

**Notes from the Meeting of the Responsibles of the Fraternity of St. Joseph
with Julián Carrón
By video conference, December 19, 2020**

Songs: *E verrà [And He Will Come]*
Aria di Neve [Snow Aria]

Fr. Michele Berchi. I will begin by rereading the question we proposed, a provocation born out of the work we did together on authority in the School of Community in recent months. Since the question of authority is related to our experience of faith, of the Movement, and in particular the responsibility that all of you connected right now—responsibles of St. Joseph and others who were invited—have as a service to the Fraternity, I thought it would be useful to focus on it again in the light of all the work we have done. We proposed this question: “On page 136 of *The Radiance in Your Eyes* it says, ‘There would be no companionship among us, no ministry of the church, no new people of God journeying in the world, for the good of the world: without authority there would not be the newness that Christ called us to live together.’ How do these words provoke you, help you and clarify your experience as a *visitor* or responsible?”

I would like to go back to the beginning of that section, because it really struck me and gave a judgment both on me and on the places and situation in which I live. In the beginning, to summarize, it talks about the place of belonging, where you live out a relationship and experience authority: it is what allows me to live, to touch reality: “makes us touch reality and makes us real.” There is a list of examples: perceiving and feeling things, grasping them intellectually and judging them, the way of imagining, planning; it’s a long list of verbs that describe my actions, my daily life. And here I realize that, in my daily life in action, either a criterion emerges—almost without me noticing and not at an instinctive level, but as a fruit of adhering—that is different than the one I had, that I draw from this place; or (I see this most of all in the new job I have, about which I am very happy, but it is different in many ways) my personal actions are plucked from instinctiveness, nice sentiments or goodwill. I really perceive the gap here. In fact, whether I like it or not, and not because awareness is lacking, but rather because something overcomes me and deeply seizes me, it’s entered my DNA, I realize how much following this place, following the precise presence of the person who leads, is what makes the difference between me and a person who acts based on nice sentiments or great generosity. When it comes to a judgment on reality, an intelligence to grasp the meaning of reality, there is truly a gap here. I realize more and more that this is the method of the Movement, of our charism. I work in a Christian environment, but the method that characterizes us—and makes us different, not superior but a place where you can see a difference - is the method of the charism: following a person who said yes. First, Giussani, then Carrón, and now each of us says our yes to a place and to a person. This is the method that makes it possible for us to live reality with intelligence, more specifically, with the intelligence of faith; and it is something you find in yourself and are amazed. It is not something I strategically produce; it is something that happens.

Julián Carrón. Good evening, everyone. That contribution sets the tone for our dialogue, because this reality is what is least accepted today. We have cited Fr. Giussani many times saying that, “Today’s culture holds that it is impossible to know and change yourself and reality ‘only’ by following a person. In our era, the person is not seen as the instrument of knowledge and change, because knowledge and change are understood reductively, the first as an analytical and theoretical reflection and the second as praxis and the application of rules. Instead, for John and Andrew, the first two who happened upon Jesus, it was precisely by following that exceptional person that they learned to know in a different way and to change themselves and reality. From the moment of that first encounter, the method began to unfold in time” (L. Giussani, *From Faith, The Method*, [1993], now in *Traces*, January 2009). Giussani framed the question. And we are not simply called to repeat

