

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón**  
**Milan, May 23, 2012**

*Reference text: J. Carrón "Introduction," in "It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me", Traces, no.5, May 2012; J.Carrón "We have a long way to go", la Repubblica, May 1 2012*

*Song: "Ballad of the old man"*

*Song: "Foggy Dew"*

*Glory be*

*After a chat with a friend, I was compelled to go back to the Friday evening text of the Fraternity Exercises that I had read almost hurriedly, as something I needed to do to get to the best part, the Saturday lesson. I was terribly struck by the letter of the gentleman who described the difficulty of a sick friend and the fact that he felt scandalized by it, exactly like Eluana's father. However, he noticed that this humanity that he would have liked to ignore was the door to enter into reality. I connected this with the end of the letter you wrote to la Repubblica, "We still have a long road ahead of us, and we are happy to be able to walk it." My first reaction would be to say that when I find myself facing a difficult situation like the one described in the letter, the experience of gladness remains in the background because the struggle prevails (or, perhaps, I don't even realize that there is a road to walk!). Instead, I get the impression that that gentleman lives through his struggle and the struggle itself becomes the generating point to start to walk the road and be happy to walk it. Therefore, he describes a trajectory that is the most enviable thing. I am asking you to help us to understand how walking this road can become truly desirable, because I understand that for you it is something desirable.*

This question shows how nihilism affects us. As soon as the situation becomes difficult one feels lost, doesn't know the road he has to follow, as if the 'I' were annihilated. I ask you right back: why is the road desirable?

*For me life is difficult when I don't walk this road.*

"Life is difficult when I don't walk this road." So, it is the opposite! The problem is not that for us it is difficult to walk this road, but that life becomes really unbearable when we don't. If we don't accept this idea, or, better, this perception and this urgency, why should we do it? We will always find some alibi for not walking this road. If this isn't born from life's provocations, from the fact that without walking this road life becomes really unbearable, why should we do it? So, what was your experience?

*I realize that I look for fulfillment where everybody else does when I face this road with inertia, that is, when I live stopping at appearances. Instead, for me this road is necessary to be able to live, to live! What is this road? Very simply for me it is self-awareness, as you describe it, and I recognize this in countless aspects of my life. When I have this inertia I am weak in front of what happens to me and towards myself, I give in to the common mentality and I don't live anymore.*

We need to understand what this inertia is.

*When I read your article that morning, the more I read it the more the enthusiasm left me speechless, because I was seeing at work, in action right there, the attitude I desire and I have always desired, of a freedom that doesn't have to consider how opportune it is to say or not to say certain things, but a person who was expressing himself without fearing neither his*

*nor other people's judgment. In short: an experience of freedom. I understood that this was possible only for someone who leaned completely on what he held most dear, Jesus. This is what I desire; it is what I started to verify with enthusiasm in the following days, to see how many times I was leaning on what I hold most dear, and what would happen then. When it was happening I was feeling free, without any sense of guilt and without any need to measure and balance things out. Therefore, I understood also something else. We often say, 'Look, it is not me; I wouldn't be like this because I don't have this personality, and instead I find myself being more patient, more merciful.' No, if I say this I make a mistake, almost as if in certain moments Jesus were to give me some superpowers, or as if He acted through me without me. Instead, I start to say, 'when I can lean on Him, and therefore I am free, my true self really starts to surface.' Because, maybe I don't actually know who I am, but I discover it, as if He freed who I am in front of my very eyes.*

