

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, April 30, 2014**

*Reference text:* J. Carrón, Introduction, in “PRESS ON TO MAKE HIM MY OWN,” <http://english.clonline.org/detail.asp?c=1&p=0&id=1434>, pp. 1-7.

Song *Abramo*

Song *Il giovane ricco*

*Glory Be*

Happy Easter to everyone! Let's begin the work of discovering what happened and what is happening in our lives after the Fraternity Exercises. In the *Introduction*, we faced a question: What is the essential? Here it doesn't so much matter whether I got the right definition or not, whether I did the right thing or made a mistake, but whether and when I became aware of what the essential is.

*What a hurricane, what a storm you aroused in my heart! I arrived in Rimini, hoping and praying that He would embrace me again. I longed to be there with the same heart, torn up and throbbing, that I had five years ago, when I encountered all of you and I was reborn. This is what is happening: the journey that you are helping me to make is so radical, so strong and substantial, that initially, in facing your insistent question – “Who is Christ?” – I felt almost annoyed, bothered in my established and unmovable certainty that I know Him very well, that I had run up against Him many times, that He had fished me out of the lake of my disordered and arrogant life, to the point of bringing me to the decision to change it completely. For better or for worse, I was sure that I had surrendered to His extraordinary attraction. In short, I often even felt pretty good about myself. How deceptive, though! Your question kept resurfacing, making me feel uncertain and angry. I was feeling a deep sense of discomfort, then a great restlessness, and eventually a sense of dejection. I recognized an intolerable discrepancy between what I felt I was perceiving and my life. I had let daily life cripple me. How? What had I missed? So, with this providential heartache full of grace and tenderness, I arrived in Rimini, and you welcomed me with that question: “Who of us would not want to be here this evening with the same face, wholly open, striving, desiring, full of wonder, as that of Peter and John running toward the sepulchre on Easter morning?” (p. 1). I discovered dramatically – and I stress dramatically – that I was on the brink of an extraordinary depth and truth regarding my “I” and my humanity. I experienced a sense of dizziness, as if I were feeling, for the first time, the entire depth and greatness of a challenge that was addressed to me. I recalled the many times in which I had come to School of Community ready to speak, should the opportunity arise: a long sequence of important, crucial facts, I could have recounted so many, and in each of them – I could have sworn it – it was clear that Jesus was at work – but it's not enough. I felt a deep sorrow, I felt all the weight of my “political ‘I,’” of my partial answers, of my hysteria. Thank you, because the challenge to this radicality demands that I go all the way, and I only desire to surrender. Christ is not a thought or a figment of my imagination, but He is, He is! I don't have to make an effort to conjure Him in my thoughts, but simply become aware that He exists. The extraordinary tenderness that I perceive is His initiative*

*toward me – any weakness, any misery of mine is erased. And what is even more astonishing is that He uses my humanity not as an obstacle, but as a resource. Therefore, everything becomes part of the journey, and my impossible life becomes very possible; moreover, it becomes something that I can love very much. Thank you, Julián. I feel a great affection for you, because you bring me to the One who is my Good. With immense gratitude.*

