

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, October 20, 2013

Reference text: J. Carrón, “How is a presence born?” Traces no. 9, October 2013, pp. I-XII; online text: <http://it.clonline.org/detail.asp?c=1&p=0&id=1037>

Song *Marta, Marta*

Song *Annuncio*

Glory Be

We continue our journey with this first moment of work after the Beginning Day. I want to start by recalling the text from which we took the question for our work this summer, and which we proposed again at the Beginning Day, because the witnesses and contributions that we received make evident the situation in which we find ourselves living. Fr. Giussani said, “The great problem of today’s world is no longer posing theoretical questions, but an existential question. [...] How can one live?” because “today’s world has returned to the level of poverty described in the Gospels.” Where do we see this? What characterizes today’s man? Fr. Giussani says, “Doubt about existence, fear of existing, fragility in living, lack of substance of the self” (L. Giussani, in J. Carrón, “*Who will separate us from the love of Christ?*” Fraternity Exercises 2013, p. 7).

“I am writing because I wanted to tell you about the inner struggle I am experiencing. I am twenty-four years old and this is my first year of work. I teach Italian in a middle school, and the eighth-grade class that I have is really difficult: half of the students are foreigners who fled with their families from countries ravaged by war, or who emigrated in order to look for a better life in what they perceive to be an affluent society. The other half are kids from the Western world, from Switzerland, who grew up in a world that has been providing for all of their material needs since they were born, so that everything seems superfluous to them—they take everything for granted, and in the end, everything becomes unbearable. What is most surprising is to see that the consequence of such different situations is the same: a terrible and impenetrable cynicism. I will give you an example to illustrate what I mean. This is the essay—very well-written, by the way—of a kid who arrived in Switzerland three years ago without his parents (I had wanted to provide a topic that would help them to discover a positive point in their life, from which to begin again). This is the clearest example, but almost the entire class answered something along the same lines. They are thirteen years old. The essay’s topic was, ‘Talk about something or someone who makes you feel really important.’ ‘Nothing makes me feel really important, because nobody in this world is so important that I cannot live without him. I look at this world from another perspective: I imagine the world and life as a car, and every human being is a small part of it. Whatever part this car is missing will always be replaceable, from the smallest screw to the hood.’ I am not going to tell you about every single episode that happens in my class, but most of the time it makes me

leave with tears in my eyes. However, I want to say that the tears are not because the kids are so violent and angry, disgusted by life and lacking any positive outlook, but—and this is much worse—because I suspect that what they say may be true, and that the love of my life may not exist, or in any case, that it may not be enough to respond to some terrible experiences, to pierce a certain cynical attitude—that it may not be enough for our heart. I am asking you to help me to do this work. I know that you talked about this at the Beginning Day (and I thank you for it), and that you always try to remind us of what happened to us with simplicity. However, at the moment, the impact with these circumstances is so harsh that it makes me continually doubt what happened, which is that He, by saying my name with a previously unheard-of intensity of affection, made me discover myself. I don't know if, when looking for Jesus' body, Mary Magdalene ever had the slightest doubt that all she had lived might not have been true. I feel exactly like her, looking for Him in the darkness of the night, but with the slight suspicion that maybe it was all an illusion, that it wasn't truly the answer that holds up in front of all of the circumstances of our life." This is the challenge that each of us faces, because when we find ourselves in situations in which—as you can see—everything is reduced to the possibility of replacing one little part of a car with another, then we no longer know what to do. Actually, we start to suspect that it is all an illusion, getting caught between the cynicism that surrounds us and our own temptation toward nihilism: I turn, and behind me I see the illusion of all that happened to me, as if it were ultimately nothing. This makes us really aware of our predicament, which is that we truly are at the level of the utmost inner poverty described in the Gospels, as Fr. Giussani says. Therefore, the problem is to answer the question, "How can one live?" in such a way that, no matter what happens to us in our life, we cannot fall prey to the suspicion that ultimately it is really we (who should be 'bringing' something to others) who are defeated by this situation. So, it is clear that faith cannot interest people who think that everything is interchangeable, like the parts of a car. I am struck by the fact that, in the Encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, the Pope quotes Nietzsche, who believed that Christianity took away the drama, thereby diminishing "the full meaning of human existence." On the contrary, Christianity will interest only those who have not emptied life of drama, while those who have emptied it will be content with replacing one part with another! Therefore, if we have nothing to say to kids like those in the letter, then this is related to the second question we asked at the Beginning Day, "What are we in the world for?" If we don't answer this question, then we don't answer the other one, either. Since we cannot be that little part that is missing, then we start to doubt and we get lost. This is why the society in which we live, with its circumstances, makes us even more aware of the challenge. Then, everything becomes an opportunity to address the question thoroughly.

