

## **Fraternity of St. Joseph Retreat - August 4-7, 2005**

### **Friday Evening**

**Don Gianni:** The smiles I saw on your faces when you saw Fr. Carrón are very meaningful, like the applause that followed it. Now, on everyone's behalf, I thank Fr. Julián very much for having dedicated this evening to us, and I have asked him the simplest thing in the world: *What is vocation?* Let's listen to him.

### **Fr. Julián Carrón**

Thank you. First of all I am very glad to be here with you this evening and to look you in the face because what I have to say is very simple. When Fr. Gianni asked me "*What is vocation?*" the simplest thing that came to me is "to live Christ in the circumstances," because if I look at each one of you, like the people I know from Spain, each one has his own circumstances and this defines somewhat the "face" of your vocation; because it is not defined by a fixed structure, like for those who live in a monastic enclosure or in a house; you don't have this.

From a certain point of view, yours is a vocation that makes one shiver; and I understand why it was so dear to Fr. Giussani, because I know what certainty he had in the possibility that Christ — Christ — is able to fill your life, the life of each one of you, without anything else added on! Because in the short time I have had, I have seen each one's "I" in the circumstances he is living, with his own need, with his own desire for beauty, for happiness, with, perhaps already, his own drama of life, and who, in the circumstances in which he lives, needs a relationship able to really fill his heart and make life something truly successful, realized, and this is what makes the vocation of St. Joseph — living this dramatic relationship with Christ in a unique way.

That none of you, none of you, be spared, not even formally, this dramatic relationship with Christ... it's, as if, each of you were called to live who Christ is in a unique way because in order to belong to the Fraternity of St. Joseph, to live one's own vocation, demands a relationship with Christ that is so full as to keep the person on his feet in the vocation.

And this is what strikes me most, and fascinates me at the same time, because we can often (and I say the same to the *Memores*) look for some structure to spare us this dramatic relationship with Christ, unloading it, saying, "I am faithful to the rule," faithful to some things, and so one can go on living with the usual routine.

The very way you live your vocation makes it easier for you not to unload the drama of your relationship with Christ onto any structure, and I am a strong supporter of this; because I don't want anyone to spare me the drama of my relationship with Christ. I want to say "You" to Christ, I want to know if Christ is able to fill my heart, I don't want anything — anything — that will spare me this, because the finest thing in life is just this. Just as no one who is in love with someone else wants a structure to spare him from saying "I love you," with all the emotional capacity that this implies, because to spare oneself this is to spare oneself beauty; I

don't want anyone to spare me the most beautiful thing that happens before me and in me, every day. I don't want it. If you want to find a structure to spare you this drama, you can, but I don't. And so I have never, never, believed in any of these things, not even when the priests in Spain at times tried to set up some kind of structure — Pepe knows this — I would always refuse, and say "Get on with it yourselves, I'm not interested."

Why? Because this is the unique beauty that Fr. Giussani witnessed to us; he was so certain — because certainty is needed — he was so certain of who Christ is that he could challenge anyone. Because a challenge like this needs a certainty that is out of this world, it needs a certainty of who Christ is and a relationship so impassioned, so great as to be enough, to be sufficient, so that there is no need for anything else. This permits an intensity of relationship with Christ that, if this is not there in the other forms of living the faith together, the best is lost. Either all the rest is at the service of this or it is a burden. Instead your whole vocation stands upon this.

So you see, all that happens — feeling lonely at times, feeling tired, feeling you are alone in the town, at times feeling all of this, all of it, all the drama of the circumstances, all of it — is given to you for this relationship. Not as an obstacle to this relationship, as many believe... "so if I am alone..." This is not how it is. Everything is given for this relationship, not as an obstacle to this relationship, but to increase this relationship, for this unique dramatic relationship of each one with Christ.