*I wanted to talk about how I am working on both the letter and the Exercises at the same time, because I find them closely and deeply connected. At the Exercises you told us blessed is the person who is totally open, that is, the person who doesn't reduce his heart to feeling and reality to appearances. It is really true, otherwise we run the risk of finding the Exercises exciting on April 22<sup>nd</sup> and already fading by May 1<sup>st</sup> ...Instead, for me the Exercises and the letter have become one single thing to work on. In the letter I saw a profound unity and therefore it was easy to read it as a whole, avoiding the temptation to read it passage by passage, in pieces. For me the letter is a clear example of the method you have been teaching us for quite a while. This letter is composed by someone – this was my first reaction – who took the Exercises seriously and who is working on the Exercises as an event that is happening to him. Already in Rimini I noticed that from Friday evening to Sunday morning you made a journey that brought me to say that if you hadn't worked on the Exercises personally (as opposed to simply dictate them), you wouldn't have been able to write such a letter. Now I am going to describe two working points from the letter. First, reality is positive, and to understand it – as you have always reminded us – we cannot even censure our mistakes (and I add, not even the petty desires that may come up in me or in the community). This letter is a judgment born of something present that happens and reaches you through all the pores of your skin, considering all the factors, even those that sadden you. Therefore, it becomes an historical judgment, and circumstances are essential for an historical judgment. A judgment that is not modified and adapted to the recipient, but aimed at the heart of those who don't run away, because by running away you miss the opportunity, you lose your friends and so you lose Christ. How many times I found myself modifying something I was going to say trying to adapt it to the recipient because I thought that my own idea would 'convey' Jesus better. On the contrary, in this letter I noticed a freedom that truly fascinates me and that I would like to learn. The second point of work is self-awareness: where and in whom do I consist? What do I hold most dear? The emperor is asking me this question also today, the emperor that is first of all what my life and my mentality are made of. How many times in my personal life or in my life as a priest I make decisions almost underselling Christ, who therefore is no longer what I hold most dear. This is reflected in the presence that is not power but testimony, as you reminded us and as I have experienced in my own life. How many times I confused being a presence with succeeding, that is, with the fulfillment of my own project. Maybe Christ is not enough for me, then. I need to see the result, and so I convince myself that I have been a presence. The famous "He is if He changes" runs the risk of becoming: "Since I saw that He worked according to my project, then He is." Therefore I make plans instead of being converted. It is a dangerous logic that corrodes the work, any work: pastoral, educational, social, political, charitable. Hence, I have only one responsibility: that of remaining in this riverbed, on this road that I have to*

walk but which seems so true for me, to become serious, that I would be stupid if I didn't follow it. Tonight I celebrated Mass and the Gospel was a passage from Jesus' speech: "I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the Evil One. They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world. Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:15-17). I think that Jesus that evening prayed for me, for you, for us and for this historical circumstance of our presence. Like the people of Israel we can be stripped of everything as well; but Christ remains and I know that His mercy, that I need so much, is eternal, and I truly have to become convinced through my experience that it is enough for me.

I don't want to add anything to the many beautiful things you said. I emphasize the question of method – to which I will go back – to answer the question of the road. The road is desirable and we can be happy to walk it precisely because we see that by walking it what you just said happens.

*I noticed that in reading the letter I made two mistakes. First, I thought that the error it mentions is moralistic ("I am not consistent; I sin as I move through circumstances"). Second, I thought that it concerned the political aspect of presence, while it seems to me that it is something that concerns everybody, a problem of how we conceive things. Whenever I am not amazed in front of the present reality I exert my power: I have an idea about reality, I want it to happen, and so I force things. Obviously, when reality is not as I would like it to be I am disappointed. Why do I behave like this? Because I am not amazed; because, being empty, I have to fill my soul with something, and so I start making demands, subtly. Therefore, it seems to me that it is a problem of method: not being amazed by the Presence. I am talking about being amazed because it isn't enough to say, "It is the will of the Mystery." I have to be amazed, I have to experience the repercussion of being, otherwise afterwards a moral reflection on faith is not enough. This is when the reduction of the amazement happens. Because it is as if I (and many around me) became resigned: being amazed is an experience one can have only once in a while (if something good happens; if I have a certain energy). I am amazed only in some occasions, and so normally I am not amazed. As a result, since I am not amazed I look for power. On the contrary, amazement is for every instant: every circumstance, even the worse, can allow me to live a relationship with the Presence, otherwise it is not true that it is happening now. Suppose I am feeling down: if I recover myself, if I don't follow the path mechanically, I become amazed because to become aware of myself again, to go back to the questions, means that I see the Presence in the instant, and therefore there are no circumstances in which I cannot be amazed. To me this seems like a crucial point. Then I understand why for us it is so difficult to face the statement that reality is positive: because we cannot think of reality as positive if there is no Presence. One can force himself to say that reality is positive, but only if I see something that corresponds to me, reality is positive; otherwise, even if I say it, it is not true.*

