological [in this case] factors. But where is the "I"? If we are only this, then we can only endure the circumstance waiting that –I do not know how- it gets resolved. But is my "I", your "I", something more than this reduction? A friend asked me: "What is the first thing needed to become un-stuck?". "To become aware that you are stuck, that is that you are greater of this being stuck: then you recognize another factor". In short, in this moment can you erase from your experience all that has happened to you? I give you this example: look at your job and tell me if you have learned something since you started working.

Yes.

If you make a comparison with the first times when you did not know how to handle certain situations, have you learned something? Now can you overcome certain problems that make you become stuck at work more easily than when you started working? You have made a journey, you learned something. And now you have more experience than somebody who is just starting to work.

A little.

A little, maybe, but you have it. This means that it is possible to make a journey. Let's leave this example. With the experience you have made in life, with the journey you have made with the Movement, have you acquired something that allows you to face circumstances in such a way that you do not become stuck, yes or no?" This is what verifies if you had an experience, if the "I" has grown! If in front of these things I find myself like everybody else, it means that I haven't had an experience, because I have not learned, I have not grown. It is not necessary to have some sort of vision, it is necessary to have a very human experience [like the one you had at work], so that you know ever more how to face life, how to stay in front of circumstances, how to get out of the dead end [impasse], how to be more yourself. What does it mean that the "I" grows? That the capacity of reason, the capacity of freedom, the capacity of affection grow, all that permits me to live. Is it possible? When we say that experience is the instrument for a human journey, it means this, that if we do not learn to use these instruments we do not make a human journey. Then we have the feeling that we are always starting from the beginning, and we learn more working than living. Why? Because at work we have a method that makes us continue to learn, while in life, without a method, we do not learn, and even when we hear others, it does not seem to help us, as if it were not something that gives us more experience to face reality.

I needed to talk to two friends about two things that were very important to me. During the past few days I realized that at the first meeting I was hesitant, I was going through my speech saying "It will be for a good ", but I did not have a question, I was trying to

use the judgment to become capable of something, while I did not have any certainty in that instant. Then I noticed that before getting to the second meeting my question changed to “Show me Your victory, instead of make me capable of something” and everything went beyond my expectations. In the instant in which I felt loved at this meeting I really recognized His Presence, which was greater than anything I had imagined in the two previous days. But what convinced me was that the next day I was completely certain because of what I had seen the previous day. I was not concerned any longer about being capable, but this happened because He had made me certain once more.

Then what is the difference –let’s see if you learned- between what you said and the testimony before yours? What was missing in what he said in comparison with what you told us?

That I made the entire journey and arrived to Him.

What changed is that you let enter something else that you know exists, that you recognize. And does this happen because I imagine it in that moment, or because, due to an experience I had, an encounter I had, a certain sequence of events, a sequence of exceptional facts, I cannot shake it from myself, not even in that moment? It is not because now I am having a vision.....

Actually, it did not change in the moment I asked, it changed when I was facing a real fact.

When I leave room for another thing it is called “memory”, which is the recognition of a Presence that is present. But, if when these circumstances happen I do not have a certainty, to think like this seems abstract in front of the urgency of life. I was told about a meeting of a group of friends. After discussing the theme of School of Community, a person said that her husband had left her, and immediately one of the participants commented: “This is reality”. Reality was that. The other, which means School of Community, is spirituality, a correct discourse. What reveals if a person hasn’t had an experience? That when life, the urgency of life, strikes, School of Community does not have the substance, the weight, the wealth of reality to face the problem, and immediately the gap with the urgency of life stands out: “This is reality”, the other does not have the substance to face the provocations of life. This tells us that if we do not have an experience, when we are facing one of these difficulties His name doesn’t even come to our mind, because it is emptied of its meaning in front of these dramatic moments. That’s why it is impossible without having an experience in which all these elements are acknowledged. Experience does not happen suddenly, at the moment we need it. The life Fr. Giussani proposes to us is a journey which generates a growing certainty, a certainty I cannot ignore, like the Disciples [“You too want to leave?”]: it is rooted in them and they cannot ignore it, is it clear? If our being together is not an experience that makes us grow in certainty..... Then our words gain more weight, they acquire a deeper meaning. As when you say the word “mother” one can’t help thinking of all the content, the depth of what a mother is. But often, in front of life’s difficulties the word “Jesus” is abstract. But,

is it truly abstract or does it seem abstract to us? And often, since Jesus is totally emptied of meaning we say: "Nothing changes". Obviously nothing changes, what do we think should change? It does not change! However, it does not change not because it is not able to change, but because without the richness of experience, the meaning behind the word and the weight of things, it becomes an empty word.