I want to tell you some things that happened after our meeting in Russia, and I also want to ask you a question. Since we met, many things have changed. For example, I remember almost nothing of the evening in which we talked to each other, but the one thing that I took from it and that has stayed with me is your gaze, your gaze toward me. Afterward, with all that happened, I understood why that gaze remained so stuck to me—because what happened afterward totally

disrupted all of my plans. I experienced what “the life that cripples a man” (Pavese) means, and I really thought that I wouldn’t make it, more than once. However, the surprising thing—I can tell you this now—is that, little by little, reality started to reveal that it is truly for me. This is really surprising, because I always saw myself only according to my fragility and in my cage, and everything had always been limiting. Instead, the presence of that gaze set me looking for the same gaze in everything that was happening to me, without having to censor anything. Thus, I started to live that adventure, so fascinating for my humanity, that I had seen at the beginning. Even living through seemingly adverse circumstances, I started to experience a fulfillment that brought me back to the encounter I had, so much so that I can repeat the words that you said about Mary Magdalene at the Beginning Day, “She was able to understand who He was, because He made all His humanity vibrate to the point of making her feel such an intensity, such a fullness and overabundance that she could never have imagined before, and that she could experience only in the relationship with Him.” At that point, I found that my gaze had also changed, and I was completely intent on seeking that gaze again, that is, the love of my heart. I was even more surprised when I found myself surrounded by a new movement of friends who were completely intent on watching what was happening to me, and who participated in the same fullness that I was experiencing. The last thing I discovered about this journey that started...

Can I ask you a question? I cannot help but ask you this: isn’t this insistence on the gaze a bit sentimental?

I didn’t perceive it as sentimental.

Why?

Because...

Stay with what you read and what you said: is Mary Magdalene’s question sentimental? Because, in the end, ultimately, when we face life’s challenges, it is as if what happened to us didn’t hold up. Everything crumbles, and then we say, “but isn’t this blessed gaze perhaps sentimental?” What did you quote from the Beginning Day?

“She was able to understand who He was, because He made all His humanity vibrate to the point of making her feel such an intensity, such a fullness and overabundance that she could never have imagined before.”

Is an experience like this made possible just by something sentimental?

For me it wasn’t—to the point that I experienced it in the moment in which I was practically run over by a truck!

If we aren’t aware of this when it is happening to us, then tomorrow our mood or the circumstances may change, and it seems to us that the only thing that happened was a sentimental reaction. We forget that we had never had such an experience of human intensity and fullness, that is, that the correspondence that we were able to experience was an exaltation of the “I” that we can only dream of reaching with mere sentimentality! So much so, that when this happens, Fr. Giussani says that it is a sign of the divine (anything but sentimentality!). However, if we don’t recognize this as it is happening, and we mistake it for mere sentimentality, then we question what happened

to us and we start to suspect—as I said earlier—that it is just an illusion. The problem isn't that we suspect that it might be an illusion, because this can happen. What is the problem if we suspect that it might be an illusion? The point is that we must become so aware of what happened to us that we can solve the problem of doubt and illusion in a second. However, since often we don't have this awareness, we succumb to this reduction. Therefore, you understand in time, when you have to face subsequent challenges, that that gaze didn't end with a sentimental feeling, but was carrying something else whose value would become clear along the journey.

Since this is a journey, I later looked for and found that gaze in many friends who are close to me every day, as well. My last discovery happened about two weeks ago. After all of these changes, all of these things a bit, let's say, exceptional—perhaps not exactly desirable, but nevertheless exceptional—there is one thing that is challenging me: my everyday life has resumed, which could become a routine, and even if I haven't lost the awareness of the grace that happened to me, still every day I have the question: "Where is the love of my heart?" The same thing happens to me that happened to Mary Magdalene when she met the Risen Lord and she didn't recognize Him, because she was all lost in her weeping. At the moment in which she hears herself called by name, she is vibrating once again, she lives that vibration, but Jesus tells her, "Stop holding on to Me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." This is what is happening to me now. The more I follow you, the more I follow the work that you are making us do, the more I follow my friends who have this kind of gaze toward me and who live so intensely, the more I would like to follow you. However, it is as if you were telling me, "Don't hold on to me." Thus, I wonder: is it really like this? And, if it is like this, what are the characteristics of the man who is all intent on seeking Jesus, but who doesn't hold on to Him?