One can arrive in Rimini like she just told us, just as one can be here tonight in any sort of condition. What demonstrates what the essential is? The fact that, even if one arrives and feels annoyed in front of a question that she was asked, uncertain and angry, with this deep sense of discomfort, with this providential heartache, Christ makes Himself powerfully present, not as a thought – because a thought cannot awaken the “I” like this – but because He is an event, and that simply makes it easier for her to become aware of His presence. So, how did she discover what the essential is? Because it makes her more powerfully herself. What did we say to each other as we read Chapter 8 of the School of Community? That only the divine saves all of the factors of our humanity, making each of us become aware of them. When we are annoyed by this, it means that it didn’t happen – because when He happens, He doesn’t annoy us, but, on the contrary, He makes us have an experience of the depth, greatness, and truth of our “I,” like the one that she described. This is Christ: not an explanation, not a list of sentences, but this becoming aware, this reawakening of one’s “I,” this becoming oneself. As another friend writes, “What a great event happened to me during these days! I went back home from the Exercises deeply moved, and with my heart full of joy for having met Him again, because His presence became manifest to me through the person who witnessed Fr. Giussani’s charism and the beauty of a life that longs for His presence. Because of what I experienced in these days, it was possible for me to embrace Him again and to go back home changed and full of gladness [we know that He is present because He is at work: “He is, if He changes;” it isn’t something that I learn and then apply. No – Christ is something that happens]. I am me, but I am no longer me. Everyone noticed it: from my husband (who, after seeing and listening to me, decided to go to the Exercises for workers), to my colleagues at school, to my friends (some of whom specifically asked me, “What happened to you? Why are you so radiant?”). I am glad, with a great peace in my heart. It isn’t “doing things,” but a love, an affection, a being loved that changes life. And it was exactly like that. Going back home after three days had never been easy; I always found a nervous and tense environment. Instead, this time I was so grateful for what had happened to me that everything was different [we verify that what we are talking about is the same thing that happened to Andrew, who went back home that evening – according to what Fr. Giussani always told us – and one could see what had happened to him by the way in which he hugged his wife; not because he tried to apply what he had seen, but because he felt a change in himself that was expressed in a totally different way of embracing his wife]. I was no longer concerned about doing or changing things [this is not the issue], but with my heart full of His presence, I was able to face everything in a completely new way [it doesn’t mean that we no longer have to face things, but that in facing things, the usual things, we discover that we are doing so in a new way]: preparing meals, going to school, being with my children or my students. The same things as before, but now my heart is full of peace and love.” This is what we mean when we say that Christianity is an event. Not a category among others or an explanation – it is something that happens and that I verify in the different, new way in which I deal with things, from embracing my wife (like Andrew) to feeding my children.

*This raises a question: How does this continue, how does it happen that the heart continues to strive and be open? Because it also happened to me that at the Exercises I really understood...*

Why do you have, now, this desire to strive and be open?

*Because the first evening at the Exercises, you invited us to have the same heart as John and Peter as they were running to the tomb. I felt that this invitation was addressed to me, because it was precisely my desire. The next day, with this striving heart, I perceived the exceptionality of Christ in the way in which you were looking at us and talking to us, and therefore I also understood Chapter 8 as experience. Suddenly, I felt glad as I hadn't in many months, and now I want to continue to be glad.*

“Suddenly,” do you understand? Suddenly she found that she was glad. This is Christianity: an event that happens. As with any event, “suddenly” one finds that he is different, and from there desire arises.

*I want to continue to be glad and...*

How, in your experience, is what you lived in Rimini responding to your question? How does it happen again? Because, in what happens, the method by which it can happen again is already present.

*I realize that what happened remains in my memory, and so I look at things with greater certainty, with an additional certainty of Him present.*

This means that you arrive at the Exercises in a certain way, and something happens to you that changes you and makes you glad. There is no other method. So, how does it happen again? According to the same method. In fact, what did Fr. Giussani do (as we will see when we work on the lessons of the Exercises)? He always made us identify with John and Andrew's experience. He started by announcing, by placing the episode of John and Andrew before of our eyes – so that it could happen again (as you were saying earlier). Then, we shifted to what “needed to be done,” to thinking that we had something else to do that was more interesting than this. And what did he do to correct this shifting of ours? We said it during the lessons: he re-proposed John and Andrew to us, that day on the Jordan River with John the Baptist. There is no other method. What we have to ask, my dear, is that that event happen again; and we have to constantly recover the awareness of this event in our memory. Like a student at Catholic University was telling me this morning: you cannot shake off that event, because it continues to come back, and come back, and come back, as it happens to one who goes to a party and falls in love and, the next day, wakes up with that face on his mind.

