

St. Joseph Fraternity
October 17, 2020
Assembly with Julian Carrón

Beethoven: Symphony No. 9 “Corale”. Spirto Gentil CD 27

The notes of Beethoven’s ninth symphony are a very small and fragile seed, symbol of the great impetus that entered the world through a seed placed in the womb of the Virgin. There, joy became “fact;” there, man’s urgency, man’s search for a destiny of happiness, is answered. There, the human intuition of a mysterious paternity is sustained by the certainty that everything the heart suggests has a definitively traced path. Just as the seed of Beethoven’s notes imposes itself on the ears of listeners, so too the seed placed in Mary’s womb is irresistible.

*Songs: Favola
Negra Sombra*

Fr. Michele Berchi

Full of wonder at what has happened in our lives—and continues to happen—we can begin this event by asking the Virgin that our heart may continue to beg like Hers, begging for that Event which has claimed our life, brought us here, and carries us, day after day. That She may find our heart sharing that simple humility of those who recognize that everything consists of that Event.

Fr. Julián Carrón

Good evening to everyone. We begin our assembly with the legendary Cinzia. Cinzia, how is it that your vocation is keeping you so healthy? You seem younger and younger.

Cinzia—Hi, Julián. I’m actually 50 years old now.

Fr. Carrón—Ah, 50 years is nothing, everyone is there...almost.

Cinzia

I want to share with you what I am discovering about my work. One point in the introduction which really struck me was a phrase on p. 3. You said to us: “What have we learnt from reality? What have we learnt about our humanity?” I realized that, at best, I would have replied with something else, summarizing my attempts with another question: “What have I learnt about reality?” I realized that even at this level my neglect of my “I” can emerge, and I abandon myself to nothingness, to the fact that I find myself, without wanting it, not following don Giussani’s proposal. Despite wanting to take his words seriously, I interpret them and empty them, taking for granted the fact that every aspect of reality is given to me so that I can discover the constitutive factors of my humanity. The new school year, after a period of long-distance learning, is revealing my error of perspective in its entirety. It is a mess, because, among other things, in my school we must teach half the students in person, and simultaneously teach the other half over the internet at home. Often we don’t manage to get a connection, so my perception is that my efforts are inconclusive. I cannot rely on any certain fact. Not even taking the register is a foregone conclusion; that, too, my must reinvented.

Every day there is some new regulation, some new rule, and I feel my inability to deal with this situation increasing. Often, I ask myself what I am doing there, what the point of it all is, and how long I will withstand it. I am well aware that these are just clumsy attempts to hide my complaint. Saying these things, I try to avoid the heart of the matter. Rereading the notes from the exercises, I was struck when, describing your experience, you say: I have learnt that reality is good for me so many times! [...] “Reality was a friend, any type of reality. All those who were with me on the stage of reality were friends, too, because, whether they were right or wrong, beautiful or ugly, they forced my ‘I’ to emerge, the constituent factors of my ‘I’.” I feel a huge disproportion between your words and what I am living. Yet I am certain that your words do not describe an aim exclusive to you, or solely your own optimism, or a “giussianian” vision of existence. I ask myself continuously: can God truly allow everything to derail, impeding me from succeeding in anything, for me not to lose myself? Is it possible that these days which seem so useless could be an unexpected gift waiting to be accepted? What use to God and to humanity is a teacher who does not know how to do her job? Asking myself these questions, I am realizing that for a long time, in my conception of my job, I have been focusing solely on its functional and organizational aspects. The relationship with Jesus would, at most, determine in an extrinsic manner a “certain way” of teaching, of fostering a relationship with students, of going to class; but it would not concern the discovery of the constitutive factors of my “I.” It was as if it were the obvious and necessary premise of my acting in a certain way. So, my question is: what is the “true way” of carrying out one’s work, what is the ultimate consistency of what I do, not only in moments of emergency, but always? How can I understand whether my efforts, independently from contingent factors, are lived in a relationship with Christ? From when this question emerged, I have gone to school asking that I may not be scandalized by my wounded humanity, or by my attempts to flee the impact with reality, asking to become ever more aware of the fact that what is in play is my true self-awareness, which would otherwise be impossible, and my journey towards conversion. Everything seems to be the same, though I know this cannot be the case. So I would like to ask you to help me not to lose this spark of novelty which I am perceiving only vaguely. Thank you.