Not holding on is a new way of treating reality, made possible only by Jesus' presence: it is called "virginity." This means that you are so full of something, of a presence that permeates your life, that you don't need to possess reality "in a certain way." And it's not because of your ability or asceticism, or by using your energy and ability to hold yourself back. No. It is that you don't need it, because you are so full of another thing, so overflowing with another thing that you can treat reality without having to hold on to it as your own possession. Do you understand?

Yes.

We discover this by living. One summer, I happened to meet a kid who told me of how, at times, he was treating his girlfriend a bit instinctively, and I told him, "You can see what you gain in treating her like that, but you cannot imagine how much you lose in intensity of affection, in potential for the relationship, and in depth of affection and fulfillment." Thus, it isn't that Jesus disappears because He doesn't want us to hold on to Him. It is precisely because Jesus is present and thus fills life so much that one doesn't need to hold on to Him, to hold on to reality, to possess reality in a certain way. However, one has to discover this in experience, because for us it is still fiction, fiction! For the majority of Christians, it is so far from a human experience that it seems like a dream. Somehow, though, we have all had an experience that supports that what I am telling you is not unreal. Have you ever fallen in love?

Yes.

The first time you went out together, you probably didn't even get close to him and he didn't even get close to you, and he asked, "Do you love me?" and you said yes. In that relationship, you experienced a fullness that you were not able to repeat in trying to possess him afterward in another way. And so you remember that day: how you wish that your relationship could have the intensity of that first day! You experienced this in a big way! Therefore, it isn't a problem pertaining only to those called to virginity, but it concerns everybody, because everybody desires that intensity and fullness of affection. But in order to be able to experience it we need Christ's presence, the only presence that makes it possible.

On many occasions, what we said about Mary Magdalene is not immediate for everybody, or it wasn't immediate for everybody at the Beginning Day. One of you writes, "I wanted to tell you what is happening to me, because I can see the terrible risk that faith may stop interesting me [we are at this level—that it doesn't interest us anymore; and we are the ones who say this, not the others]. Even if I love and I have loved the experience of the Movement up to now—I had the experience of Mary Magdalene, otherwise I definitely would not have stayed in this story—it is as if, for awhile now, I have been living off of an event that happened in the past, and not something happening now [this is what we said at the Exercises: at a certain point, the event becomes a devout memory; it is no longer something happening now]. In reading the Exercises, I realized that my loving Christ was intellectual, and not a very fascinating experience, except for certain moments. When I saw Fr. Giussani again, in the video for the presentation of his biography, I rediscovered what the experience of Mary Magdalene means in me. Everything was so clear with him that I understood the difference between an intellectual belief and a presence, and I am in the Movement because of this experience. This made me desire to read his biography very carefully, in order to rediscover the traits of what has made me live. In the meantime, I left the choir of which I had been a member for years, because I could no longer stand the way I was living it. In other words, I actually distanced myself from the gestures of the Movement, but I did it for a true lack of judgment and value for me. Now my life is something to weep about; what remains is the desire to encounter Him again, but it is very hard for me. I am aware that if I leave that piece of companionship that God gave me, which is the small group of School of Community, it would be like cutting the last thread that keeps me connected to the experience of Christianity. But I need to change, I need to be called by name again—I have a terrible need for this. How does this experience of Mary Magdalene happen every day for you? Or, having already had it, how does it become such an awareness in you that it makes you joyful to the core?" This question is asked repeatedly. In fact, another person writes, "At the Beginning Day, I was very struck when you spoke about Mary Magdalene, of her name being called, and of how she was changed by that event. However, now I am experiencing a sense of loneliness; everything seems well-organized, but it doesn't correspond to me. I haven't felt called by name anymore, and therefore I haven't had all that personal and community experience. I stay attached as best I can, and I understand that my personal initiative is always what makes the difference, but is it hard if, at times, one doesn't have the strength to do