*However, I notice that when I get back to daily life (with all of its struggle), the clarity and awareness that I had there aren't as strong anymore, and often the distraction and the tiredness take over.*

That is precisely where you have to let yourself be challenged time and again, so that this gaze may become ever more yours. It is necessary to realize that this is the journey that one has to make: “Expect a journey, not a miracle” (L. Giussani “Raduno nazionale maturati” [“National Gathering of High School Graduates”], Rimini, September 28-30, 1982, CL Archive). These words have kept coming back to my mind ever since I heard them for the first time. Based on what you are saying, the miracle has happened to you; but, as you can see, the miracle is not enough – because when one returns to the daily grind, after a while, everything fades away once again. As it happened to a student at Catholic University who came and talked to me during the break that followed the explanation of Chapter 10 of *The Religious Sense*: “This amazement in front of reality happened to me, because I had a motorcycle accident and I was a coma. And when I woke up, everything

was new, everything was amazing – I didn't take anything for granted. Waking up was like saying, 'I am still here,' and everything was calling for my attention." "Do you see? The miracle happened to you." But he was full of sorrow, because that morning he had already forgotten this amazement, he was no longer experiencing it. I told him, "Do you see? The miracle isn't enough. For this to become yours, it takes a journey." Conversion is a journey, as we said to each other.

*I tried to answer the question about the essential. After almost a year of doing research, I started to work five months ago, and this is a big challenge – difficult, demanding, forcing me to take risks every day, to make decisions and acquire specific knowledge, so as not to work hastily and imprecisely. Also, it forces me to face many people who are different from me, and whom I would often prefer not to deal with. I still have a lot to learn, and often I make practical errors in the relationship with my coworkers and with people. However, each day I start again by asking to be able to work well, to work to the best of my ability, not to make too many mistakes, and to be my very best. This was the essential for me regarding my work.*

That is, for you, the essential was the result that you had at work.

*Yes. Not making mistakes.*

And so?

*However, I realized that this is the mentality that everybody has, the mentality of success.*

A person, surprising herself in action, realizes that for her the essential is to be successful at work. *Not long ago, it happened that, in a short time period, I made two serious, similar mistakes, and something changed. Because after one mistake, you can get up again, everyone tells you that to err is human and it can happen. However, I didn't expect to get distracted in a similar way again. So, I was forced to ask myself what is the essential in life, what is my true need, because if the essential is being successful, then when I make a mistake, I am finished. And if I look at myself like this now, I am really crushed by my powerlessness, and I become very distressed and fearful for the mistake that I made and for the many that I will make again – and I am trapped and paralyzed because my essential has collapsed.*

Do you see? One discovers, even in making a mistake, that she placed the essential in something that turned out to be insufficient. Here I am not interested in focusing first of all on the mistake, but I am interested in the journey! Only because you made this mistake was it revealed, before your eyes, what the essential in life was for you. Now you are more aware of it. This is more crucial than not making mistakes. We are too worried about making mistakes, instead of being concerned about learning. So, what were you saying that you need?

*I asked myself what allows me to look at myself in another way, because I have to answer this question in order to be able to get up tomorrow morning and go back to work. What I discovered is that I need to always recognize that my value is not measured by my success. I need to experience concretely, always, a gaze that embraces me and my mistakes. I discovered that this is the true essential – otherwise, I fall at the first obstacle, as it happened to me with my work.*

Do you see that the essential is not a doing, but a love? So, what is essential is revealed in life, right before of our eyes.

