

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón  
Milan, June 20, 2012**

*Reference text: J. Carrón. "A Maestro to Follow" in "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me" Traces, no. 6, June 2012.*

Song *Negra Sombra*

Song *Noi non sappiamo chi era*

*Glory Be*

The harder the times, the more the subject counts, the more the person counts, Fr. Giussani reminds us, as quoted in the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises. I think that the hardship of the times is right in front of us and it is not necessary to explain it further. The situation we are living challenges our person. The harder the times, the more the person counts: it is precisely in these times that each of us truly discovers if he is a person; not a person in the ontological sense (which is not in question), but if he is a person with that self-awareness that allows him not to be defeated, done in, reduced to a cog in the mechanism of circumstances. In fact, if this happens the "I" doesn't exist anymore. Obviously, the ontology remains (we cannot tear it off ourselves), but we are at the mercy of everything. Therefore, this is a very favorable moment – mysteriously! – to verify our self-awareness. I start by reading a witness on the issue of the recession: "I wanted to tell you about the particular circumstance that brought me to this deep sense of gratitude that explodes in me in everything I do. A few days ago, after months of waiting, the company I work for made its economic crisis public: in fact, it has to reduce labor costs. Next week the savings policy they want to implement will be announced. The very evening of the meeting with the unions, by a strange coincidence my four sons sent me a text message inviting me to stay calm and serene because no negative news could have crushed me. This is not because at fifty six I'm not at risk of losing my job, obviously not, but only (and I quote my nineteen year-old son's message) "because your life's substance is always made of Another, it doesn't depend on the circumstance, in the same way as you will never stop being my great dad and I your little great son." It was a strong repercussion. My sons were reminding me what we can read on page 18 of the Exercises booklet: in the circumstances "we fall apart because of our lack of self-awareness. No power in this world could eliminate us [...] all the energy of our strength is in the simple acknowledgment of Him to whom we belong, He who makes us now." Honestly, I have to admit that I could have never gotten to perceive the crisis I have been living at work, by now for months, as the opportunity for a journey of conversion for my person. Until a few months ago calling the recession a great grace for my life would have been pure folly. Now it is as if I became aware for the first time, after thirty seven years in the movement, of what you wrote in the message to our friends struck by the earthquake: that this is the time of the person. "Now the next-to-last explanations are useless. [...] Who am I? Am I a piece of all that is crumbling down or am I something else?" It is really true: the expression 'I am You who make me' is the ultimate definition of my life." Little by little, to the extent that we travel on this road, we are amazed that we can face certain circumstances in a way

that not long ago (not that long) would have seemed crazy to us. Now we can understand it; now we start to understand it, especially those who have traveled on this road and are constantly engaged. This is a verification (among the many we will see tonight) of the journey one has made. For those who have made it.

*I wanted to describe my experience of self-awareness after the Fraternity Exercises and the meeting with the Pope in Bresso. Even before the Exercises it was clear to me that what was happening around us could not be reduced to a political judgment, but had to be lived as a call to conversion, my conversion. However, in Rimini – since I felt that I was desiring what everybody else desires, that I wasn't very different - I asked myself, "So, if staying in front of reality is not a matter of consistency, what is the point exactly?"*

What do you mean by "what was happening around us"?

*All those political events. At the last School of Community I identified clearly what the point is, and I am focusing on just two aspects. After the meeting with the Pope I was able to unveil two attitudes that I was subconsciously self-justifying, and this made me gladder. The first: a frantic restlessness and dissatisfaction that I thought was good, as the sign of that sprout of desire in me, the condition for my recognition of Christ. Actually, I realized that when this results in self-hatred and non-acceptance of self and search for something else outside one's personal privileged place (for me the family with my children) it means that there is something wrong. It could show in a chase after confirmation of relationships and so on. The second attitude concerns the inertia you were talking about last time. Initially, I identified it with a sort of passive attitude, when one doesn't do the work. On the contrary, I discovered that it happens also when, for example, I use reason in a rationalistic way: I go after a situation that leads me to try to control all the factors of the things I am living, perhaps with a good, not evil, intention. The outcome of this approach makes me feel depleted, run-down, like when one is in a gear that never engages.*

Where do you recognize that you were a rationalist? I think it is important to understand this. I am asking you because it isn't a problem for experts. Where do you recognize that you were being a rationalist?