it. I am asking for your help.” This is the paradox: even if we all participate in the same gesture, we see very different experiences. So, how can we answer these questions? Through what happens: “This year started with events at work that I could call traumatic. Somebody’s human error fell on me, the only one to suffer the consequences of a situation, and I didn’t have the comfort of my coworkers’ empathy. Upset by all these things, I listened to the Beginning Day, at first with difficulty, but then as my attention grew, a jumble of feelings overtook me. I recognized myself in the things I was hearing, and I remembered the many gifts that I have received in this relationship with Him. In the past, I have already had the opportunity to verify that what may seem like a blow from behind, if lived deep down with the awareness of being loved, leads to the judgment that the circumstance is not crushing the ‘I.’ In other words, even an injustice that one has suffered, if freely embraced, makes one stronger and brings one a step further up the ladder of life. As I listened to Fr. Carrón, sentences that I knew but that I never fully understood suddenly became clearer, and at a certain point, there was something like an explosion, a light in the darkness, when I heard that, in the encounter with the Movement, one hears once more that being called by name that happened at Baptism. This was like a detonator within me. It was the understanding that, when I say that something corresponds to me—that leap of my heart that has underscored certain moments of my life (making them unforgettable), that being deeply moved that is difficult to explain rationally because it is in no way something that I can produce—it is precisely the echo of when my name, called at Baptism, was received and raised up to Heaven so that the Mystery could be within me, too. This is what I experience every time I feel that my ‘I’ expands and is redefined: it is the reflection of that grace. How amazed I was after this intuition: it is like seeing my Baptism! It sounds crazy, but I feel that having been called by name that first time, as it happened to Mary Magdalene, is forever. I feel as light as a butterfly. I am grateful for this gift that makes me understand that I have already received a ‘good,’ and I also desire to think of the people who were the cause of my recent difficulties without anger. I am stronger because I know the spring that quenches my thirst; I am filled with gratitude.” The encounter with the Movement reawakened the grace of Baptism, and continues to reawaken it through the Christian announcement, as we sang at the beginning: “What was from the beginning, / what we heard, / what we have seen / with our own eyes: we announce to you.” The question is if each of us grasps all the meaning of what we say to each other. “At the Beginning Day, you blew me away with your insistence on Mary, and I kept hearing the sound of my name. I’ve been reading my notes from the Beginning Day over and over. I can’t tell you what kind of upheaval the things that I read provoke in me. They touch the deepest chords in my heart and make what I have within me resound in such a way that I can barely go beyond the first paragraph, and I continue to go back to the beginning of your lesson...” How does it happen, how does it happen again, also for those who may find it difficult at times, and who, despite participating in the same gesture, don’t experience the vibration? This is God’s plan, also among us: God gives the grace to someone so that it continues to happen before our eyes, so that through this person, through his witness, the same echo of the beginning may also reach the others. This is what Fr. Giussani told us, and we have been repeating it often recently:

“Man today expects, perhaps unconsciously, the experience of the encounter with people for whom the fact of Christ is such a present reality that their life is changed. What will shake today’s man is a human impact, an event that echoes the initial event” (L. Giussani, *L’avvenimento cristiano* [*The Christian Event*], BUR, Milan 2003, p. 24), as it happened to Zacchaeus. How can it happen, also in moments when we find it hard? Because it continues to happen in others who can witness it to us, and so it can continue to reawaken—according to a plan that is not ours—the “I” of each of us that hears itself called by name again through this vibration that happened. Therefore, the first thing is not so much that it happens in me according to an image that I have, but the fact that it happens! Like when one has an incurable disease and discovers that another person with the same disease is being cured. Immediately, he recognizes that fact as a source of hope for himself, too, though he is still sick. The possibility for us comes from seeing that the event continues to happen.

Regarding the episode of Mary Magdalene, I don’t think that I have often read a text like this (at least, not that I remember), that is also very beautiful. As I read it, and it was very present in my mind while I was living my days, I noticed this: very gradually, but inexorably, my attention is shifting more and more from the surprise I feel at being looked at in a certain way and being loved, to the One who is looking at me. Everybody desires to be loved, to be affirmed and embraced, and my need for this is so great. Thus, when it happens that I experience this gaze in reality, the surprise and the gratitude are immense—but through the work of the Beginning Day, I notice that my attention is moving to the One who is looking at me, because I often catch myself thinking, “If I feel like this, how powerful must be the One who is looking at me in such a way!” So my attention is “sliding” toward the origin of this gaze.