it, but rather to see if this approach, this difference our friend spoke of, finds its confirmation in the way we move in reality when verified in experience. Here it's not enough to repeat things, even the right things, because the help we can give each other, that we ought to give reciprocally, is to share our experience we related to the point we are focusing on, wherever we have seen it happen, verifying whether what Fr. Giussani says is true or not. And not because we have doubts, but rather to deeply convince us of this, so our following is not simply accepting something *a priori*. We accept it, above all, because we have faith in the one who communicated that hypothesis to us; and then because, as he himself says, we verify what happens when we take this hypothesis into real life. In fact, without that verification, it could not become *ours*, as we said in the School of Community for this week. On that note, I was really in wonder thinking of the whole question of a new intelligence that we discussed, because deep down that is what is at stake here. From the very beginning, Giussani says the new creature is characterized by a new awareness, by a capacity to look at and to understand reality that others are not able to have. Giussani uses demanding words, "To become a 'new creature' means having a new awareness, a capacity for looking at and understanding reality that others cannot have" (L. Giussani, S. Alberto, J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal 2010, p. 53). Therefore, if we do not verify these things, if we reduce them to the theoretical affirmation of a presumptuous person who says to others, "Look, I know better than you!"; if we cannot see by the way we act in reality, right in front of our eyes, that we are new creatures, then we keep repeating Fr. Giussani's words, but without being fully convinced. So, they become like mantras we repeat, but that do not invade our whole lives. Fr. Giussani says this new awareness of reality is the regular awareness we have to go through reality's whole web of circumstances. We must, therefore, enter into circumstances, into reality with the thing we said we would verify so that it can become evident to our eyes that it gives us a new intelligence of reality. We are all called to verify this, in the first place for ourselves, and then also in looking at others. We cannot, in fact, go around saying "Hey everyone, we have the truth!" If it is true, it will have to be displayed in the way we live reality, by our capacity to communicate a difference from within all we are living. Because, deep down, this is the claim of Christianity: by entering into reality starting from a particular history, a person can live everything, every circumstance in a new way. I am not the one who defines the event; it is the event that defines me. We are all facing a challenge: to verify if following one person, a particular history, makes it possible for us to enter into everything with a clear difference, living every circumstance with a newness, as St. Paul says: as a new creature. It is not a matter of reflecting on this in the abstract, the conclusions of which are short-lived, but rather documenting the experience each of us has, because that is the only thing that will convince us.

Not long ago, three thugs broke into my house and, without saying a word, attacked me, breaking my glasses and my arm. When I read—in the Beginning Day - that Carrón spoke of gratuitous violence, this event, which had a major impact on me, came to mind. I recognized how, in that moment, I had a serenity that is usually impossible for me. As they were ripping out all the cables for the Internet and the modem, which caused several short circuits, I said to the person who was pulling at the cable, "Be careful, don't hurt yourself!" Despite my broken arm and being in such a situation, I was worried that person might get badly hurt. He heard me, was surprised and looked at me as if to say: "But why are you worried about me?" That fact changed his position, so much so that he started to say to the other two: "Come on, let's get out of here!" Another thing that surprised me was that, before I left, they locked me in the bathroom with a bottle of water, because in my house you can't drink from the tap. Another thing that struck me was I asked them to leave my wallet, where I keep my ID and other documents: the money, they took away, but they left all the documents. I perceived it as a grace, as something special, as if something provoked that person's behavior. Among all the things knocked down from the shelves was our breviary, which fell open and he seemed surprised. I was locked in the bathroom for fifteen hours, and I had to break the door to get out, but I thanked the Lord: I was alive, it was a beautiful day. This is why I feel that all

the experiences we have, all the companionship that Fr. Giussani gave to us is what gives life its shape, is what allows us to look at such a violent circumstance in a serene way. Thank you.

Carrón. Thank you. This is a very beautiful exemplification of what we were saying before: a way of living reality that surprises us, first of all, and when they see it happening before their eyes, surprises others, too. It's not a song and dance we do just amongst ourselves. As soon as people see this difference—obviously not always or in every circumstance—something changes, as we saw when we read the book about Van Thuan. It was not a private song and dance. In fact, the people who started to have a relationship with him changed. His attitude even caused the guards to change.

In the fifteen hours I was stuck in the bathroom, I thought precisely of Van Thuan. "Imagine if he found himself in my same situation, hurt and locked up..." I cannot describe my demeanor as courageous, but it was serene. It was as if Van Thuan, with his experience, opened my mind to face that incident. This refutes the idea when you think, "I read the book and now it's over." Not at all. They are all trials that teach us something. Thank you.