Fr. Carrón—Thank you, because what you are putting to us is a great risk that we all run. That is, taking reality for granted. You articulated it very acutely when you said: I never ask myself what reality is, or what my humanity is. In front of the question “what have we learnt from reality” or “what have we learnt from our humanity,” you simply would take them for granted: reality and humanity, speaking of reality in an avalanche of opinions. Realizing this, as acutely as you have, is what can help us to understand why the Mystery provokes us, often in a manner which we find disconcerting. If it did not provoke us, as we are seeing again with the challenge of the second wave, but with reality in general, the challenges placed in front of us, we would content ourselves—as you said—with organizational work, made heavier in this case due to all the conditions we find ourselves living in currently. Because regulations, rules, make work become even more cumbersome and heavy. Yet it is there, taking ourselves there, seeing our own incapacity, as you say, that our questions emerge. Questions begin to emerge: what am I doing here? It may be a lament that one seeks to elude, but it is ultimately a question that cannot remain at a “organizational” level: what am I doing here? It is a radical question about work. And this is decisive for us, because vocation is linked to work, to the circumstances we live; it concerns the form of our vocation in a radical manner, let’s say. Thus, everything concerns work and the method which our form of vocation engenders. Fr. Giussani reminds us that life is vocation, as we told one another at the start of lockdown. This means that we journey towards destiny through circumstances that are volatile, changeable, often heavy, often incomprehensible, but this is precisely what, thanks to God, is not spared

to us, in different manners, in different circumstances; and at the same time, nothing human is extraneous to us. I had to embark on the same journey as you, and I was able to share with you all what I discovered; that reality can become something good, for the precise reasons you describe. Reality does not spare you the provocation which then generates the questions that do not allow you to reduce yourself to being merely a manager of what you have to do; to the organizational aspects, as you said. You ask yourself: does the Mystery want this? Sometimes, the only resource the Mystery has is to provoke us like this. This is why it remains astonishing how Fr. Giussani captured this method for considering reality as something that challenges us, and re-grants us our “I,” reawakens our humanity, making questions emerge, the questions of the Religious Sense, Chapter V of the Religious Sense, those radical questions which constitute the fabric of our humanity. When I discovered this, I began to perceive how, in contrast to what I might have thought of my complaints or the blame I laid on others, aside from all of this, one gets fed up because it is useless. The question is: what does all of this generate in me? In what way does this reawaken me, put me to work, almost in spite of myself? Because there, in front of these questions, one can let oneself simply wait for things to change, suffocating within circumstances, because it is not as if you can act as if nothing were wrong, feeling ever more uneasy, ever more upset, continuously blaming others, as one often sees in the world of work. It is difficult to find radiant people who do not complain. I was recently told of someone who, going to work, seemed to be constantly happy: where have you come from? Did you come out of an Easter egg? Unable to find another explanation for her happiness, the others all complained, giving a definition which was sort of.... I don’t know how to define it, but which spoke of their inability—seeing what type of person she was, the type of initiative she would take, her type of humanity—to simply brand her mad or naïve, or possessed. They were forced to cede to something that somehow spoke of that Mystery they could not give an adequate explanation of, but which astonished them. It is thus there that we can begin to understand if we are truly experiencing our work according to this density of meaning which allows us to live with meaning, with sense, with zest, as one girl said.—But can you (teachers)—as I said at the Beginning Day—not communicate a zest for the everyday to us?—because this is not enough, it is not enough that one speaks of zest; one must see it in action. One either sees complaint or a zest for the every day. Thus in an identical circumstance, one person can be living in one way, and someone else can be living in another. This is the great adventure of work. Do we see the true way of doing work when complaint prevails, or when meaning, happiness, and a zest for the everyday prevail? This is not in contradiction to work which is challenging, for which we have to exert all our effort; this is the zest with which we do it, it is the meaning, the density that that moment has. It is thus there that we can truly realize whether, for us, work is an occasion for us, as we have said over the last few months, to live reality intensely. That is, religiosity coincides with living reality intensely, not merely persevering with reality, but with living reality intensely, in order to perceive its meaning. This is why it is so decisive, because this novelty you speak of, of which you have already perceived a glimmer, will reveal itself only to those who apply themselves. Those who simply observe as if from a balcony will not believe that this can reveal itself, because even among us, people are cunning; this idea of applying oneself intensely to reality is a pain, because in the end.... There it can be seen whether one is living reality intensely or not. Either, suffocating, we remain concerned only with organizational appearance, or this is what reawakens us and places us in a relationship with the Mystery. This is the form by which we can see to which point our vocation helps us. If this places us in a relationship with the Mystery, it brings us the Mystery. This morning, observing silence, I was reading a piece of SoC, the section from *Generating Traces* on a new consciousness which Fr. Giussani recalls for us. “I am living, not I, but You are living in me [...]” What does this mean? That “the person before me,