The problem is not moralistic, it is very true. We don't have to rend our clothes because we realize that we have looked for fulfillment where everybody else does. This is just the consequence. Why are we surprised by the fact that when facing the desire we have we look for fulfillment? It's impossible not to look for it. The issue, then, is not that we made a mistake. The question is: what is the origin of this mistake? And the origin is not that I am not consistent (because I am not). It's no mystery that fragility is frail and weakness is weak. What a great discovery! It wouldn't have been worth it to write the letter for this. We need to highlight another question: why do we look for fulfillment where everybody else is looking for it? Then, it isn't a problem of inconsistency, but a problem of faith; it is a problem of what Christ means for us, of what we hold most dear! This doesn't have to do with consistency first, but with the substance of our life. Why isn't this amazement winning us

over? Why do we think that it is something that happens only once in a while? Because we want a miracle instead of a journey. Last week I was giving a lecture at Catholic University on chapter X of *The Religious Sense*. You all know how it starts. Fr. Giussani invites us to imagine being born with the awareness we have now, etc. At the end of the first hour there is a break; a student comes to my desk and tells me, “During the lesson I became aware of all the distraction I had when I woke up. I understand perfectly what Fr. Giussani is saying, because I don’t have to imagine what he is saying, it really happened to me. I had a motorcycle accident and it was a miracle I survived. When I woke up for the first time after the accident I felt full of amazement at being alive. I couldn’t prevent my life from being filled by this amazement, and this happened many times during the first days. However, afterwards the intensity dimmed, everything became weaker. And today I woke up distracted, like many other days.” Do you see? We are dreaming for a miracle. A miracle happened to this kid, but it wasn’t enough, because we need to make a journey. If the miracle doesn’t introduce us to a journey, if it doesn’t introduce us to an adequate use of reason, if I don’t take advantage of what helps me to realize that life is given to me and I don’t follow the entire path of my reason by working on it, after a while it decays. This is our immorality – as Fr. Giussani says – but immorality towards the fact, towards the event, not the inconsistency of not being up to the task (this is a consequence). Immorality is not having followed the event that triggered this awareness. If the fact doesn’t become morality, if it doesn’t become responsibility, then I don’t answer with all my ‘I’ and the intention doesn’t penetrate like a wound and a judgment on myself, as a judgment that moves, that tries to move me to do a work. Everything becomes sentimental, I wake up again and I see that I am still alive, but it isn’t yet self-awareness, a true use of reason. What happens then? Listen to what Fr. Giussani says on p. 315-316 of *Certi di alcune grandi cose (Being certain of a few great things)*, “It is like finding in your garden a sprout, a flower, and not helping it to grow, not nurturing it. A person, a gardener, a farmer who planted the seed of this plant and then did not care for it, is reckless, irresponsible, that is, immoral. Our problem is precisely this word: immorality [immorality towards the fact, not ethical inconsistency]. Facing what has been given to us [life, faith, the charisma, the encounter, countless occasions in which we were reawakened by a fact, by an event, by something we told each other; the people of Corazim and Betsaida, of whom Jesus said that they had an enormous responsibility because they had seen so many miracles, are amateurs when compared to how many miracles we experience, amateurs!] which despite all of our conniving (letting the world get inside of us and so slowly marginalizing, censoring or leaving this sprout of desire to dry out and without nourishment) remains and is still here, our problem is immorality, that is, not taking care of this desire. That sprout of desire doesn’t become ours, mine: mine as judgment and mine as will. Namely, that sprout of desire is not recognized and doesn’t become mine, it doesn’t become conscious desire: it is as if it remained by inertia. This inertia is immorality.” Until eventually this inertia brings one back to his old routine. Our immorality is not following Fr. Giussani in this. Often the journey he proposes to us seems abstract: “To widen our reason? Who cares!” Sunday morning I held the retreat for the *Memores Domini* novices, going over a lesson in which Fr. Giussani states that the main issue is the work on the instrument of thought. This is the farthest thing from us! So much so that we think: Giussani is fixated on this point, and the Pope is fixated on the same point. It’s as if they were aliens, both of them! Then, not being amazed by anything, we look for satisfaction where everybody else looks for it. However, I repeat, this is a consequence, and I’m not interested in this right now. Fr. Giussani continues: “If the problem was our consistency, we’d have a thousand alibis not to do the work anymore. Immorality, however, is what is at the root of this, whereas the problem of consistency is the problem of a development. Underneath the problem of consistency or inconsistency there’s a problem of truth or falsity, of the truth of ourselves. This is within