I thought a lot about the question posed, because I would really like to understand. My thoughts went back to November 19, 2019, when we came with the Center to talk to you and tell you that for us—after all the work that had been done by the previous Center that was then confirmed in the new Center in a way that was almost unimaginable, but in continuity with the experience we live in St. Joseph—you are the authority, inasmuch as you are the one chosen by Fr. Giussani to lead the Movement, and that we do not need anything else besides Christ. And you were happy to hear that last thing, and we were even more happy because it was really the expression of what our experience in life tells us, which everyone in the Fraternity recognized. Now, I would like to ask your help on something: recognizing you as the authority, I have a Fraternity group with whom I share the experience of St. Joseph, and of whom I can say, of all the years I have been in the Movement, they are where I have most felt God's mercy toward me, for my life. So, what is said in the small fraternity is authoritative for me. I don't know if authoritative is the right word, but if I think about what comes out of our small group, about what my friends in the fraternity say, I see how it works inside of me for the next fifteen days before we meet again. What is said at the Advent retreat, the Lenten retreat, the Exercises; in other words, all that makes up our life in the St. Joseph is authoritative for me. Authoritative in the sense that I live it out in my everyday life. Two things have struck me recently. Four years ago, I started working as an attorney again practically out of nowhere, thanks to the generosity and loving gaze of a friend who asked me why I didn't start practicing again. And I, who couldn't wait to start again, immediately said, "Yes!" without knowing what was ahead of me. I have been happy with that experience and it seems to me that what I learn in the Movement, which for me now is the Fraternity of St. Joseph, is also becoming an intelligence about work, in the sense that obedience to an authority is obedience to your boss, to my boss. But it is not blind obedience. I mean, there is obedience a priori because I obey and, the more that I work, that I mold reality and am introduced into reality, I also give suggestions, but not insisting on what I say. I mean, I give a suggestion and if it is welcomed, good; if not, I still obey. The second thing that struck me is that a number of very challenging and difficult things happened in my immediate family (I am telling this because it seems to me opening one's heart is the way to share the concreteness of life): I have a very matriarchal mother, who has not been doing well lately, and neither has my dad. I have been struck that, in this dynamic of my life, I have had an objectively different attitude, meaning I held tight to the unity of our family. This came spontaneously to me because of what I learn in my small fraternity, within the larger Fraternity, what I learn from School of Community with you and other things you say that I read. I learn by comparing myself and by trying to enter into the way you live, seeking to understand how you live and act accordingly. So, this is a test. I don't know if it is a test of what you are saying, but to me it seems like it is, because in any case the final test is that I, within all the upheaval in my life, which has left me more and more off-balance psychologically and emotionally, am still doing well.

Carrón. This is verification. The point is not what I say, but how you verify it in your own experience, at work, with your family, in everything you have to face. Because it is certainly not easy to start working as an attorney again after many years, or to have a different position toward your parents after years of living a certain way. I don't have anything else to propose to you. All my authoritativeness, my authority—call it what you will—is nothing other than this sharing the experience of the verification I do with all of you. As I always say, “If it helps you to live, I'm glad; if it doesn't help you, find someone else.” I have nothing to defend. I only share with you what is useful for me to live, and I give you the reasons why I behave a certain way.