*Because I want everything to add up perfectly, I want to have all the factors in my hands, I try to possess all of them.*

And why is it not right to try to fix everything?

*Because it is not me...*

Why is it wrong to be rationalists? Simply because we have to take a stand against rationalism? Because we have something against rationalism?

*Because I do not make reality.*

Did I understand correctly what you said, that you feel depleted, run-down?

*Yes.*

Does feeling depleted correspond to you? No, so this is the problem! We have to recognize how unreasonable certain attitudes are based on their outcome, because this is how we understand the nature of the mistake. Do you understand why Fr. Giussani insists on the work on "the instrument of thought"? Because if you use reason in a rationalistic way you find yourself depleted, despite all of your attempts. The problem is not that you don't do anything, as you said you do many things, you are busy with

many things (like Martha in the Gospel), but only one thing is necessary, and not in a 'mystical' sense as we often misunderstand; no, I have to use reason in such a way that I can grasp the essence of what I am doing, beyond the appearance. Then, everything falls into place, and not because you are fixing things, but because, in finding its source, the meaning of everything, everything regains its proper weight. We don't have to perform a balancing act in the midst of the chaos; it would be impossible.

*First of all I wanted to go back to what you were saying at the beginning, because for me these last few months, and particularly these last few days, have been a clear proof of the fact that this is the time of the person. The question that comes up more than ever is this: what allows me to be myself, that is, free, free of everything, no matter what happens? I am starting to understand that what you are telling us, that is, this self-awareness (who am I and Who makes me) is not a sentimental or intimist problem, but it is a matter of relationship, of connection. You told us that it is a belonging. I am starting to experience this personally; I am starting to understand who I am and Who makes me inside a belonging, inside a relationship. However, this last period has shown me clearly that not all relationships are true relationships.*

What do you mean?

*Not all companionships are true companionship, and we can stay in the movement without being able to keep each other company. I am going to talk about two things. One morning we woke up in Bologna and the entire city had been pervaded by some bad news: a local politician had committed suicide during the night. He was a very popular and highly regarded man. I didn't know who he was, I had never met him, but this fact struck me very much. I thought, this man is not without companionship, he is surrounded by people, he is loved by everybody. Then I thought about my life and I asked myself, "I am among people as well, but what is it that really keeps me company? In other words, "why can I say that my life is not lonely? Because suicide reflects the judgment that, after all, you are alone. I had to discover this through the event of the earthquake. Where I was we felt it very strongly, but it didn't cause great damage, which was instead suffered in all the small villages of the lower plain near the city of Modena. Nevertheless there was a moment of general chaos. I was struck, seeing many friends and relatives perceive for the first time that we are all together facing a fact that literally puts you on your knees, giving you the feeling that everything is collapsing. In front of this I didn't know how to react: I felt the responsibility to answer also to my friends, but I didn't know what to do. I remember that I also felt the urgent need to get together with them. We were there, feeling a bit lost because of what had happened and I said, "We can even get together, meet, and then what?" That's when I called you to tell you this. I was terribly struck by what you told me, "This fact puts you and everybody else in front of this great question: who are you? Can you say, based on the experience you are having, that you are not part of all that is crumbling down? When you asked us this question it was the first moment – if I am honest – in which I didn't feel alone. I had an experience of liberation: I don't know what is going to happen here, but this self-awareness already gives me peace now. This is the companionship I am looking for! The companionship that reminds me of who I am and of the One Who makes me be. Based on what I lived in the last few days and in these months, the sign that a companionship is true is not the fact that we continue to talk to*

*each other about the companionship, but the fact that one, within a communion, has precisely this experience of liberation. This is the sign, and this kind of experience – based on what I lived - gives you an energy, a creativity, a strength, as well as a freedom that I could not have imagined before, greater than all the true or right things we can tell each other.*