During the past holidays of All Saints and All Souls, I thought of my sister who died three years ago and the fact that I haven't visited the cemetery in three years. A friend who knows about this called me and said: "I went to the cemetery to visit my mother-in-law, which I had never done before, and you have to go too". Just the fact that someone was telling me "you have to" started to irritate me, I felt it was an imposition. Furthermore this makes me particularly angry because ... the idea that I might miss my sister.....She got on my nerves and I put the phone down saying: "You mind your problems and I will mind mine!". Instead, mysteriously, this incident worked on me, and while I was going through the day I realized that I wanted to understand why this friend spoke to me like that. I started to desire to follow the journey to the end, that journey that lets me look at my sister saying: "It is my sister!", and recall her in my memory as mine. This struck me deeply, because I couldn't even think of her any more as my sister, as a person, something belonging to me, with her own face but deeply connected to me. Then something that was said at the last School of Community came to my mind, that judgment and so affection are not detached from reason, the fact that when this moves you, it is not a judgment tacked on. I started to desire. Maybe also the love of this friend for me [that she expressed in what she said to me] mysteriously worked. At the end I did not go to the cemetery [I went only to Mass] because it's still hard for me. But it is really mysterious how the love she witnessed to me generated this desire I did not have, and this anger slowly became desire to follow the journey to the end, without fear of asking myself the question. And it is so true that my younger son, since I had been sad for a few days, noticed the difference and said: "Mom, today you look happy". This erased any doubt about the truth of my experience, there was no possibility for ambiguity.

What is your judgment of this?

My unexpected change, unthinkable for me, that from this anger a new desire could be born.....

From this anger a desire was born? I want to understand this: the desire was born from your anger?

No, it was born from the fact that I listened to a person.

What was it born from? Because, this is the important point. You used the word "love".

Yes.

Love, a good, which means a grace, which means a presence that was not scared in front of the cemetery. You can see what this presence is because of what it moved in you. What does it mean? If you start from this desire that was re-awakened, from this happiness that even your son recognized, what does emerge? Which Presence is able to do this? We do not realize it even when it happens! You see how many times we think of the two things as separate, grace on one side and freedom on the other [or, the presence of Christ on one side, and then my move on the other]. But where do you see the power of what happened in what you recounted? That something moved inside you, it shows that it is exceptional because it moves you, it grabs and exalts your “I”. Only Christ’s contemporaneousness can move to the point of being able to face death. But how did this happen? How does it happen? It happens exactly because of what is described in point 5 in the La Thuile Booklet, “The Triple Factor of Christian Experience”.

I want to read you a letter that is related specifically to this. “A friend of mine became seriously ill. While I was going to visit her, I was wondering what I would say to her. Since I can’t alleviate her burden, I realized that what she needs is not different at all from what I need. In fact, her burden can only sharpen her heart’s desire for happiness, and this ‘something’ that I need has a name: “Jesus”, that unmistakable presence in many different faces and circumstances”. Do you see? When situations like this arise, one cannot avoid His name. Like when one is abroad and he feels lonely, what does he think of? Of the most real things he has, of his most beautiful relationships, he doesn’t start to create something with his imagination. When circumstances become a trial, do we start to create things with our imagination, or rather these are the moments in which we adhere even more to what is true and real? The letter continues: “I need to enjoy His presence, because it is He who fulfills the desire of my heart. This is what I was able to tell my friend, I have nothing else to say to her, and somehow this has become the breath of my relation with her, also taking away that uneasiness one often feels in front of the pain and burden of another. I understand that what is necessary is loyalty to our own desire and simplicity in recognizing Him present. I would say it is almost a surrendering to the evidence of His presence. Considering my life and the work on experience you are recalling us to, I think I understand –and I am asking for your help so it becomes more clear- that it is a path to arrive to say His name, to recognize Him in the circumstances, to say: “Here He is, it is He who fulfills me”, and that this is what judgment really consists of. Instead, it seems to me that many times the attempt of judgment stops at the threshold, we practice to say: ”It corresponds to me, it doesn’t correspond to me”, we even discuss with sincerity the detail that gives a jolt to our heart, but we do not get to the point of saying Who corresponds to me, as if faith were another chapter and judgment only a premise” Here all the factors are present, but we do not know how to connect them. I think this testimony is really appropriate to go back to “the triple factor” of Christian experience, because Fr.Giussani states exactly the opposite, that these factors are not separate things attached to each other, but “one single, vital act, in which a triple factor is at work”. For this reason, if all three factors are not present, there is no Christian experience.