whoever he may be, is and marks out the road through which I reach Christ.” Every circumstance, every occasion, every person is the You through whom “I go beyond, to the root of the face of things and reach the point in which the thing is an Other that makes it, the You that makes it, Christ.” (p. 56).

The question is whether we decide to carry out our work merely as organization, or to carry out our work with all its religious density, not with faith as something parallel, by which I then go to Mass or observe silence; but rather, whether this is there to introduce me to a way of living reality, and work, as a possibility of engaging with the root of things. We can see this in ourselves, always quick to complain, to say that work bores us; to say that work, rather than helping us grow, reawakening us, instead of being an opportunity to witness to Christ where we are, is yet another place of complaint. This is why work is a decisive opportunity for verifying our faith. It is only if, as you say, I identify with that proposal that I can reach this point. Accepting a proposal that no one else can accept for me, because the verification must be mine. This is the circumstance that we are all faced with.

Roberta

My dear friend Julian, everything is good, you tell me. Over the last year a whole set of things have happened to me: a neurological illness, my father’s Alzheimer’s diagnosis, and my struggle to trust his care to others (I am a nurse), and thus the need to accept that it is not me who will be able to cure him, the virus and the difficulties of working in my RSA, an illness suffered by Galia, my Kazakh “sister” (we met many years ago and our relationship has developed over time), and the fact that I could not be with her. Events, exercises, meetings, all over video...without “flesh.” A year without truly stopping, in work and in general.

At the end of July, the Lord thought I needed a break: I fell off my bike and broke my clavicle.

At the start of this new adventure I felt a lot of pain and I just wanted to get rid of it. I found a beautiful, fantastic white pill. Taking this pill, the pain lessened, but I began to move my arm again in its brace. So, after two days I reduced the painkillers I was taking until I did not take any, because I realized that without pain, I was moving in a way I shouldn’t; rather, that pain was helping me remember that that movement was not suitable for now.

Life is like this. Pain, challenges, circumstances, limits are given to me because they are path of my journey of awareness. Without them I would live in such a manner that my clavicle would not heal; that is, it would not heal my forgetfulness, and would distract me from the judgement that is part of the origin of my heart, giving in instead to mere reactions to what is happening to me.

In my life, the Lord has continuously placed small markers to signpost a path, just for me. Christ is just near my struggles, He is within them, including my clavicle, and in the beauty of the relationship with Galia, 5000km away, which is possible only in the grace of the Church and in displeasure at His death, because I have already seen Christ win with two friends from the Cremona Fraternity, who we accompanied in their journey to the Father, but I forget.... I’m getting distracted. In this period of enforced rest, I gave myself to reading and to friends. I watched and enjoyed many of the Meeting events. One in particular encompassed the exercises, *The Radiance* and the Meeting. My personal encounter with Mikel Azurmendi made me fall in love again and be re-amazed by my past and our companionship. I read the book immediately, envying the writer and our Spanish friends. I said: now we must go to Spain. I experienced what I had seen years before in Kazakhstan: a place where there is something, Someone, moving the heart. I saw all of the markers that the Lord had put on my path to get me there. As you always say, it is important to return to the origin: I saw what had fascinated me at the start. This is what happened in my encounter with

Mikel. I give thanks for everything I have, for the friends He has given me, even without going to Spain, because I already have everything here, and even for my clavicle, without which I might never have seen what I did.