Thank you. I think that this is a precious contribution to understand the meaning of the content of the Exercises, that is, what is the meaning of self-awareness. Who I am and what my total need for meaning is doesn't find an answer just in being together. If we don't understand this we cannot understand what Fr. Giussani means when he says that this is the time of the person. Moreover, we will not find the adequate answer to the need we have. We can see this when life challenges us, as in front of the earthquake. We can feel the urgency of getting together, of being together and then the question 'and then what? And then what!?' arises even more forcefully. A rationalistic use of reason cannot answer to this. Why? Because we do stay together and we do participate in the reality that is happening, but it is as if we were swept away by the stream of circumstances. But am I a part of all that is crumbling down or not? Is there an 'I' or is there only pantheism? Am I just a cog in the mechanism of circumstances, in this case of the tremors, or of our joint powerlessness? So we can understand that without answering to this urgency the 'I' doesn't exist, the 'I' doesn't exist! We start to understand that the 'I' is not a sentimental problem, it doesn't depend on our pulling close together to solve the drama, but it is in this urgent yearning for total meaning that it either exists or it doesn't; and if it is not there the 'I' doesn't exist, the 'I' as self-awareness doesn't exist, the 'I' as possibility of being in reality doesn't exist. On the contrary, when in the midst of everything, someone states the meaning, then one understands that it is true because it frees him, because something totally different happens, something completely new. Where do you see this? In the fact that now I am free in the circumstances (not outside of the circumstances, but in the circumstances). As many who were directly hit by the earthquake witness to us: "This earthquake brought down something more than the walls. With great sadness I find myself blocked, stunned in front of all of this. These facts exposed all my fragility, all my need to stand on something that doesn't shake and doesn't crumble down. The question that strongly emerges in me is precisely this: what is my substance? In what do I place my hope? It hurts to see that in the end I am like everybody else. At the Exercises you urged us to restart from our humanity; also in your message you say that Fr. Giussani told us that this is the time of the person. However, I am fearful, I am anxious, and I am not able to get out of this by myself." The challenge is at this level, but it is enough to gain self-awareness and see what happens: "Two days after the big tremor of May 29<sup>th</sup> I went back home to wash myself. I was shaking like a leaf and I started to repeat to myself: even if the earth trembles, I am not trembling. As I continued to tremble I found myself recognizing that what I was saying was true, not because it stopped my trembling, but because what I was saying was truer, it was getting to the bottom of the matter more than my own trembling ["it was getting to the bottom of the matter more than my own trembling": for this reason if we don't get to this point we are rationalists and we don't get unstuck]. I faced the facts [it isn't a matter of energy, it isn't a matter of strength, it isn't a matter of performance, but it is a matter of simplicity that recognizes (like the man born blind) the ultimate core of reality] and, even if I was

shaking I decided to stay there and wash myself [one is different not just in a manner of speaking; no, he is different because he acts in a new way: instead of fleeing, “even if I was shaking I decided to stay there and wash myself”]. I didn’t belong to the earthquake, not even if I had been buried under the rubble [you are shaking with the earthquake, but you don’t belong to the earthquake: this is an ‘I’; this is an ‘I’ whose substance is not defined by the fact that you are not shaking (because you may continue to shake), but by not belonging to the earthquake]. I was amazed. If in that instant that was so hard for me it had been possible to open myself up to the Mystery of being, to the ‘You who makes me’, that meant that it was and it is possible in any situation and in any circumstance. Immediately my thoughts turned to my countrymen, as fearful and worried about the earthquake as I was. What accompanied me in the days following the earthquake, when the fear of seeing the earth trembling again was very strong, when every future seemed precluded, was to continuously recognize that no matter how obscure the future is, the present, this moment, is, and it is because there is Someone who is giving it to me [it is the immediacy Fr. Giussani was talking about in St. Peter’s Square in 1998: our substance is in recognizing the evidence of reality]. In these days I realized that every circumstance, daily or exceptional, has great potential to challenge me. The Mystery is always calling us to open up to a measure that is totally different from ours; but if we let it in, this is what makes the true difference, and living like this is definitely more beautiful.” But in order for this to happen it is necessary for each of us to say, ‘I’, because, without this attachment of each of us to the evidence of being, we are once again stuck in the circumstances. And precisely because we don’t collapse, - this is not the arrival point! - , then we can begin to do all we need to do, as someone else told me who was affected by the earthquake: “I have been able to verify as true, one more time, what we tell each other all the time at our charitable work. It’s true, we have this need to share completely [because it made us move to help others] and if this need is silenced and suffocated, our ‘I’ is no longer our ‘I’. Our powerlessness to resolve doesn’t nullify this need but, paradoxically, it amplifies it, and it opens us up to the mystery of the other, to the mystery of our ‘I’. Our friends’ need for everything is my own need. If I don’t feel this chord vibrate within me now, I can no longer live and my life doesn’t seem to be life anymore.” This is why this person moved, to also answer her own need. But a person can answer because he or she has not collapsed in the middle of this general chaos. So we can understand our task, if we live this way. We can see how we can be useful to the world in a moment in which – as I was saying in my message to our friends affected by the earthquake – all these answers that everyone is so ready to give, are of no use. “Now in the area in which I live, within about a twenty mile radius, there is no longer a single church, as they have all been badly damaged. In front of this I was saying to myself: now, Jesus, we need to be the ones who make you present in the world. What is asked of us now is to sustain our hope, so that it may be evident for everyone that the Lord is stronger than the earthquake.” But this cannot be done by just anybody. This can only be done by someone whose substance enables him or her to sustain this hope. This is the only way we can understand the importance of our contribution.