From being seen, to the One who is looking at me. It is often difficult for us to take this step. Yet, though it’s difficult for me now, if I am here it is because something happened to me, and Someone made it happen. Who is looking at me? This is why I am glad—not because in this moment I “feel” this gaze more or less, but because there is One who is looking at me like that, so much so that I am no longer alone in reality with my nothingness. Faith, we have said repeatedly, is recognizing a Presence that we have been able to experience concretely in certain moments, those moments that Fr. Giussani described at the end of his life, in front of the Pope and the entire Church, “...there are moments, certain moments that go straight to the heart, to the bottom of the heart, and that one can never tear off of himself.” None of our doubts, mistakes, or blunders can take away that experience of unique correspondence, because it is something we could never generate on our own, and is instead evidence of the One who made it possible. Therefore, it is He whom I recognize in faith, whom I can recognize now; and I am glad when, though faced with darkness, I can recognize Him. I am just back from what I saw two days ago in Kampala: Rose’s women, all with AIDS (some abused, some deserted, some widows, some abandoned), but they feel that they are defined by that encounter that has given them back value, that made each of them discover the value of her own life. I assure you that the joy that was visible in them is hardly seen among us. This means that they can touch firsthand... The person who wrote the letter that I quoted

earlier was asking me, “Where do you find this?” I find it there, in Kampala; I find it in what I see, and in other things that we all see. Similarly, I found it as I was listening to the passage about Mary Magdalene during Mass, when I was preparing the summer Exercises of the *Memores Domini*. I thought of using it only for the Introduction, but once I read it I couldn’t tear myself away from it, and it kept growing and growing. At one point, I couldn’t go on anymore without feeling the need to go back to that gaze that constantly generates me, without which I don’t look at myself properly. How can you go on without returning constantly to experience that gaze, to hear your name being called? What happens to Mary is what happens to each of us: every morning we can let Him in, because He is constantly announced to all of us. We can welcome Him, or we can ignore Him, because we have our own image of how it should happen. However, once He has been announced to us, nothing can prevent us from looking at ourselves through what happened to Mary Magdalene, because none of us would be here if the same thing hadn’t happened to us, too. Therefore, if we don’t constantly go back there, if we don’t continuously share our life with those pages, if we don’t let this become a journey (after the initial miracle), then everything that we have falls apart. Because that gaze doesn’t continue if I don’t let it continuously come in, and if I don’t make myself constantly available to letting it enter.

I wanted to recount an episode in order to document what you said at the Beginning Day, particularly when you spoke of the beginning of a new awareness. You said that one can look at reality in terms of his wound, blocking the path of knowledge, and that the Lord has to happen again. In the days prior, I had worked a lot on the Exercises, and I thought that I understood them more clearly, but I found myself crushed by the weight of what was happening at work, where the pressure of having to answer all of the demands was quite suffocating. I was surprised that, despite repeating to myself all of the things that I know, I almost had an objection: “Why do I have to work so much? Why do I have to do all these things? Why?” And I was providing some explanations: “Because it is right to answer clients properly, it is right to treat your associates well, it is right to do all you can because there is a recession...”

We do everything except go back there. Everything and more!

It’s true. Having this clearly in mind, knowing the reasoning, this morning I wanted to go to Mass, but I couldn’t because we had an early meeting. Then, I remembered that at 12:30 there is a Mass at Catholic University. I did all that I could to be able to go. The meeting ended at 12:30...

But, if you were in love... Just think about it once. If you were in love, where would you return? What would prevail?

That love.

You would go back to see her.

I really did want to go to Mass.

It’s not a joke. We are saying that we are pulled in all directions, but if we don’t understand the difference of what happened to us, then we do all sorts of things, thinking that the rest can be fixed. As if that gaze were one thing among many. No—it is “the” thing! It is the event. Either we understand this, and we constantly return to where we can let it enter again, or the only thing that

we don't verify is faith. We verify all of our thoughts except for the only thing that happened to us.