When you hear certain things that strike you in your small group, and you take them on as a working hypothesis to live reality, you verify what happens when you follow your own thoughts, or when you follow the hypothesis you receive in the place to which you belong. That is the question to ask. A place reveals itself to be increasingly authoritative for us if it convinces us more and more that, just through what we receive there, we are able to live reality in a more human and a truer way, for us and for others. Authoritativeness grows, the esteem for the authoritativeness possessed by a small group and the people in it, or other people you meet, grows to the degree that you feel you are generated, enriched by a way of living reality, by a gaze that makes it so that, when you look at reality with the same gaze, your humanity is exalted. Authoritativeness is gained in real life. No one has it *a priori* or can give it to himself. Each person has to perform, as you said, the test of what is authoritative for his or her journey. If you accept certain things people say to you *a priori*, and then all your experience points to the opposite, the authority or authoritativeness of that small group vanishes. It's not enough that the people gave their best effort in order to tell you things; the question is whether the place to which you belong is a place that generates a difference in you. Obviously, when you are taking the place seriously, as Fr. Giussani says: “If the Church cannot cheat, then neither can man,” (L. Giussani, *Why the Church?*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal 2001, p. 208). Just as the small group cannot cheat, neither can you. If a person has truly had the grace of finding an authoritative place—and does not cheat in relationship with that place—you see the proof in reality. This makes us increasingly grateful to Fr. Giussani; at least I am, because each time I follow the lead of what he taught me, it exalts his greatness before my eyes, and therefore glues me to him more and more—as we saw in School of Community talking about the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Not because of an infatuation with Fr. Giussani, but because what he offers to me as a way of living reality, as the content of the awareness with which he teaches me to enter reality, is verified before my eyes: it introduces a newness and generates freedom in me, and for others. Thank you.

May I ask you something else? Since 2006, when you preached the Exercises on the question of the heart, I have been really struck; for me that was a really important starting point, because I think the heart is the criterion to use to verify everything.

Carrón. So true! This last emphasis is crucial. I was writing this morning to a friend, in response to something he told me, saying that experience, as Giussani describes in *The Religious Sense*, is the key to the method. From the first page of *The Religious Sense*, in the first chapter, he places a clear alternative in front of us. If we want to know something—in this case, the religious sense—what do we do? What would a boy who heard someone talking about the “religious sense,” do? He'd go on Google, type in “religious sense” and find the universe's library. What would he do with that? How would he distinguish what was correct and what was false, *fake news* from true content? He would find himself in such a state of confusion he would not know where to begin to untangle the knot. So, Fr. Giussani says this cannot be the method: to go see what St. Thomas Aquinas says, or Aristotle; or St. Augustine—I always added when I was teaching my students—or we can add Fr. Giussani; because this goes against Giussani's own method. It tells us we cannot abandon ourselves to the views of others, offloading the responsibility of a verification that should belong to us (cf. *The Religious Sense*, MQUP, Montreal 1997, p. 3-6). The alternative method Giussani proposes is that of experience, because it is in experience that each person can come to know reality. “Reality is made evident in experience,” and again, “Experience is the phenomenon through which reality

becomes transparent and makes itself known” (L. Giussani, *In Cammino. [On a Journey]*. 1992-1998, BUR, Milan 2014, p. 311, 250). I’m not going to go on to repeat what I said at the Fraternity Exercises in 2009, because I’d have to project the same slides I used back then. I am only going to say that the question of experience was one of the most decisive points for my life, one that made me fall in love with the Movement, because it gave me a tool to be able to walk the road. If I lost it, the charism would be over for me. Because Giussani started the experience of the Movement seeking to demonstrate the relevance of faith to life’s needs. And this discovery can only happen in experience. This is why, during *Raggio*—I’ve repeated this many times—he was not interested in the kids’ opinions; he didn’t let them speak just from their thoughts. “You tell us the experience you have had, because it is in experience that you learn,” he used to say. It is in experience that each of us tests what we need in order to live. We are seeing this during the pandemic. In the face of a challenge we all share, we have seen and continue to see who—among our colleagues, our friends and our family—was and is determined by fear and who by a newness, which surprised first and foremost the person who bears it—as we were saying before—and then the others. Christianity brings something different into the world when it is lived as an experience. This is crucial because it is there, in experience, that I can come to see what is authoritative for me; it is precisely because I have an experience that I can test on my own skin what holds up to the demands of the circumstances. What one person or another says is not enough. Just think how many opinions are out there now! And with social media, they circulate even more. At this time, when everything is within reach for everyone, it is even more complicated to trace the road that is truly fitting for man, for each of us. Consequently, if a person doesn’t have an experience of verification, he is lost. I hope we will not lose track of the issue of experience you brought up, because the day that happens, we will have also lost the charism along the way. People ready to tell you what you have to do are a dime a dozen. People who offer you a method are truly rare; people like Fr. Giussani, who walked into class on the first day and said, “I am not here to make you adopt the ideas I will give you as your own, but to teach you a true method for judging the things I will say,” (*The Risk of Education*, MQUP, Montreal 2019, p. xxxi). This is the opposite of any kind of authoritarianism, an instrumentalizing of authority. You can verify first-hand whether what I say to you is true, and that is anything but authoritarianism. If there is anything that generates the opposite of authoritarianism, it is precisely the education of the Movement, because it invites you to judge using the criteria that emerge at the core of the experience a person has. I always gave this example for my students, “I do not decide what shoes fit your foot, because you yourselves are the ones to verify which are right.” The criterion to judge a proposal is inside of us, and is objective. We do not give it to ourselves, but it is inside of us. This is crucial for the journey of life. Thank you.