*I am a university student. When in November our friend Giovanni died all these questions you are talking about also this evening had emerged clearly within me. It*

*was evident that if I put all my substance in my relationship with my friends, who could be taken away from me the next day, I would collapse. Your position challenged me right away in this regard when you said that the last great gesture of friendship from Giovanni was the fact that he put us in front of the Mystery. Recently I went to see the exhibit about St. Augustine, and I was moved reading about the episode of the death of one of his dear friends. He said: "My soul was in an absolute crisis, and I would tell myself to hope in God, but it was not satisfactory because how could I hope in a ghost?" For me, instead, it wasn't like this. I was really able not to lose hope above all because my friends have been right there with me, and through them I saw an indescribable and beautiful gaze. Here is just one more fact that happened. One afternoon I was listening to a friend of mine who was recounting the last few days before Giovanni died with some details that I had forgotten. At a certain point I started to feel empty and deeply sad inside and I absolutely wanted to get rid of this feeling because it bothered me. It wasn't possible for me to be like this I had to be happy. I really needed my friends to challenge me by asking me if with his death everything was over. It was Jesus, Who, through them was asking me to do this work. Then, when I read the School of Community I was moved again, particularly when it says: "If you had not had this companionship, Christ, for me as for you, would have been a word, the object of theological sentences or, in the best of cases, the call to a 'pietistic' affection, generic and confused, that was articulated only in fear of sin or, in other words, moralism." And then: "Instead the relationship with Christ, with God made man, coincides with the relationship with those people who document, who testify that Christ is present, not so much because they are physically present (we find many people, in fact, who are present yet do not change us much), but because they live a human intensity that documents His presence today. In fact, to testify to His presence today, through this intensity, this change, it is necessary for Him to be present." I never had such a clear awareness of what that friend really was, although he's no longer physically present. And this simply opens me up to a new use of reason with regards to this fact: thanks to this, I can say that my friendship with him, because of the facts that are happening, continues and deepens, even though for the world, in reality, everything would be over.*

Thank you. For the world everything is over, but that intensity, that difference that she has experienced remains also in the present. "How can we do this journey?", they ask me. I don't want to finish without answering a question about following which I received in a double version. "In the Saturday morning lesson of the Fraternity Exercises you write, by quoting Fr. Giussani: "The desire for the memory of Christ matures as a history in us; it does not grow automatically, but as our capacity grows, following someone." Then Fr. Giussani concludes: "The reason for *sequela* among us is not in order to attach to the person, but the *sequela* of Christ is the reason for *sequela* among us." I really need clarification on this, because it's a continuous source of misunderstandings. It's easy to mistakenly fall into a protective companionship that makes you feel loved and reassured without ever really knowing what we want, whom we love, and for whom it's worth living." And another person writes: "Lately you have been talking often about following, and I have realized that for me this is a weak point. I wouldn't be able to tell you whom I follow concretely, and in my experience I often fall prey of interpretation, and I go after what strikes me. I get excited in certain