So, I tried to go to Mass. I ended the meeting very quickly. It was 12:30, I was leaving, and one of the people present at the meeting said to me, "Excuse me, but I need to talk to you." I answered, "Listen, I have an important appointment" (because it was important). However, he insisted and I stopped, because in my heart I wanted to answer him. I lost ten minutes, and then I ran to the university, hoping to make it at least for the Consecration. I got to the Church and I found the priest cleaning the chalice. I felt a pang of disappointment, of regret; I told myself, "I came for nothing," and I almost chastised myself for having stopped to talk. I actually spent a moment thinking, "Why do I feel this weight within me? Why all this responding to reality, if in the end it is..." Nothing gave me relief. Then, I moved to the side and I saw a lectern with the Gospel open on it. "At least I am going to read today's Gospel," I said to myself. I read it quickly, and there was a sentence that said approximately, "Blessed the servant whose Master, upon returning, will find him faithful to his work." What a liberation—it was a moment of total correspondence! I felt a surge of joy, like when you say of Mary Magdalene that one wouldn't exchange anything for an instant of this relationship. I felt totally immersed in the Mystery of the Father.

It is enough to let His difference enter for just a minute. Others ask me, "How can we stay in reality with the wound that we carry within [which I recognize as a grace, because it forces me to look for this love] but without letting ourselves be defined by the emotional state that we are in?" This means, how do we not stop at the feeling provoked by a particular moment? Do you see how we are often stuck precisely there? It is the same question that another person asks, as she writes, "At the Beginning Day, I was very struck by these words: 'Because any challenge or any circumstance, even painful, always contains something true, otherwise it wouldn't exist.' A previous passage on circumstances describes me well: 'Because we are unable to see the attraction they hold within, so defined are we by the wound. We have already reduced them because we think we already know what the circumstance is. We think we already know that there is nothing new to discover within it, that it is simply something to endure.' To hear that the circumstance carries something true within it gave me a jolt, because in this difficulty that I am going through, the circumstance is disconnected from the truth. I am almost choked by the confusion, and by the list of things that don't go the way I want. In the past I used to say, 'But in any case, there is Jesus!' This was putting a patch on everything, and therefore eliminating both Jesus and myself. However, the test that you give us is too reasonable, and doesn't leave me with a shadow of a doubt. It is true, otherwise it wouldn't exist. If it exists, it is because there is something more than the adverse circumstance. There is something true within it, otherwise it wouldn't exist. This statement put the pieces back together. Could you elaborate on what this 'there is something true within it, otherwise it wouldn't exist' means? How can we be certain that the truth, Christ, is not separated from what happens, even in the hardest trials?"

I was struck by the fact that life is truly contained in what you told us about Mary Magdalene. Also, that deep emotion, which you have started to tell us about since this summer, doesn't last because I reread a text, but because I see it happening. Last Saturday was one of the many memorable moments of this re-happening that have recently taken place. I visited a prison in order to present the exhibit on the Duomo of Milan (six events in the various prison wings). What struck me was how this gesture was born. Two years ago, a young man killed two people. He turned himself in right away, went to jail, and stopped talking, as if he were destroyed and paralyzed by what he had done. Some of our friends who do charitable work in prisons started to visit him in jail. For months he never spoke, until last year, after the Rimini Meeting: while they were telling him about the exhibit on the Duomo of Milan and who had built it—men who were all sinners—he was suddenly moved, and said, “Are you telling me that a person like me can build a cathedral?”

Is this sentimental?!

And so, as they were talking, he had the idea of bringing the exhibit about the Duomo to the prison, and having it explained to the inmates by some of the inmates themselves.

You said that for a year and a half, this young man never spoke, that he never spoke to anybody in the prison, until he heard about the Duomo. How paralyzed can a man be for having killed some people, for the judgment he has about himself as a person who doesn't have any value! Then he hears about the building of the Duomo: “This means that there is a possibility for me, that there is still something to discover within this ‘I’ of mine that I believe to be useless?!”

The exhibit was born of this person's “movement,” to the point that I told him, “You have started to build your cathedral.” I was very struck, because in going to this prison, it was as if I experienced as never before the infinite depth of our need. We are really people who weep over a tomb—not only that young man, because when you see it happening in front of you, you recognize what is happening also within yourself, something that you usually regard superficially. We are totally powerless toward others and toward ourselves. On the one hand, there is our absolute powerlessness and, on the other, the fact that we carry a Presence who looked at us precisely for this reason. So when I stepped outside, I thought, “In order to understand reality, I need Carrón who speaks to me about Mary Magdalene; and I need reality in order to understand Carrón.” Thus, the verification of faith is not about succeeding, but it is self-awareness, that is, “Mary!”