*What freed me is that what I need happened in history, that is, that Christ died and rose again to save me, my sins, and my mistakes. I have the possibility to discover this in the companionship of my family, my friends, and some of my coworkers. This is something I recognized with a clarity that I have rarely had. I am saying this because I saw it, not because it is the right answer. My powerlessness forces me to face the fact that I am fallible, and this scares me a lot, because my*

*capacity for making mistakes is huge. However, it is also the way in which I understand that my happiness cannot depend on my being perfect, but that, instead, I am bound to an Other who wanted me the way that I am, with my imperfections, and who gives them to me as an opportunity to grow. The sorrow for my mistake and for my distraction remains, because I would like not to err, but now the alternative for me is between the anguish that paralyzes me and entrusting myself, through prayer and the companionship of my friends, in order to better understand who I am and to enjoy life. This is a journey that I have begun, but I continually forget and fall back into fear. It doesn't matter. The issue is a journey that gives us more and more clarity – as you say, “a clarity that I have rarely had” – regarding the journey that we need to make. Thank you.*

*The last two weeks were very provocative for me, in the sense that everything in my days contributed to making my experience gravitate around that question to which you and Pope Francis are recalling us: What is the essential? What is essential for my person and for my life? I participated in the Easter Triduum for university students, and on Good Friday we were told, “To answer this question it is necessary to let Christ wash our feet.” It often happens that I back away from the possibility that Christ is the essential for me. On Sunday, as I was listening to Pope Francis' homily as he declared John XXIII and John Paul II saints, I felt called back to this. The saints were not scandalized by Christ's wounds, but rather they loved them, because through these wounds we have been saved. They let Christ wash their feet, they recognized the essential, and they made the essential visible to us. Through those wounds, they verified faith, that is, the essential. And this is just the culmination of two weeks in which everything spoke to me of that essential: on Easter, when my family celebrated only by going to Mass, because we didn't have time to prepare the usual wonderful lunch with our relatives; my cousin's wedding the next Monday; my visit to the famous Scrovegni Chapel the following Tuesday; and again, in subsequent days, in the relationship with my sister. Sunday increased my question, my cry: How is it possible? To recall a sentence from the Introduction: How is it possible “to be incoherent and yet be highly focused on the essential”? I would like you to better explain this statement, because it won't leave me in peace.*

Who wants to answer this question?

*This is what happened to me. I came to the Exercises with great expectation; I had been waiting for this moment for months. Then I was not fully present. I followed the lessons attentively, but the rest of the time, I wasn't really present: in the hotel, during the free time, in all of the other moments that are part of the Exercises (and you had even reminded us of this and stressed it!). So, on Sunday, I was returning home full of sorrow, and while I was with a friend, I started to cry over having thrown away that moment, because I was missing Him tremendously, because what I desire most is for Christ to invade my whole life. I spent two days in great sorrow for the wasted opportunity. Afterwards, provoking my friends on this issue, asking them about it, I discovered that that sorrow wasn't worthless, but that it is already a starting point. In the Introduction, you said, “In talking about the distance between intention and experience, the core is not primarily coherence, how often we err, but what defines us even when we err; the core issue is the content of our self-awareness, our real substance, what we actually pursue and love in action, what is essential for us. In fact, one can be incoherent and yet be highly focused on the essential” (p. 4). So, I discovered that Christ is essential for me, and not because of a choice or ability of mine, not because I say it, but because it came out in the flesh. I can't live without His presence, and each*

*time that I don't recognize Him, my life falls apart and I can't hold myself together. I found myself unknowingly reliving Peter's same experience in front of the Lord, who asks him, "Do you love me?" Discovering that I was still so needy for not having fully engaged myself with my friends was the step necessary to recognize that, regardless of me and of what I decide and do, He is the essential in any case. He is the one who shows that He is essential; it is not my decision. This emerges precisely from within life. I remembered a passage by Fr. Giussani in Vite Straordinarie [Extraordinary Lives video] (February 18, 2007) where he speaks about Peter's "yes": "When he said, 'Lord, you know everything. In spite of all appearances, in spite of the appearances, in spite of the appearances of me to myself, you know that I love you.' I want you, because to love is to 'want the good of the other;' and so it is to 'want you,' and to 'want you' means to 'affirm you.' 'I affirm you, I recognize what you are, I recognize what you are for me and for everything.' In short, this is overturning moralism and justice according to our own interpretation, because he was a poor sinner like me and like you, he was a poor sinner who had just betrayed Him, and by the way, betrayed in an indecent way, to the point that we cannot recall such shameful behavior at any other time. He was full of error, and yet he loved Him."*