Fr. Carrón—See how slowly, even things which seem to have no sense can speak to us, if we are attentive. I am amazed by how Roberta understood this value of pain, in her clavicle first of all. This is not something secondary, because without pain she would not have realized that the movements she was making were wrong. Pain is like a sign. Just as well we feel pain when we get too close to the fire, and get burnt, so that we can recoil; otherwise, we would lose a hand. This is the case in many situations. Thus, even without provocation, whatever the manner in which the Mystery comes to meet us is, it is for this path to awareness. I am amazed by how this new awareness of many things is becoming increasingly familiar, even if we initially perceive those things as being pointless; we slowly understand their meaning. We begin to see how things which we initially thought were useless can be useful for our journey. Because without an awareness of need, forgetfulness prevails. Instead, seeing that in all of these markers—as you say—Christ is already present, calling you within circumstances, means that you can begin to see that Christ is in the markers, that He is calling you from within those circumstances. Every aspect of reality thus brings us into a conversation with Him. The problem is whether we experience aspects of reality as opportunity, or live our relationship with reality as an encumbrance and an obstacle, or whether everything is an opportunity for us to enter a relationship with the only interlocutor in reality, which is Christ. We then begin to live everything through this conversation with Him. For Christ, too, everything that happened—as we say in *The Radiance in Your Eyes*—was seen in relationship with the Father. He could not look at anything without it recalling him to the Father. Life was full of this Presence. Instead, for us this is often still embryonic. For Him, it was the normal method of relating to reality, and thus everything fell into this relationship. This is why—as I said earlier—Giussani says that Christianity introduces a new awareness; only if the event of Christ reoccurs can we look at everything like this. But what can put us in this relationship without reducing it? Often, it is our need which stops us from reducing it, which is why it is true that when we begin to experience certain things...listen to what you said at the end: I already have everything here. Often, we think we must do some sort of...what do we need? It is all already here. We lack no gift of Grace, as Saint Paul says. Thus, religiosity can now be understood; it does not consist of doing particular religious acts, but of living reality intensely, like this. Because everything is there. Everything is an opportunity to enter into a relationship with Him. And we are the first beneficiaries of this, because without Him it is like receiving an anonymous gift. It is obvious that if I receive a gift and it does not recall me to the person that sent it to me, the gift, as beautiful as it may be, will not have the same significance. I always use the example of the Christmas card. You might receive one from big shops, from companies—they might send you the best one. But most of the time, even if it is the nicest, the card, the colors, everything...is empty, there is nothing behind it. Often, someone close to us, a friend, might send us a card with lower artistic value, but for us it is full of meaning. What effect does one thing or another provoke in us... what fulfils us more? We are faced with the same object... one is seemingly of more artistic value... but in terms of meaning for us, which one do we prefer, which one brings us more? One is empty, and the other is full of a relationship which has an affective intensity which the other lacks. I make such a simple example in order to help understand what is at stake: sticking to appearances, albeit beautiful, or engaging with the origin of that gesture; the latter is something otherworldly, entirely different. So, Christ came to show us this, to bring us to this type of relationship with reality, not simply because we are good, or do fewer stupid things... so that we can live a hundred times better. So that our relationships can be a hundred times greater,

as Giussani said in the text I read earlier. “There is a relationship with the Mystery that makes all things, there is a relationship with the Mystery become flesh, become man, Jesus, that is immensely more human, more mine, more immediate, more tenacious, more tender, more unavoidable than the relationship with anyone else—with my mother, my father, my fiancée, my wife, my children—with everyone and with everything. For everything is born from the Mystery, nothing makes itself. This is why the person before me, whoever he may be, is and marks out the road through which I reach Christ, the You of which all things are made, and so for that person I have esteem, respect, adoration, I can adore his face. But I adore this face if it is the road towards the source of all things, the source of Being. Otherwise it is like drawing a figure without perspective, it is an infantile, primitive, perception.”