It is only this that reopens the possibility, because many times we don't have an answer to reawaken the kids in school, who are already stuck. Instead, when we bring that gaze, we can free them. It would be more appropriate to say that it is not we who can free them, but what we carry. What we carry, as in “earthen vessels,” is able to free even a person who has been stuck for a year and a half because he was seeing all of his life through the evil he had done. Can any of us think of being in a worse predicament than that inmate? Or worse than Rose's women? Or worse than someone who finds himself in many other situations we can think of? To be called by name, no matter what the circumstance—this is what freed that young man. He didn't have a hallucination, nor did he hear voices: he simply let what another was saying enter into his life. We can go and visit the Duomo exhibit and take it for granted, because we are not aware of our own need. Instead,

when one has this need, he recognizes the announcement! This is why our only possibility for recognizing the announcement comes from keeping the question alive. Without our need, without a true awareness of our need, the gaze may happen to us without our realizing it. As Fr. Giussani used to say, starting from a phrase of then-Cardinal Ratzinger, “‘One cannot take the shame of life, if not for the presence of a lover.’ But the worst shame is the kind of lovers we are! So we can bear the ‘shame of life’ only in the presence of a lover that is not just any lover: it is the presence of Christ [...]. Only by looking at the beloved with his eyes full of what is behind her, can Leopardi compose the hymn ‘To His Lady,’ which is not a hymn to the woman, but a hymn to the Woman with a capital W: it is a hymn to that for which man feels an attraction in the woman that he otherwise would not feel [What happens instead? That for us the circumstance is separated from the truth!]. We are tempted to consider abstract the only hypothesis—the only hypothesis!—that makes the greatness and the nobility of things concrete, up to the ‘density of the instant’ [for us this is something abstract, because for us “concrete” is something else!] [...] What everybody [instead] considers to be clearly concrete, as opposed to the abstraction of the ideal, is actually truly abstract, because abstract means torn away from the substance that can come only from [...] the unity of the whole” (L. Giussani, *Vivendo nella carne [Living in the Flesh]*, BUR, Milan, 1998, pp. 289-290). What we call abstract is instead the most concrete thing. I saw it, I touched it firsthand, when, after having celebrated Mass with Rose’s women, she told me, “I had to announce Christ, besides my desire to share with them what I had found, because for these women it was the only possibility to recover the desire to live. These women all have AIDS, and I could get them the pills, but they were not taking them, because they had no reason to live. Only after they had encountered a reason for living, when they had discovered their own value, did they have a reason to take the pills.” This is what we have a very hard time understanding. Yet they are the most obvious things! What is more obvious than life? Nothing. This demonstrates that what we often consider more abstract is, instead, the only thing that makes one rediscover the evidence of the value of life. Only after rediscovering the value of life did those women have a reason to take the pills in order to continue to live. This is why “what everybody considers to be clearly concrete, as opposed to the abstraction of the ideal, is actually truly abstract, because abstract means torn away from the substance that can come only from [...] the unity of the whole. ‘Far from its branch, poor frail leaf, where do you go?’ The substance of the leaf is the entire tree [because] a leaf in the wind no longer says anything” (*Ibid.*, p. 290). This is why—in that young inmate, in those women—one sees a dignity that we can only dream about! These people, in different ways, have been called by name, have discovered who they are. This is what really fills their life with gladness. Without this, we get stuck, because it is only a Presence that can unblock everything, that reopens life for the inmate and for the women sick with AIDS, as it can reopen it for each of us, in whatever situation we find ourselves. We only need to let this Presence enter. We only need what is announced to us, in whatever way it is announced, to come and enter into each of us.