This is what we find difficult to connect: he was full of error, and yet he loved Him; full of incoherence, and yet highly focused on the essential. Why? Because it is Christ who shows that He is the essential, as you said. In what do we see that Christ is the essential? In the fact that all of my mistakes don't prevent Christ from reawakening all of my affection and becoming the essential for me. As Fr. Giussani says in this wonderful sentence, as he explained Peter's "yes": "I don't know how, [...] Lord. My human sympathy is for you; my human sympathy is for you, Jesus of Nazareth" (*Il Tempo e il Tempio. Dio e l'uomo [Time and the Temple. God and Man]*, BUR, Milan 1995, p. 50). This was said by one who had just betrayed Him. One can make mistakes and be highly focused on the essential. Why? Because that thread of tenderness gets stronger, grows more and more, becomes more and more attached, as you see with your children; often, it isn't that they stop making mistakes, but you see how the thread that ties them to you grows. No other example explains more simply how the two things are not in contradiction. Precisely because this affection increases, because this thread of tenderness grows stronger, Christ shows that He is essential, as you show that you are essential for your children – not because suddenly everything is fine, but because, even in a mistake, that affection that makes us understand more and more what the essential is, who the essential is, continues to grow.

*I will recount a fact that happened to me last week at the meeting of the Faculty Senate. First I have to describe an event that happened the same morning. Some people in my department and I decided to distribute the flyers with the invitation to the Easter gestures that were going to take place on Holy Thursday and Good Friday. Right away, I met a student who told me that he was the most atheist of the atheists. He told me that he had always been a Christian who conceived faith as a relationship with God, but that despite this, he had always been disappointed by the priests and the people he had met, so much so that he had stopped at this negative judgment. This perception had been so strong that he wanted to renounce his Baptism. After saying this, he asked me what faith was for me. Faced with such a radical question, I couldn't answer him with phrases or a discourse, or by recounting beautiful but secondary facts. I couldn't reduce the question, and so I was forced to tell him how believing in Jesus has changed my life, how I can see my changed gaze in front of everyday things – in the relationship with my family or my boyfriend or my friends – and how I recognize Jesus' work in this change. As I was talking, he stopped looking at his cell*