So stop complaining, because this is the mode with which Christ is calling you to the relationship with Him and don't try to spare yourselves this or you will lose the best. Because the fact that I cannot unload this unique, direct, immediate relationship with Christ onto anyone means that I must use everything, that I cannot let anything go, otherwise I am not living, I am sinking. And everything, absolutely everything is given to me for this, it is given to me for this, it is the mode with which Christ is calling me. Think of a child when it is hungry, when it is sleepy, everything, everything, is given him for a relationship with his mother. I cannot find a more elementary example than this, everything is given him for this. He has no need of another structure, he needs only everything that happens to him in life — and when one is an adult, more happens to him than when he is a child — to throw himself into this relationship. No one can take our place, we cannot unload this onto anyone; for many people this is a disaster, for me is quite the opposite. It is what permits us to have an absolutely unique relationship with Christ. It is not for something less, but for something more, for an intensity in everything.

I always remember St Thomas Aquinas' phrase: "Man's life consists in the affection that principally sustains him and in which he finds his greatest satisfaction."

The only decisive question in the whole of life is if there is an affection that supports the whole of life, and, if this is not there, you can build the column of a monastery, but it will not stand, because you could find refuge there, but it will not support your life. But a support for life, that can sustain it, that fills it to the point of finding its greatest satisfaction, this is something else.

You have to decide what you want: an affection to support your life so as to find its greatest satisfaction, or do you want something else — a refuge in some structure that will spare you this. Perhaps you will be able to organize your life in such a way as to spare you this, but you will lose the great satisfaction. So you have a fine challenge before you and you have to decide what you want. I haven't come here, as you can all imagine, to spare you even an instant of this dramatic relationship with Christ, not at all. Perhaps it will become more acute, not out of unkindness, but so that you don't lose it; I don't want to spare myself Christ, I want more and so I want more for you and don't want to spare you.

In this moment of history in which we see the "I" collapsing before our eyes, what can we offer to the world, to our friends, to our families, to our fellow citizens if not the witness of what supports life? What can we place before the eyes of men if not this spectacle of an "I" — of an "I" — standing on its feet, consistent, capable of holding the world, because the relationship with the Mystery makes it free?

I was thinking these days of the theme of the Rimini Meeting, *freedom*. Just look at something so desirable as freedom, yet freedom is so scarce in reality, in the circumstances, because everyone is bogged down in the circumstances, everyone chatters about freedom, but how many people do you know who are free in reality?

It is something out of this world that someone can live with this freedom because he belongs to Someone who makes him free, this witnesses the presence of another world in this world. And we can go on in this way: a man with consistence, a free man, an "I" that is content because he has met what satisfied his heart, who is a slave to nothing; and this is not something that happens in the sacristy, but in real life, where you are called to live, because this is a characteristic of your situation. In reality, in everyone's real circumstances, with your colleagues at work, alone, or taking care of an aged parent, or your children. An adult, a Christian adult who is living in real life, in the circumstance like everyone else, we who are like everyone else, fragile like everyone else, irritable like everyone else, but who see there, in those things in which we are similar to everyone, the victory of Christ.

Because this is what makes life fascinating; we don't see it only because we run away from the world, run away from the circumstances... is Christ the One who dominates only in the cemeteries, outside reality, outside the normal circumstances in which people live?

The temptation we have is always to look for a situation in which we can relax, "a place in the sun" — in a convent, with all possible conveniences — because ultimately we don't believe that Christ alone is enough to sustain us. So don't give in to this temptation; it might be a bit less uncomfortable, but you will lose the chance to know who Christ is.

You have to choose, not everything is sold in the same packet. Either you accept the challenge of living in reality and then you know what Christ is, or you look for a place that is comfortable, a safer place, but I assure you, you will never know what Christ is, because Christ's beauty is seen in reality; like a mother, who shows who she really is in the

extraordinary moments, when beautiful or dramatic things happen, as if everything that happens is forcing her to show her guts, making herself a great mother, revealing who she really is.