moments, like when I heard you at the Exercises, or reading your letter to the newspaper *la Repubblica* or seeing the Pope, because that's where I recognize a unity in action, a fullness of life that I desire for myself. But, then, I get lost along the way. It seems to me that when you speak of following, you are talking about something more than a point of reference that is a source of inspiration. You mean identifying yourself with the other person, just like a child who, without meaning to, assumes almost the same characteristics of his father, without being his duplicate. If it's not a matter of being physically with someone (you were saying that you never saw Fr. Giussani), what made this it possible for you to become one with him, like you continually show us?" This experience of identifying yourself with someone is what Fr. Giussani has always told us: a tight comparison with what he tells us, because following is this continuous possibility of allowing oneself to be moved by a witness, by the way someone who is in front of us lives in reality. And how can I know that I am following? How can I know that a companionship really keeps me company? Lately we have repeated many times that famous sentence by Fr. Giussani – ever since I have read it, not one day has gone by without me having to repeat it to myself or to someone else –: faith is a present experience, which finds a confirmation of its usefulness to our humanity, of its truth, in experience itself. If it's not like this, we can't resist in a world in which everything says the opposite. How can I know if I'm really following? I know that I am really following because my experience confirms it through what happens. We've seen this today in several witnesses. How can I see whether I use reason well or not, whether I'm using it in a rationalistic way? From the fact that I can't stand up straight, that I am bent down. How can I see that there is a true companionship? From the fact that it frees me. How can I see that I don't collapse when everything collapses? Because I don't run away, and I stay there washing myself, because 'I don't belong to the earthquake.' We don't need, as I say all the time, a supplement of certainty provided by someone else outside our experience. We know that we are following because of the experience we are having according to a method, according to a time that we don't decide ourselves. Now we are starting to see the signs of a journey we have done, at the beginning we didn't understand where it would lead to. We couldn't see how it could be useful for our humanity, and we simply followed because Fr. Giussani had proposed it to us. Now we begin to see that in our experience we have signs that enable us to recognize when we are following. So the problem is this continuous comparison with what School of Community proposes to us (the text, what happens here, and in your meetings), because this allows us to understand what it truly means to follow. And this makes you aware of how it is necessary not only to have an experience, but to constantly judge it according to those needs we have always reminded each other of which we call the heart. Otherwise we can't verify whether what we tell each other is true. How can I recognize that I have had a true experience? Because it corresponds to my whole need for liberation, to my whole need for peace, to my whole need for substance, to my whole need for stability. We don't need someone to explain this correspondence to us. We just need to experience it. And when we experience it, it's easy to see it, just like it's easy to see the daylight: it imposes itself with all of its evidence. This is why if we commit ourselves to this journey that Fr. Giussani constantly offers us – we have nothing else to propose! –, we can constantly see whether we are following, through the evidence of what is happening.

*This question emerges from what has recently affected me most. I have felt deeply wounded, troubled, with a bleeding wound, by the most recent facts that have put our history to the test. I'm not referring so much to the earthquake or the recession, and not even to the political attacks, but to what has really struck the origin of our history, in front of such a hateful slash. When at the Exercises I heard you talk, by quoting Fr. Giussani, about an adverse society, I almost thought it was exaggerate. It's true, we are a minority, culturally a minority, but I had never seen this gratuitous hate, without any sense. Now in front of this deep uneasiness, I ask why, and not a why as an analytical explanation of what caused it, but why can such a thing happen.*