phone, rejected all of the calls that he was receiving, and even left his girlfriend alone in the coffee shop in order to speak with me. That afternoon, I went to the meeting of the Faculty Senate, and the encounter that I just described made me feel calm and glad, because of how we had really gotten to the point of faith. In the Senate, I am the only one from my party, and I am not friends with any of the professors. For this reason, I always arrive feeling anxious, because I don't know on whom I can rely, and I feel that I can't go it alone and be of some influence. That is why, on that day, this gladness was unexplainable. What is more, that specific meeting was going to be particularly rough, since we were going to vote on enrollment restrictions in one of the departments, and a large number of students were protesting in front of the Rector's office with megaphones and banners. Therefore, once again I recognized that my calm in front of this was unexplainable. This gladness immediately gave me a better understanding of how to act, and since I was there without any ideological preconception regarding what to vote for, I started to read the minutes, asking more questions to whoever spoke in order to better understand. After a while, a professor to whom I had never spoken before approached me and told me, "You are different. One can tell that you are the only one among the students here who uses reason, because you are not here to defend some ideological principles, but to build something, and this makes you more free and sincere when you vote. I am telling you this because I have been noticing it for the past six months." That meeting ended, and we reconvened the following day to vote. During this second session, the situation heated up, the students started to protest more – they even interrupted the voting process and asked for an open ballot that would allow people to see it on live streaming, and this provoked anger and shouting from the professors. In this tense climate, the Rector walked out during the voting. The other students approached me, telling me to be a true student and to vote like them. That session had brought the worst out of everyone, so much so that I couldn't take any side. The same professor from the previous day came up to me and said, "Here I see your difference again. While everyone else is angry and ideological, you are sad, because it is clear that you are not here to argue, but for something else." It is incredible that this sadness was immediately taking on another meaning! The next day, this professor wrote me an email encouraging me to continue to live the Faculty Senate like this, as a place to build myself, first and foremost, as a person and as a woman, because only this would then allow me to build something in the world beyond the Faculty Senate. He told me that he was talking to me like a father to his daughter, and invited me to stay in contact with him for any questions that I had. These extraordinary facts made me aware of a few things: first, having recognized, with that student, what the essential was for me, what the relationship with Jesus was for me, wasn't something that I set out to do that morning. Recognizing the essential for our life isn't something right that one has to do, but it is something that happens in the impact with reality, in the encounter with a person who doesn't know what faith is and asks you. Moreover, doing this isn't something spiritualist or inward-looking, but it is a recognition that is worthwhile for us, because it is concrete and it changes us concretely (as I explained): it made me more intelligent when I had to vote. Second, I realized that this happens if I am open to saying, "Jesus, take everything, take even the Faculty Senate, take me, also in the Faculty Senate meeting." This happens because of having taken seriously the work of School of Community that you have been making us do for months. From all of this, I understand that the first tool for being in the world and in the Faculty Senate is precisely working on School of Community seriously, which – by the way – also makes us able to deal with technical things. Finally, I am recognizing what people told me when I was elected: that a changed "I" changes places. And one can really see this.

You discovered what the essential is for you, not by meditating abstractly, but in the impact with reality. Because you were surprised by the difference in the way in which you handled yourself in the Faculty Senate, and by how you faced that student who would like to renounce Baptism (to the point that he forgot his cell phone and his girlfriend to be there with you, moved by curiosity for what he saw). This is how what is essential for life reveals itself in front of our eyes. It is in the use of reason, in the freedom, the calm with which we are in the world. The others notice all of this. Anything but being closed in the sacristies! This asks us to let ourselves be taken hold of by the essential in reality so much that the simple fact of being present becomes a witness. Anything but inward-looking! It is precisely there – in reality, in the midst of the fray – that who Christ is, and what newness He can bring into life, shines through. Then, the issue is whether this becomes ever more ours, by making – as she said – the journey of School of Community. When I will discover myself in reality like this, it will be a surprise, as it happened to her – the newcomer in the Faculty Senate – when she surprised herself during the controversy and the voting. Her freedom reminds me of the freedom recounted in the *Acts of the Apostles* – you heard about it recently, if you went to Mass. Peter and John are brought in front of the Sanhedrin (like she was in front of the Faculty Senate). Imagine, two ignorant peasants brought before the Scribes, the Pharisees, and the High Priests, and they are surprised (like the professor): “But these people are different!” Why were they surprised? Because, even if they lacked formal instruction (those two were illiterate, because only the Scribes and the Pharisees had the opportunity to study), they were speaking in front of everyone with an inexplicable freedom. Then the High Priests realize that Peter and John had been Jesus’ friends, Jesus’ companions. In sharing life with Jesus, they had been generated to have an experience of life that was surprising! In that instance, the Scribes and Pharisees were not surprised by Jesus in the flesh, but by two fishermen. This shows what kind of newness sharing their life with Jesus introduced into life – they were making mistakes, forgetting, arguing about who was first, but never going anywhere else, in order to witness what is the essential for life, for living as men in the midst of reality. The Pope recalls us to this as the necessary condition for being a witness. Then, it doesn’t mean that, by speaking of the essential, we mean to eliminate everything else, as some people say: “We speak of the essential, and in the meantime we don’t do anything!” No! The essential is necessary to live everything else differently! It’s not that she thought of the essential in a moment of meditation – she discovered the essential in the melee of the Faculty Senate! So, to speak of the essential doesn’t mean to leave anything out, but rather to recognize it where life is constantly played out: students, professors, janitors, administrative staff, everyone. It is precisely there that a different person emerges and witnesses to something else. If the Pope recalls us to this, as we recalled it at the Exercises, it is precisely for this reason – first and foremost for us, because who wouldn’t like to be in reality with such freedom, so able to face circumstances with this newness? She is able to do it and she is still a university student! It is possible for everyone. It’s not a matter of having a special genius, but it is rather a matter – as for Peter and John – of participating in a place where we are generated like this.