what I call 'a sprout of desire,' i.e., that beginning which remains within: the recognition or discovery of something else as an answer to what we are, the discovery of something that is everything! That sprout of desire is a fundamental element in us; it's a human position which, even if I were inconsistent a thousand times a day, it would judge me a thousand times a day. But, if I don't recognize and make my own this basic element, I don't judge myself in my thousands of inconsistencies, and so I say: "They are inevitable!" and then, "Well, after all, what's so strange about this?" and finally, "It's right to do this." It's exactly like this, like our x-ray! If we don't go to the origin, if the Christian event, and first of all reality, doesn't reawaken in us that sprout of desire that makes us want to breathe without suffocating (because we can't live without recognizing reality in all its original aspects), then we remain rationalists and so nihilists. And since we can't help desiring, we look for happiness in things that have no substance, because we have already lost our relationship with the origin of reality, with the mystery of reality. And so we live reality like everybody else. When, instead, by grace we follow Fr. Giussani, we can see the difference, not because we say the right words, but in the way we live our circumstances. This is a test for each of us. As I said at the Diaconia in Lombardy, referring to some initial excited comments two days after the Exercises: "Wait, the true test of the Exercises is the way we face reality, for example how we face what the newspapers are saying." Now, after reading my letter, you can see the change: a few who were excited got angry about the letter. That's where we show what we hold most dear, whether with the Event, we can look at everything, even our mistakes, without justifying them. It is necessary that what reawakens our humanity doesn't become only sentimentalism (like when someone reawakens after an accident and, in time, by inertia, decays), but becomes ours in the way we use reason, in our self-awareness. It would be a shame if we didn't become aware of this.

*I'd like to recount a fact that happened in our university. We have the elections for the student representatives. In my department they have just changed the academic calendar and the exam schedule. It's a hot issue and the other group of candidates is basing their whole campaign on this issue, on how to bring things back to the way they were before etc. They had a public assembly to which all were invited to hear all of the students' opinions. I heard that at a certain point someone said: "Could it be that those of CL have a hand in this whole story of the change of the exam schedule?" As soon as I heard this I got angry because it pains me that our presence is so mistreated and misinterpreted. Two of us who were present had not reacted and I got angry because they had not said anything. As we were talking, at a certain point one of them says: "It did not seem useful to argue in that moment." When she said that, I realized that this is precisely what I do: I skip reality before wondering what is in front of me, and I immediately go to something else (what's the best move, how can I make sure that others understand that it's not true), and so I don't get anywhere.*

Most of the time, we have a visceral reaction.

*From that point a beautiful work came out, because we wondered: what is this about? The problem was not answering back, but that the very nature of our presence was being jeopardized by that comment, as if we were those plotting things. So we wrote a very simple flyer, in which we explained that the professors had made this decision without consulting the students, we said when they had announced this, which student representatives were present, etc. We concluded by saying that our objective as student representatives is to improve our education, above all by working on teaching and professional development rather than on exam schedules. At the end we wrote: "If we have failed in this work, we accept any constructive criticism, but we can't tolerate unfounded insinuations." I was struck by the fact that my judgment was all in the repercussion I felt within me when they told me what had happened at the assembly. It wasn't something complicated that I had to add after. I was*

*reacting that way precisely because they were spitting on what I hold most dear. But in order for this to become evident, I had to go to the bottom of that repercussion.*

This is the point: it's necessary to go after that reaction, that repercussion, to begin to use reason starting from that reaction. How?