We will continue to work on the second part of the Beginning Day, because now we can understand it better, without making the mistake—which is always a risk—of considering the first

part sentimental, pietistic, or a form of inwardness, and the second, something that addresses the organization, the structure, or the association. If this were the case, we would have already muddled things. When the young man in prison felt looked at in this way, it was anything but sentimental. On the contrary, it was precisely what made him become a protagonist, even to the point of the desire to build the cathedral himself. The fact that we lose sight of this, separating the two parts, shows how far we can go in breaking the unity of our experience. So, what we heard today may help us to understand more easily what we are in the world for, what we are in front of the students for (as the first letter said), what we are in front of people for (as Rose is), what we are doing when we go to visit people in prison, or with people at work, or in the most normal circumstances of our life. This is what Fr. Giussani used to tell us, which we repeated at the Exercises and which we can now understand even more: “The true problem of CL [that is, of the Movement] today is the truth of its experience and thus its coherence with the origin. Among us, there is often the attitude that the most urgent thing is how things are going, how the community is doing; instead, the urgent thing should be to give renewed life to a sensibility for the truth of the experience of the Movement” (“Il vero problema di CL è la verità della sua esperienza” [“CL’s Real Problem is the Truth of its Experience”], L. Cioni, ed., *CL Litterae Communionis*, n. 4, April 1977, p. 8). Why was Fr. Giussani insisting on this? Because he understood the situation very clearly, as we can see: “In a society like this, we cannot create something new except by living life: no structure or organization or initiative can succeed. Only a new and different way of living can turn around the structures, initiatives, relationships—in a word, everything. And life belongs to me, it is irreducibly mine” (“Movimento, ‘regola’ di libertà” [“Movement, ‘Rule’ of Freedom], O. Grassi, ed., *CL Litterae Communionis*, n. 11, April 1978, p. 44). Thus, if the Movement is not the experience of faith that illuminates life, that sheds light on the problems that I face in life, then it cannot be an answer for others. We can become a presence that responds to the situation in which we find ourselves only if, for us, faith is an experience that sheds light on the problems that I face, helping me to find a solution to these problems. Otherwise, how can we think that we can communicate it to others? At the first difficulty, we have the suspicion that, ultimately, it may be an illusion. Therefore, the two things cannot be separated. From this point of view, the letter that I wrote to the Fraternity after my meeting with Pope Francis is an opportunity to become aware of what happened to us in our life, and of what we are in the world for. We can see that the Pope has this concern, and he witnesses it to us in such a splendid way that rereading his words in this context seems to me to be the greatest gift that he can give to us—precisely to us. This is why we will continue to work on the second part of the Beginning Day text, “What are we called to do here in the world?” and on the Letter to the Fraternity.

Book of the Year. *Vita di Don Giussani [Life of Father Giussani]*, by Alberto Savorana. I am struck by how the people who started to read it immediately have the desire to make other people aware of it, too. It is the same thing we were saying before: we will wish to publicize this book, to make it known to others, to speak about it, insofar as it benefits us and is striking to us. For this

reason, we will be the first who will be able to make it known. It is always the same—as Fr. Giussani says, life is irreducibly mine.

As of this month, the layout and content of the **Fraternity website** have been completely renewed. On this website, you can also find useful information about the life of the Movement (for example, the dates of the different Schools of Community and retreats, the main announcements, and other things).

I am asking you to mark the date **April 27, 2014** on your calendar, the day of the **canonization of John Paul II and John XXIII** in Rome, and the date **May 10, 2014**, when the Italian Episcopal Conference has announced a huge **rally about education** in Saint Peter's Square with the Pope.

This year, the proposal of the **National Day of Food Collection** (in Italy), planned for **Saturday, November 30th**, and organized by the Food Bank, is first of all the opportunity to educate us to live what the Pope said, "...when food is shared in an equitable way, with solidarity, then no one goes without basic needs, and each community can meet the needs of the poorest." Therefore, I invite you to adhere to this initiative and to support this gesture of charity, of that charity about which we spoke at the Beginning Day.

Participation in School of Community. Participation in School of Community is a sign of participation in the life of the Movement. It is a small gesture that educates us to express the desire to take seriously this work that is starting to become our own, to the point of making us pick the text up again every day. In personally participating, we will put it to the test, because our freedom is even more in play—fortunately, I say—because each of us has the opportunity to say "I" in front of Christ. But, do I want to participate in this, or not? For a person who loves freedom, and loves to say "yes" to Christ—not as a routine, but as a renewed commitment: "Today, I want to say yes today"—opportunities like this are precious.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, November 20th at 9:30pm. I remind you that there is an email address that you can use to send questions and short witnesses regarding the part of School of Community on which we are working. I ask that you send them no later than the Sunday that precedes our meeting, in order to give me the time to read them. The email address is: sdccarron@comunioneliberazione.org. Please use it only and exclusively for School of Community.

Veni Sancte Spiritus.