I thank you because this gives us the chance to read again what Fr. Giussani tells us to help us answer. It's a text from 1972 published in the March 2008 *Traces* issue: "In the life of those He calls, God never lets anything happen unless it serves for the growth and maturation of those He has called. This is so above all for the life of the individual, but in the final analysis, and more profoundly, for the life of His Church, and therefore, analogously, for the life of every community, be it a family or an ecclesiastical community in the broadest sense. God never permits anything to happen unless it is for our maturity, our maturation. In fact, the truth of the faith is demonstrated precisely by the capacity of each of us and of every ecclesiastical reality (family, community, parish, and the Church in general) to valorize what appears to be an obstacle, persecution, or difficulty, as a road to maturity, by the capacity to make it an instrument and moment of maturation [here too, he points out what the maturity of faith is: if we can use this, whatever it may be, without getting lost in our theories, which do not interest us, because this is pure rationalism. It means remaining at the level of appearances, which we are not interested in. As I've told you before, at least we can say that the Mystery has not spared this to us, so it's for us, for our maturation; but this growth won't happen mechanically. It depends on our capacity to use circumstances in this way, for a relationship, to have a greater solidity, to seek Christ even more, to be able to live everything without stopping at appearances]. [...] This, we can say, is the indicator of our faith's truth, its authenticity or lack thereof: if the faith is truly in the foreground, or if in the foreground there is another kind of concern; if we truly expect everything from the fact of Christ, or if we expect from the fact of Christ what we decide to expect, ultimately making Him a starting point and a support for our projects and programs. The law of spiritual development, this dynamic law of the life of our faith which we have just mentioned, is truly of extreme importance for individuals, as it is for collectivities; for collectivities, as it is for individuals. It always remains true that, for those who understand and love God, everything works for the good; and it always remains true that, in difficult times, whether you love God or not comes to the surface. It's the eternal dilemma at the wellspring of all public declarations of position, of each of man's actions, each of man's expressions; it's the alternative that lays bare the ambiguity possible at the root of every human inflection. The world is a great ambiguity for the unclear spirit. The spirit of man is tempted by ambiguity above every other thing. For good reason, Christ spoke in parables: "So seeing they may not perceive, and hearing they may not understand." The whole world is like one big parable: it demonstrates God, as a parable demonstrates the value it wants to teach, and "those who have ears to hear, listen." Listening to the parables, the secret thoughts of the heart are revealed.

What man loves comes to the surface in the face of problems, questions, and difficulties. [...] If what we are after is Christ, or if it is our own self-love, the affirmation of ourselves, under any inflection, according to any point of view - this comes to the surface in the exact moment of the trial and the difficulty." Therefore these circumstances, which we are not spared, can become for us part of our journey, of our road, of our growth, so that we can be more and more worthy to make Christ present, more purified from anything other than that, instead of placing our certainty in what we do, as Fr. Giussani says in a sentence that sticks in our mind for the beauty of its meaning: "A Christian is not attached to anything else except Jesus." I hope that in these circumstances we can grow in this certainty. They may strip us of everything, but nobody will be able to take away from us the fact that we are not attached to anything else except Jesus.

Summer Vacations. The title we'd like to give to our vacations, as we saw this evening and as we have been saying lately, what we think as most adequate is: "It's the Time of the Person." I think that we have never felt is as pertinent as in this moment.

All of our work, from the School of Community to the suggested books for the summer, will be a help to this.

So we suggest working on the second lesson of the Fraternity Exercises which is connected to the fifth chapter of the text *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*.

Among the suggested summer books, we'd like to point out, in particular *Murder in the Cathedral*, by T.S. Eliot, because it is well connected with our work of the School of Community and with the journey we have done. In this text we'd like to underline not so much the heroic nature of the person (we don't want to shift the attention to the heroic nature of the character), but the witness of a free man in front of power and the necessary journey to be able to 'withstand' even undesirable circumstance like that of martyrdom, something that one doesn't look for nor should he look for. We are interested in understanding that, given our fragility and inconsistency, we can forget about this freedom if we are not willing to do this journey. This is why it's not the heroic nature of the central character that we are interested in, because it's not really a heroic nature, but it's simply the result of a relationship that is stronger than anything else.

The entire second lesson of the Exercises describes the journey to certainty one needs to do in order to generate a subject who witnesses what it means to be Christians in a society like ours. This is why, the School of Community and the work on the Exercises are the path we are called to follow, also and above all in the Summer, which, by definition, is 'free time,' when, after all, we can do whatever we want and can decide how to use our time. In the summer, when we can freely decide how to use our time, we can verify to what we give our time and energy.

A second book is: *The Miracle of Hospitality*. This book by Fr. Giussani (recently re-published) is a collection of conversations he had with the association *Famiglie per l'Accoglienza* (Welcoming Families). It would be useful for everyone to read it, because we can see how hospitality is a witness of the nature of Christianity. It's the communication of a 'fullness' as a foundation for life.

**Emergency: Earthquake in the Emilia and Lombardy Regions.** Many friends have been asking how to help the people affected by the earthquake. On the *Compagnia delle Opere* (Company of Works) website you can find an updated list of the most urgent requests and information about collecting funds. In particular, the *Compagnia delle Opere* in the Emilia region is available to put whoever has a trailer/motor home in direct contact with the families who need one.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*

I wish everyone a good summer!