When children are so happy about a present, it must be parents who say: “what do you say?” They do not realize it is a gift, that there is someone who gave it to them. Parents must help children to gain true awareness of that present, that it is a gift from someone else who they must thank. Imagine if life, in its every detail, could be lived like this: as a gift, which Another is giving me, and which is immensely more tender, more immediate, more tenacious, more inevitable than any old relationship. These adjectives which Fr. Giussani uses speak of what we lose if we do not live reality like this. At least, hearing this from him, we can ask for it. As Cinzia said, we must engage with that gaze which Fr. Giussani witnessed to us, so that we can live a relationship with reality like this, according to a plan which is not our own, as Christ lived in the Gospels.

Eleanora

For months now, a deep pain has established itself in me: relationships have been severed violently, and lies and malice have nourished this companion within me to the point that, increasingly often, I ask and beg in the morning before going to work: “Please, do not allow my pain to touch anyone else, do not allow it to hurt those I meet.”

In the Exercises, you speak of the fact that “no reduction can take what is most intimate of me,” and that the adulteress in the Gospels “was affirmed and attracted by Christ.”

School has restarted, and I restarted with my burden of wounds and my heart aflame. If I had to describe myself now, I would say that I am in the least performing phase of my life; I am suffering so much that I am not even touched by the desire to do things. I am spent; at least, this is how I see myself.

A couple of days ago, I attended the funeral of the father of one of my pupils. There were other families and students from the school present. At the end of the service, the mother of a first-year student approached me—who I had just met—saying: “Miss, my daughter was wondering if she could greet you, because she says that when you are there, she is calm.” This is one example, but I could offer many others. The question which was powerfully provoked in me was: “What is it that can claim and dominate my soul, despite the fact that I am in tears?” It seems evident to me that, at the bottom of the list of negatives I could draw up about myself at this moment, there is a “yet” which defeats everything and forces me to re-realize Who has claimed and affirmed me.

Fr. Carrón—Perfect. This afternoon, I held an assembly on the first lesson on verification with students. Fr. Giussani begins by saying what you have perceived. “When it comes to the relationship between God and man, to the relationship between man and Christ, when it comes to Christ’s life in the world, man does not have the ability to do anything.”

You must not be frightened by this. As you see, this is the starting point, like the discovery of hot water. It is the force of the Spirit which creates it. Thus, all that man can do, with his richness and strength, is to invoke the Spirit. The Spirit is the energy with which Christ triumphs in the world, with which He enters history, and with which He calls and sustains

those He calls. As you see, although you may be spent, He does not care, and finds a girl who can tell you that when you are there, she is calm. Fr. Giussani continues: “We also invoke Our Lady, because if the Spirit is the energy with which Christ enters the world in triumph, then this Spirit entered history through a 15-year-old girl. The Spirit enters the world through Our Lady. Thus we say: Veni Sancte Spiritus. Veni per Mariam.”

This is God’s originality; to enter the world through the poor, like us. See, Eleanor, this is nothing new; it is simply an increased understanding that only—as you say—when Christ claims you, as He claimed the adulteress, He claims you even when you are “spent,” and can allow to emerge ever more clearly—as Saint Paul says—the fact that we carry a treasure clay pots, so that it can be seen that His power does not originate in me, but comes from Christ. Often, as I frequently recount, I would have like you not wished to go to class, because I felt down, spent; but it was precisely in those days that the Mystery used my nothingness. Often I would come back from class moved by what the Mystery had achieved through my nothingness. It was clear to me, as it is clear to you, that this is not something that belongs to you or I. What claims your whole life? It is claimed like the Virgin was claimed, like Saint Paul was claimed, like you and I are claimed. So what must we do? We must, because we must ask for it, constantly make ourselves available to the method through which the Mystery does things. One might well go home spent, it does not matter, because the fundamental question is whether the Mystery has claimed and affirmed you. I was saying earlier: affirmed by Christ. Even if you do not realize, you are already so claimed and affirmed that you cannot but carry it with you in every fiber of your being. So much so that others will realize. When she is there, I feel calm. I was amazed—as I said, when observing silence—by a phrase which I marked here. Speaking about Peter, Giussani says: “From the first meeting, Jesus overwhelming his (Peter’s) whole soul and his heart.” Like you. This is what testifies the loyalty of Christ to your life; it could happen to a friend of yours, to anyone, but nothing can nullify the struggles you have faced, nor the fact that He continues to use you and your nothingness to make it shine for others. Sometimes, you hear about it, like in this case. The Mystery gives you this comfort to tell you: what I have done through you is not negligible. How many.... you will never know in life, but you will find out in the afterlife. In this case, it happened so *en passant* that you met the person and she told you. But how many of these things happen through our poverty! We do not need it, but sometimes we are given this gift because of His mercy towards us. It is something extra, though we already live the hundredfold, because He has claimed us, not because of the outcome. As the Gospel says when the apostles return full of excitement at what they had done, Jesus says: what will you do with this tomorrow morning? “Nevertheless, do not rejoice because the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice because your names are written in heaven;” because we are His, you are His.