In my forty-year belonging to the Movement, I have often found myself at a fork in the road where I had to either follow my thoughts, impressions and convictions, or follow this companionship through which the face of Christ has become familiar for me. My choices were not always unambiguous, so I’ve had the experience of oscillating between the two poles. Within those experiences, a judgement has been able to mature in me that becomes increasingly clear in obedience to this companionship, which I expressed in a letter of resignation from an important responsibility I did not know how to fulfill. I said: I do not hide the fact that I am sorry that I have not been able to find solutions to the problems that have arisen, but I am consoled by the fact that I feel preferred by the Lord, because every time I think of going it alone, He puts signs on the road that, though wounding my pride, make me realize that not everything depends on me. I have experienced over the years that every time I go about affirming myself, I make mistakes and I am not happy, but when I follow the signs and the people the Lord gives me, the knots and difficulties are more easily untangled and I am happier. It is increasingly clear to me that one of the greatest signs the Lord gives us is the presence of authority. At the Beginning Day, you reminded us again, quoting Fr. Giussani, that, “authority is a person who, when you see them, you can see how what Christ says corresponds to your heart,” (From a conversation between Luigi Giussani and a group

of *Memores Domini* (Milan, September 29, 1991), in “Who Is This Man?” supplement to *Traces*, October 2019). And you witnessed the fact you recognize this by pointing us to a person: Azurmendi. Because you reminded us that, “I don’t have to generate the event; we don’t have to generate it with our effort, we just have to recognize it when it happens” (School of Community, November 18, 2020). The same way, when I look at the friends in my group and manage to be faithful to this method, I discover many inspirations, because looking with surprise at what the Lord does allows us to overcome prejudice, preconceptions and our ideas even about the people in front of us. It’s becoming increasingly clear that when we entrust ourselves to Him, miracles happen; ones that often don’t come where I decide they should, but rather emerge in reality, in people who have been touched and became protagonists of an event and a personal change. I see that, over time, this really nourished a familiarity among us, and an authoritativeness, so it is a continual reminder that accompanies me and the others in our work and all we do. So, it seems to me this increases our certainty and willingness to be obedient more and more. On that note, I thought of a line that struck me as I was rereading *Is It Possible to Live This Way?*, when Fr. Giussani, speaking about obedience, says it is the virtue of friendship. Because being attached to the others that way made the companionship more truly a friendship, which makes it easier and easier to follow and entrust myself, even in moments of crisis when things do not add up as I would like. Thank you.