*By living that passivity which is the first activity that Fr. Giussani talks about in the tenth chapter. I could have simply thought: it's too bad they think this way, but it's their problem. And nobody would have come to disturb me since nobody had said anything. Instead, exactly by going to the bottom of it, an interesting point emerged for us and for many others, who after all were also glad about the flyer we had written. I also understand that all my lack of substance, that you talk about in the Friday evening introduction, depends on the fact that I continuously skip reality, which is precisely the biggest pretext for the lack of this judgment (I mistreat reality, and this can always happen because I will always make mistakes, but without judging, either I don't realize it, and so it's as if I had not mistreated it, or I can slip away by saying that it was the others' fault, that those two are to blame, and so I justify myself in front of my mistake). During a dinner with you what came out is that many times our gestures are not proportionate and aimed to the only purpose that Fr. Giussani identifies for the movement, i.e., the generation of a subject. The things that happen, even humiliating mistakes, can be a provocation to do a journey, because there is a place that has me at heart, has at heart that I may consist, that I may be: it's the biggest sign of mercy on me and it's the biggest reason for gratitude.*

We remain without substance. A different subject is not generated if, in front of these provocations, our reaction is not accompanied and followed by an adequate use of reason. If it's not like this, forget about the possibility of a new subject able to live in reality with all his reasonableness, able to answer back, not ideologically or reactively, but as a power to witness a new way to be in the reality. In front of the attacks we have received, we could have said: "Let's forget about it, let's write to the newspapers telling them what we are so that they'll stop saying things we are not." Everyone would have laughed, because we say what we are by answering to what happens to us. Otherwise we will never overcome the dualism inside of us: we face reality in a rational way, like everybody else, and then we say the right words. But this is what Christ has overcome! Content and method coincide. This is the challenge. This is why there won't be a new subject if this doesn't happen. And how does it happen? If each one of us doesn't miss any occasion to judge. If you let it go by inertia, it will be a missed opportunity. If, instead, any occasion that the Mystery doesn't spare us is used to do this journey, to walk this road that we are talking about, to use reason in a certain way, to move freedom, then any circumstance that life offers us will be an opportunity to generate a subject. The subject is not born by chance, is not born by miracle. It is born as an answer to that event which puts in action the totality of the 'I' and which helps him or her use reason, freedom and affection in a different way: it is called "new creature." But this subject can only come out if we cooperate with the Mystery Who acts constantly by grace by reawakening us, and Who won't spare us the journey, because otherwise it will never be ours. It's not true that we don't see many miracles happen in front of our eyes, we can't complain that we have asked for the miracle and we haven't seen it, we have seen even too many of them. The problem is that those miracles that we have seen don't generate a subject, because they don't set in motion the totality of our 'I' as use of reason and freedom. So then for us this new subject will only be a dream or an absolutely unreachable utopia. Instead, when we see those people who, tentatively, in the middle of all their doubts, with difficulty, do this journey, they are a witness that this is possible for us.

*When your letter came out in the newspaper "La Repubblica", I got a little irritated, because I was almost saying: but how can you look at me more than I look at myself? Because my*