This is what makes you different, no matter that the circumstance. And this is a liberation. We can say that it is not our performance that provides a testimony of Christ. It is Christ who takes our poverty and uses it to offer a testimony of Himself, through our nothingness. The testimony of Him in us, when we allow Him to enter, when we give Him space, as Jesus says: if you do not believe in me, believe in my works, my works speak of me. The works that the Father has me do are those which testify to the Father. It is the Father who offers a testimony of Himself in Jesus, who gave Him the space as His Son. So He can say: when you believe in me, you do not believe in me, you believe in the Father who sent me. Thus, the Mystery can use our nothingness, as we pray in the Magnificat: for he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. We must be concerned only with this availability, within that nothingness that we are, to allow space for Him. Everything else... We have already been repaid 100 times, independently from the praise you

might receive from a student. If we receive that sometimes, then that is great, but we have already been repaid. Is that clear?

Claudete

Dear father Carrón, we want to tell you about our experience in the St. Joseph community in Brazil, during this period of the pandemic, which is evidence of what you said in the exercises, and also answers these questions about hope: with Christ in our eyes, invested with His Presence, we can face anything. In this period, we have found a new way of being close to one another, with fortnightly meetings which unite everyone in Brazil, as well as the meetings held in our cities virtually. For our context, this is not a simple notion, and nor was it obvious that it would work, due to connectivity issues in many cities, and several more senior friends who struggle with technology. At every meeting, there was a surprise: people who began the meeting with their grandchildren there, helping them to get connected with their cellphones, or who were going around the house to find the best connection spot. All of this showed a great desire for this companionship. People who rarely spoke at regular meetings began to share their concrete experience, not always nice or pleasing, but in a lively and truthful manner, testifying, with this, that the Lord is truly present! Amazing! It was beautiful to see how in each attempt to deal with the technology, which for some was a real struggle, we grew as companions for each other, contributing to maintaining our faith and hope and having our gazes fixed on Christ when some fell ill or had a relative that contracted Coronavirus. In this period, we have not seen desperation. A fact that shows this well is that of our friend Elza in Sao Paulo. The news that she had contracted Covid and was going to hospital put us all in the position of the apostles on Good Friday, after the crucifixion: it seemed like the end. Elza has diabetes, she was not well off, and along with other problems associated to the virus, it seemed like a death sentence. This situation impeded us from living in a merely “optimistic” manner, and we began to pray. Her daughter sent us daily audio files with medical updates we slowly began to improve, against the odds. Every day there was an improvement. It was like seeing a miracle. The news that she was sent home was like seeing the Risen Christ. And her story, once she was home, saying that we were like her family, daily arguments and feuds left aside, was like seeing Him Risen, and touching Him like Thomas. As Padre Pigi, who lives in Brazil, said: how can we not say that the coronavirus is our brother, seeing a story like this? It is a virus that has brought us closer and made us more familiar with people who we would only see once a year at a retreat, and it has allowed us to grow together in our awareness of faith, and shown us where we can find our consistency! Our friend Rosi, from Belo Horizonte, also says: “With these fortnightly meetings I have felt so embraced by the lord! Despite all the issues with technology, it was clear that it was a gift from Him for me to see the faces which the Lord has chosen to keep me company on this journey. In this period, I feel like I did at my first St. Joseph meetings, alive and happy! These are difficult times, but having and belonging to this companionship makes the difference in life!” Thank you, Father Carrón, for helping us on this journey of awareness. The Brazil St. Joseph Fraternity.