Christ reveals Himself by answering to our circumstances. So the fact that you are forced to live in this, because of the fact that the Lord has called you, the fact that you are here the sign of Christ's victory, because Christ does not privilege any mode and can use any form in order to fascinate you. He had no need of anything; it was enough for him to make you sense His Presence so as to fascinate you. What are you afraid of, what are we afraid of?

So an adult who lives in reality with this awareness is truly a spectacle, which, after all, is to be Christian, a new creature as St. Paul says; like everyone else, with the same frailty as everyone else. But don't worry about your frailty, this is what tempts you to look for a pillar, to establish a convent. Christ will worry about your frailty, and if He doesn't take care of it, then it's useless to build walls anyway. Christ will take care of it. It is as if you were overwhelmed by a stone in the middle of the river of circumstances.

This is why the Lord gave you your vocation; if it is the way through which He has called you, don't try to change it, try to follow it, try to obey the mode with which the Lord has called you. Has He changed something in your circumstances in order to call you, in order to fascinate you? No, so why do you become nervous and look for something to support you?

If He has fascinated you in this way, He is the one who introduced the method, and we have to follow the mode with which He fascinated us. Is the difficulty the fact that He fascinates us in these circumstances? He has managed to do it?, so why should He not fascinate you for the rest of your life?

So my wish is for you to live your vocation, which is the most beautiful thing, because it is the greatest promise of a relationship with Christ of this nature, of this beauty, because this is what can contribute most to the growth of the Movement and the Church and the world: becoming a good for the world, because we can offer no other good to the world but our person so fulfilled in the midst of reality, in this moment in which everything is collapsing. We can be sure, tranquil and certain, because we do not depend on the circumstances, but on our unique relationship with Christ.

So all that remains is for me to wish for you to be faithful to the mode in which God has called you, because He is the one who decides the method, our job is to obey, because this is the only way not to go wrong, not to put anything else in the way.

The Lord could have called you to another vocation. Does He have the power to call you to another vocation, at another age, in different circumstances? Could He have? Yes, He could have. If He didn't, then there must be a reason for you. If He didn't call you to become Sisters, or to become monks. Could He have? Yes, but He didn't. This means He loves your vocation as it is.

Our task is to obey, that is, to follow the fascination, because He is the one who builds our vocation, don't worry, He is the one. All we have to do is to accept this fascinating mode, and when difficulties come, don't think it is due to the form of the vocation, it is not. Use everything for increasing your relationship with Christ, because all that happens is for this, is given to you for this; it is the mode in which Christ is calling you. He does not create problems so that you look for another way to spare yourselves this. No, we all go wrong in this way; because in the way in which He calls us, whatever the form of vocation. He calls us through what happens to us in life. And if someone has difficulty with his community he thinks that the solution is to change community, or if someone has difficulty at work, then the answer is to change his job or move to another town. Perhaps at times this is necessary, but to set our hopes on this as an illusion, and more than an illusion, it is to reduce reality to appearances, it is not to recognize the mode with which the Mystery is calling me and so it is an illusion. It is He who is calling me through what happens to a more intense relationship with Him. When something strange happens, a child does not think of changing his mother; no, he uses everything for the relationship with the mother he has. He doesn't think of changing his home, but we adults get this idea, all too often. We even think it is intelligent. It is the mode in which the Mystery is calling us.

Let us ask Our Lady to say simply yes, because our vocation is like hers. What did Fr. Giussani used to say? "And the angel left her." Our vocation is like hers: and the angel left her and what remained was Our Lady's relationship with Jesus: a mysterious relationship.

What Fr. Giussani tried to communicate to us is the vocation in its most absolute essentiality; not to found anything, but to bring together all the essential aspects of Christian experience.

This is it! We don't need anything else. Thank you.

**Don Gianni:** I sincerely think one thing, at the end of this, with all that we have heard in this witness of Fr. Carrón, I think there only one thing to do: realize that all my life will consist in understanding what has happened to me, and Your presence fills my life with silence. What he said is really full of an urgency of change. So we put everything in the hands of our Lady and go to sleep. We thank Fr. Carrón for staying near us.