*At the Exercises, I was surprised by the simplicity of the criterion from the Gospel that was proposed to us in order to understand where the essential is: “Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be” (Mt 6:21). This is what has stuck in my mind the most during this time, because I discovered that during the day I do many things, even good things – I make good decisions, I make choices in which I give my whole self, and I understand that in this “whole,” my heart is there, and that my treasure coincides with these things. As I realized this, the distance that you*

*emphasized between the essential and what my heart rests upon became clear to me. This made me breathe – because otherwise we risk reducing everything to a problem of ability or coherence. At a certain point, you said that we need to understand what the content of our self-awareness is. That made me think of this question: If the content of our self-awareness, of my self-awareness, is so weak that my treasure is always elsewhere, from where does one begin again to bridge this gap between the intention that Christ be essential and the fact that, in living, one realizes that the essential is somewhere else?*

From where do we begin again? Try to give an answer. From where do we begin again? We all already have, in our experience, all of the elements to answer this question.

*I started from one thing: that I couldn't help but go back to what happened to me and changed my life.*

Perfect. From where does one begin again? One begins again from there, from there! Why? Because in that moment, this gap was filled. In that moment, there was no distance between intention and experience. In the encounter, in that precise moment, that distance was closed. At a certain moment, you were taken hold of by what happened to you. This is the Christian event. Christianity as an event is this, the fact that He closes the gap. Then, the question is whether we constantly go back there, to the beginning – because the method is precisely that: it has always been a grace, it is always a running up against something different from us, it is always about welcoming something that happened to us, and it is always a return to the memory of the encounter that we had. As Benedict XVI told us, “We are *Memores Domini* because He is *Memor nostri*,” I can remember Him because He remembers me (cf. Benedict XVI, *Messaggio in occasione delle Esequie della Memores Domini Manuela Camagni, della Famiglia Pontificia* [Message of His Holiness Benedict XVI on the Occasion of the Funeral Mass for the Memor Domini Emanuela Camagni, Member of the Pontifical Family], November 29, 2010). He is always the One who begins again, who reopens the door, and I can continue to go back, like John and Andrew went back the next day to meet Him, because one always begins again from there. With time, this makes self-awareness grow – this bond that we spoke about, this thread of tenderness, this human sympathy that increases more and more. It creates that unity of life that one later discovers in himself while he is in the fray: in the Faculty Senate or when facing life's challenges. That is why our concern has to be this going back there, constantly beginning from Him – because it is only from the event of His presence that everything starts again. It's not moralism. It's not that the beginning is one thing and the continuation another – it is always the same, the beginning and the continuation. That is why, if we have the simplicity of returning, of going back again, of reclaiming what happened to us, of remembering it – which is not a memory, but the recognition of the Presence that entered our lives forever – then this self-awareness grows, and we are amazed by what He witnesses before our eyes.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, May 21<sup>st</sup> at 9:30pm. We will start to work on the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises.