Carrón—Thank you, Claudete, because you do not let yourself be confused; at times, when this do not happen according to the ideas we have, we begin to get nervous. Many people may have already thought: we will go back to normal after the first wave, they thought they could start again with their events, as we all hoped. Once everything changed again here, as it did in Brazil, we found ourselves disconcerted once more, beginning to almost complain about this situation again. It is important that, at the start of a new situation here, in Europe in general, or in the United States, you can testify to us how with all the difficulties with technologies, this did not become an objection; rather, everyone moved to overcome the

issues, because precisely through that medium you could be helped to live in faith and hope. The fact that this situation, and what happened to Elza, enabled you to grow together in faith means that often, despite having seen it in recent months, we can once again fall into the temptation of an idea we have. Instead, it is amazing that Claudete reminds us that the Mystery can allow His help to reach us, His companionship to sustain us, in the manner He wishes; not merely the manner we have in mind. We saw this in Azurmendi's testimony; who would ever have said that the gift of Chris would reach him through a radio program, one among thousands on the radio? Yet the Mystery can use any situation; we do not need to get stuck to a particular form. The Gospel dispelled all such plans. Christ makes Himself encounterable, as we see in the Gospel, through the most diverse of methods, as has happened to us, too. He can be found by someone up a tree, at a well, at a market stall, in the temple, on the road, in the mountains, or on a boat in a storm. The new temple is the person called by Christ! This is the revolution of the Temple which Christ introduced. Thus, our companionship for one another can acquire the different forms that we have at our disposal, and I therefore thank you for offering us this contribution as we begin to face a second Covid wave now.

Alessandra

Dearest Julián, I thank the Lord for making me desirous as ever for authority.

And I thank the Lord that this authority is present in you, and I desire to be protected by your gaze, which bursts the bubble of my comfort zone and throws me back into the inexorable, adorable concreteness of reality.

I want to summarize certain recent events, hoping I will be comprehensible, because I won't include certain details out of discretion.

Everything starts with *The Radiance in Your Eyes* and the nihilism of others.

When we began to work on *The Radiance*, I noticed some perplexity among some friends: "I cannot relate to this, I am not like this, at my age I have already come a certain distance... we in the St. Joseph Fraternity are lucky because we have a different attitude, our experience... and so on..."

Faced these "sensitive" friends, at first I willingly tried to argue back: "Surely if Carrón insists there is something there for us, too; we should trust him, compare it to your experience...etc."

I must confess that in supporting you like this (!!!) I ultimately felt a bit fake: as if I were doing CL PR, and I don't think you need this, do you?

Fr. Carrón—It is Another who will support you....

Alessandra

But the best was yet to come.

We come to your latest school of communities (those nihilists who speak are so true, alive and courageous!) and my brother exclaiming during your School of Community: "desire, desire, you do not understand why Julián insists so much on desire." Finally, the day arrived. The Lord always sends a fine day, and the heart—which is infallible—realizes that it is a fine day, even if it falls on you like a boulder, and I understand: I, too, am a nihilist.

Asymptomatic, the worst kind.

I am a devoted nihilist.

This blessed, challenging awareness generated a string of reactions; firstly, the question: "What am I doing here? (in St. Joseph, obviously). What about my vocation?"

Asking myself this question struck me, because I feel in exactly the right place in St. Joseph; like a mouse in cheese.

Yet I also realized that, over time, my belonging has become a belonging to a comfort zone, a nice warm, rose-tinted bubble, comprised of dear friends, good meditations, chats on WhatsApp; in other words, a parking lot, equipped with every possible emotional and spiritual support.

But tell me, Lord: “Where have the days of our love gone?”