First: “*The encounter* with an objective fact which has an origin independent of the person having the experience [an objective fact, something I bump into, I collide with]

[...]. All forms of Christian experience, even those lived in the innermost recesses of the soul, refer in some way to an encounter with the community and to its authority". An encounter with an objective fact. All last year we spoke of this "running up against a human diversity", a different human reality, but many times when we recount it is already reduced. This is the first factor: an encounter with an objective reality, an objective fact that is different.

Second: "The ability to properly perceive the meaning of that encounter". Because without grasping the meaning of that encounter I do not become aware of what happened. And he continues [and this is a sentence we should learn by heart]: "The value of the fact which we encounter transcends our power to understand, so much so that an act of God is required for an adequate understanding". Something is needed, some help, an act of God in order to understand, because otherwise I do not grasp that what corresponds to me is Him. But this means that we have not understood why it corresponds to us! Pay attention to the next sentence: "In fact, the same gesture by which God makes His presence known to humanity in the Christian event, also enhances a person's potential for knowledge [it exalts my cognitive capacity, it enlarges reason, it makes me understand more clearly what is present in the experience I am having], to adjust the acumen of the human gaze to the exceptional reality to which God attracts it. We call this *the grace of faith*". The grace of faith is that this Presence has the capacity to enlarge reason, to adjust the acumen of the human gaze to the exceptional reality I have before me, so that I do not reduce it to my measure and I can grasp all that is present in that experience. Without this we talk about correspondence without grasping its full meaning, and then we do not have a true experience [since this is missing we often say: "And why do I have to say Christ?, it seems that to say Christ is tacked on, that to state the content of faith is tacked on]. Why? Think of the disciples: in front of His exceptionality, they could not prevent it from adjusting their gaze. To use a trivial comparison, imagine your "yes" to the person you love; without this person's presence, which opens wide all your reason due to the affection you feel, you could have not grasped the whole meaning of that "yes". The "yes" is all yours, but at the same time you couldn't have said it without the presence of the other in front of you, without the presence of the other that brings out all your capacity for affection and the recognition of the value. Is it clear?

Third factor: "*The awareness of the correspondence* between the meaning of the fact that we encounter [that is the exceptional Presence I become aware of] and the meaning of our own existence [...], between the Encounter and our own destiny". This is why what the letter I was reading says later on is right: "Even more I feel like saying –and I would like to verify this with you- that if the judgment arrives to recognize His presence, an attachment, a love, are born of it". It is true. This triple factor is present in any Christian experience. It is one single vital act, everything happens at the same time, because without Him in front of me I can neither perceive the correspondence nor perceive my whole reason enlarged to the point of recognizing what I have in front of me. It happens at the same time, a single vital act. For this reason it is contemporaneous with judgment: only faith can grasp the whole meaning of what is happening.

From now on we will resume the reading of "*Is it possible to live this way?*". However, instead of starting from where we left on *Poverty*, next time we will read the short synthesis Fr.Giussani gives from p.103 to 110. We start from there to recall the path of

the journey. I think it will be striking to read it now: faith, freedom, obedience, hope and poverty. Listen to how it starts: “In our experience [to speak of faith he starts to talk about experience, but look what he says about experience] there is something that comes from beyond it: unforeseeable, not immediately visible, mysterious, but within our experience. If it is unforeseeable, not immediately visible, mysterious, with what instrument of our personality do we grasp this Presence? With the instrument called faith. Let’s call this instrument “faith”, to use a term that does not lead back to and it is not exhausted by the concept of reason, because the comprehension of experience in its immediately experiential factors belongs to reason [...], but in experience [in experience, in something we experience!] we feel the breath of the tremor or the consequences of a Presence that cannot be explained”. Faith is to grasp this, it is an intelligence of experience. It is striking to re-read this after all we said, because now we understand what it means, and we understand while for Fr.Giussani it is important. Faith is a form of knowledge that is beyond the limit of reason: “Because it grasps something that reason cannot grasp: “the presence of Jesus among us”. “Christ is here now”; reason cannot perceive this in the way it perceives that you are here now. Is it clear? Yet I cannot *not* admit that He is here. Why? Because there is a factor within [remember what we were saying last time about the reason why we are here], there is a factor that decides about this companionship, certain outcomes of this companionship, certain resonances of this companionship, a factor so surprising that if I do not affirm something else, I do not give reason to the experience, because reason is to affirm experiential reality according to all the factors that make it up, all of the factors”. As you can see it is providential that we may re-read now these pages –with all that we have seen on experience-, in order to grasp all the factors of experience without reducing them. Then he continues through freedom, obedience and hope. For next time we will read this and also start the first pages of Poverty, from p.86 to 91.