**European elections.** In view of the European elections on May 25<sup>th</sup>, I invite you to seriously consider distributing the flyer on Europe – especially because, in the situation of confusion, misinformation, and political apathy in which we find ourselves, we cannot take for granted that people will vote. The third point of the text says well what it means that the “I” is the great resource for the rebirth of Europe. For this reason, I want to read a letter from a person who wrote to me,

saying what going over this flyer again meant for him. “A few evenings ago, we discussed the flyer on the European elections at School of Community. We had just had the Exercises, I had read Chapters 8 and 9, but after a superficial reading when it came out, I had really forgotten the flyer. Even if I thought that it was beautiful, what stayed with me? Nothing but a feeling. Instead, some friends were offering many interesting judgments, but I wasn’t even thinking about it. I felt a sense of discouragement, of frustration. How was it possible that I had forgotten such an important part of reality, a reality that comes to meet me? It’s not that I hadn’t been present in my days, trying to have an experience, in light of the School of Community, of certain things that had happened to me – but regarding this flyer, I drew a blank, like my other friends who didn’t have anything to say (although this is no consolation). In the end, I was struck by the words of a friend who, with great dignity, admitted to have forgotten the flyer as well, but was grateful for the opportunity to be recalled by the evening’s many witnesses. I hadn’t even been able to say this. Back home, I immediately printed two copies, one for me and one to post at my workplace. However, I was not at peace, because even if I told myself that, on other occasions, I could always carry the desire to be present with me and I could make a thousand mistakes, that evening, in front of the question, ‘Do you love me?’ my answer was, ‘Sure I love You,’ but the risk was that they were just words. The next morning, before going to work, as I was reading the School of Community – like every other morning – the first thing that I considered was the flyer, but I wasn’t sure where to start in order to make it become mine. My heart immediately leapt at the title: *Is a New Beginning Possible?* It was really speaking to me: I desire a new beginning for myself. I started to read it, not as if it spoke only about Europe, the people, the economy, as I had thought at first, but precisely about me, about my person, as if the contribution of experience about which it spoke were precisely for me. Everything took on a more concrete meaning; it was talking about my ‘I.’ In looking at myself, I also better understood what was happening in this Europe of ours, and what is at stake in the elections. Through the charisma that I met, my ‘I’ has the opportunity to recover a positive attitude and to change. I have value as a person, as it says at the beginning, and Chapter 8 pushes me to look at myself as Jesus looks at me, and I regain an unimaginable dignity. If I look at others as Jesus looks at them, I also have to look at myself in the same way – it is not a given, it is a value that is expressed also in my work, in how I treat material things; it is a value that concerns how I use time to grow, free because I depend on something else. All of this contributes to the unity of my person – point one of the flyer is the value of a united Europe – but for a life lived in search of truth, as Havel says, useful for me and for seeking the common good. Not to mention the recession and my personal crises, which at times cause me to get lost, and the fact that by grace – because God saves man through man in the charisma that I have met, and therefore through the Church, Fr. Giussani, you, and the friends that I have – He redeems me, because man will never be redeemed simply by external structures. I want to conclude with this gratitude, because the beginning that we desire happened to me. I regained the awareness of the responsibility that I have toward my fellow men, and my awareness that the Lord needs me, that this concerns my origin, my destiny, all of reality, even mine, which is the sign of an Other. These are words that I don’t hear anymore. It is also up to me to re-propose them, because a new beginning is possible, and not only for me. As a consequence, I have the desire to share the content of the flyer with others and to help circulate it for the good of others, and therefore as a tool of charity and mission.” I think that this is a beautiful witness of how a tool that we give ourselves can be not just something to do, but something for ourselves as we do it. For this reason, not to waste this opportunity to have an experience, as this person shows, is a proposal for everyone.

**Rome, May 10<sup>th</sup>.** I remind you of the importance of Pope Francis' encounter with the educational community that will be held on Saturday afternoon, May 10<sup>th</sup>, in Saint Peter's Square in Rome. The encounter was organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference (CEI), with the title: "The Church for Schools: In Rome with Pope Francis."

Education has always been our first concern, and if there is someone who feels the urgency of education, in the schools, as a fundamental factor, it is precisely us. Therefore, this is an invitation that each of us has to seriously consider.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*