Where is my life? Where is my desire?

Where is the life I lost in living?

“Devout living:” what garbage.

My instinctive impulse was to flee, to seek refuge (here we go again) in “freelance” begging... I do not know whether it is even possible, given that every form of begging, as well as an object, requires a place, however uncomfortable.

Ahead of the exercises, with great difficulty, I sought to face this question with my friends who share my vocation; my Group.

It was an SOS, a cry to my dear friends who have been on this journey with me for ten years.

I was answered: “If you leave here, where will you go?”, “speak about it with your brother;”

“Pray a novena to Our Lady, who will heal your wounds.”

Just as well the meeting was on Zoom, otherwise it might have come to blows.

After the Zoom, I felt like a meatball.

A meatball that was, however, inexplicably happy.

I was happy because, like migratory birds, the questions had returned. Maybe they were “wrong”, they were certainly formulated poorly, and many were full of presumption, but the questions were true. Then, at the last School of Community, you quoted Blixen—who I love—and that quotation seemed directed at me, and the joy of having returned to a mode of questioning was greater than my sense of humiliation for my miserable, arid devotion.

At the Exercises, I was like a sponge, desiring to absorb everything. And everything, everything, everything you said was for me, as if you had granted me a long face-to-face meeting, which then continued in the work undertaken on *The Radiance*, which was a daily surprise, as if every word reactivated the synapses of the heart. It had been years since I had felt such a need and urgency to do School of Community.

Now.... I am not sure exactly where I find myself, and nor do I know precisely what happened at the Exercises to generate the conception I now have of my daily life.

Right now, I feel like I am living in Chapter 4 of *The Radiance*.

I turned 60 recently, and I find myself asking to be readmitted to first grade to study “Conversion to the Event.” I do not know whether to laugh or cry.

How great God is.

Fr. Carrón

I thank you greatly, Alessandra, because I think we all empathize with your testimony of the journey you have undertaken, and we all heard, and perceived, this struggle that can befall any of us; even if we have been within this companionship for a long time. At a certain point, we can find ourselves reducing our belonging to a bubble, a comfort zone, void of all awareness of our need, awareness of the drama of life; one asks oneself—as you articulated with these powerful questions—“Where have the days of our love gone? Where is my life? Where is my desire? Where is the life I lost in living?” These are questions which I thank you for, because they are the greatest possible gift you could have given us at the start of this year; because we can either restart the year taking everything for granted, as you said earlier, or we can allow these questions to emerge, and—as you say—you are happy because your questions have reemerged. The reemergence of questions is thus the first sign of Christ’s return, because it is Him who challenges us through reality, circumstances, in order to generate questions in us again. We thus begin to realize, as you say, that everything is

happening for us. How I would love to start this year as you described, going to the Exercises this summer and be like a sponge all year, desiring to absorb everything that the Mystery gives us, which is entirely unforeseeable, yet which, as you say, can become a daily surprise, as these months have been for you, as if every word reactivated the synapses of the heart. “It had been years since I had felt such a need and urgency to do School of Community, since I felt such an intense relationship with Christ.” Let us begin this year by asking what Alessandra is sharing with us; it is this availability, openness, which we need, because the rest is Grace. When one assumes this position, the space and the need is generated through which Grace can enter, as Péguy describes. We do not desire anything else—any of us here today—more than this openness to allow ourselves to be called by Christ, filled with His Presence, so that He can use our nothingness—as I said earlier to Eleanora—to allow His beauty to shine for all man in such a dramatic time, in which the priority is not health, but rather a testimony of Christ, capable of filling our lives, and those of the people we meet, with hope. Let us thus leave one another with this desire and this task of supporting one another in this begging for Christ, all of us in first grade, so that Christ may find the Earth ready to welcome any gift He chooses to give us, because we are those through whom He has chosen to communicate Himself; through us for everyone else, too. Thus, welcoming Him for ourselves, we welcome Him for others. He chose us for this, not just for ourselves, but so that we can provide testimony of Him through our lives to others. Let us finish by asking Our Lady for this desire, with the same words we used at the start: “Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam.”