*limitations, my betrayal define me all the time, and you, instead, were embracing all that I am. However, I turned out to be almost scandalized by this, rather than letting you embrace me. But something happened in the unit where I work: a baby was born, who, when he was a week old, was diagnosed with a genetic pathology incompatible with life. It was amazing because many of my colleagues started to wonder: “But why does this child exist? Sooner or later he will die. Couldn’t his parents find this out earlier so that they could have let him die before and he wouldn’t be useless for the world?” When I heard this I reacted immediately, because the point is not that he was different from me; that child is still there, like I am here. He is wanted and loved, and he is preferred precisely just because he is there. No malformation, no circumstance, no adverse condition can take away all of his value, that is the relationship with One Who wants him now. But I would have never been able to discover this, if it weren’t for that loving gaze which is continuously upon me and which overcomes and embraces all my limitations and all the betrayal that I am. I was amazed because ever since they told us about this child’s syndrome, I became so attached to him that I asked to take care of him all the time. So one day a mom from the ward – they are normally quiet and just watch us do our work – at the end of the shift came to me and said: “You can tell right away for whom our children are a burden and for whom they are someone to be amazed at.” I understood again even more the whole value of that letter and the value of my encounter with Christ: a gaze that doesn’t limit me to my usual mistakes, to my habitual self and to my betrayal, but that continuously gives back value to myself for who I am. So, almost unconsciously, I can look at all of reality like He looks at me.*

The fact that one can be amazed in front of a child like this (who would seem a contradiction to the statement that reality is positive) indicates the revolution that one can reach even without any ‘mystical’ vision. This is the surprise that Christ allows to happen in us, when we are aware of how we have been looked at. This self-awareness prevents us from reducing reality only to appearance, to a sentimental reaction that it provokes in me, and so I look at it as deeply as I look at myself: wanted and preferred. And the mom who is there sees the difference between the person who treats children like a burden and the one who looks at them with wonder. Nobody would say that a child like this could arouse wonder, just his mother out of the love she has for him, but for everyone else it’s the opposite: repulsion. But this look on reality, in any circumstance, as we were saying earlier, which can become our normal relationship with reality, is what Christ wants to generate in us, because a subject who can be amazed is so full, that he doesn’t need to look elsewhere for what fulfills him. This is the promise that many of you are already starting to discover. A promise which, to the extent that we follow Fr. Giussani, we can really expect that will become more and more ours. And this will be a possibility to witness to everyone, as one of you writes in regard to my letter: “On Friday evening I was at a “Milan upper-class dinner” with lawyers and professors who, I would say, were unexpectedly nice. One of them, after a few conventional greetings and clichés, having started to talk about your letter, rather than about political nonsense, told me that he had started to read it out of curiosity, to stay updated on the latest gossip on this topic. However, he was so struck that he kept on reading it over and over, and he even said that he started to ‘meditate on it,’ in particular, for that point in which you say that “Christ is not defeated by our defeats.” Many have written to me things like this. Only if we face circumstances that we need to face in front of everybody, in front of all of reality, without hiding, do they then become an occasion to witness, to understand that our presence doesn’t need hegemony in order to really influence history, because what affects it the most is Christian witness, that is a witness that is born from one’s amazement at the event of Christ which allows us stay in reality in a different way. I think that this puts us now in the best position to understand why it’s in everyone’s interest not to miss the opportunity to work on the Exercises, where the path to follow is described.

Our next School of Community will take place on Wednesday, June 20<sup>th</sup> at 9:30 pm.  
We'll work on the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises.

**World Family Day.** The Pope will be coming to Milan as a pilgrim on June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>. May this encounter with him find us available to recognize that his teachings are not a leader's opinion or an opinion among many others, to which the Pope is usually reduced. The Pope is the point through which Christ's truth reaches us, and frees us, it saves our reason and our freedom.

Let's then offer the sacrifice and challenges that will be implied for us in this gesture, for the discomforts associated with these gestures, for the purification of our heart and for the good of the Movement, for the Pope, the Church and society.

The **Book of the month for May and June** is *Dal paradiso all'inferno. I confini dell'umano in*

*Dostoevskij (From Paradise to Inferno. The Borders of the Human in Dostoevskij)* by Tat'jana Kasatkina (Itacalibri edition).

This book collects many various conferences and a few conversations between Tat'jana Kasatkina (a Russian scholar, and a great expert on Dostoevskij) and the students of "La Traccia" school who have staged *Crime and Punishment* as well as other talks. We propose it to you because Tat'jana Kasatkina for us is a clear example of what is a Christian presence, able to give value to everything without reducing itself to an alignment. I think this is a position we need to learn, as we have seen this evening.

*Veni Sancte Spiritus*