Carrón. Thank you. What you said confirms what I was saying before. Why am I struck by Azurmendi’s experience? Who would ever say that a radio show could be authoritative for a person of his intelligence, of his age and human experience, with all he has lived? Who could impose that upon him? No one. Because no one in the world has the power to impose something on a free person. How did Azurmendi intercept the authoritativeness of that journalist speaking on the radio? Precisely through experience: listening to the radio, he perceived the different gaze communicated in that show, and that conquered him. Just as it happened to us in the beginning, when we encountered the Movement: the first impact was caused by running into something different, so new that we didn’t want to lose it! If, over time, this fades, or it starts to be lacking, everything gets complicated and confused.

Having seen that first impact happen again in a personality like Azurmendi, we also saw the enrichment of his person, his reason, heart, intelligence, freedom and affection. Because Azurmendi followed the lead of what happened to him, we saw what a marvel his life became. Now, what is authority? It is what we saw described in School of Community and that he witnessed to us: starting from an event that struck him left him so dumbfounded that he felt great admiration for something he certainly had not imagined waking up that morning. He recognized and accepted that he is not the one to define the event, but is rather defined by it. What was the sign? That Azurmendi set out to follow what he encountered. It’s impressive! Why does a person like him begin to follow, to obey what he had encountered, if no one could force him to do so, if no one could impose it upon him, claiming some kind of authority over him? He follows and obeys because the authority is intrinsic to the correspondence that Azurmendi experienced in the face of that difference perceived. This will always be the way Christianity is communicated: there is no other modality than seeing our hearts leap within us at an experience of correspondence, which is what we read in the liturgy and are living in the liturgy of Advent. Beginning with our need, in Advent the Church has us cry out to the Mystery, “Open wide ye heavens, and rain down your mercy upon us.” And the promise that, when this happens, “even the mountains will leap.” This was how Azurmendi’s heart leapt, just as we have also experienced.

That is authority. Authority is an Other who, to reach me, can use anyone—in this case, the latest arrival—and so I decide to obey, to follow him. I have nothing more interesting to communicate to you besides what I see the Mystery doing before my eyes. Each of us can decide which criterion to use in life: you decide if you want to follow that leap of your heart you see in you—it’s what we saw this week in School of Community when we read, “We have been loved and we are loved: this is why we ‘are,’” (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, op. cit., p. 68). We are called to

respond to this, to obey, as we saw in Azurmendi. When we are willing to obey, to follow the lead of what He—that Love without limits—is doing in us, then our entire humanity is exalted and consequently we are able to contribute something to all those we meet along the road.

That is the experience of authority, because there is no other authority than what the Mystery makes happen, because that is where we see that Christ conquers. The guards who were in charge of watching a prisoner like Van Thuan could not help but feel their hearts leap, seeing his humanity. That they felt generated by their prisoner, and let themselves be generated by him: that is the most sensational thing. No one can impose this, that a person really allows himself to be generated by an authority; it can only be recognized by the correspondence a person experiences. This is the great decision in life, this is—as we said at School of Community last Wednesday—our real problem, because He does all the rest. That we are loved is His business. The response to this being loved should be ours. And He tells us: “Look, you can understand what this means if you let it grow in you?” How? What is the one thing that Jesus asks for in the Gospel? To be children, to accept what He gives us as children do, because all the rest will be the fruit of that power for change that Christ introduces into life. But who will see the fruit? Not the one who says: “Beautiful, beautiful”—as we read in the School of Community—and then walks away. If Azurmendi had done so; that is, if he had said: “Beautiful, beautiful,” and then had changed the radio station, everything would have ended there. He would have missed the best part, as we will miss the best part if we do not follow the lead of the way the Mystery knocks at our door. This is where everything is played out, friends.

Berchi. Excuse me, Julián, can I ask you something about that? There is a prior question, of affection, because I understand that to let yourself be moved, you need an availability that is not automatic. Sometimes it happens that we see people whom, to some degree, we do not like, to say it in a somewhat simplified and superficial way. If this is not overcome, it is an impediment: it is as if I had to first decide to allow the other to make me budge. Can you help me on this?

Carrón. We can say this availability, or this possibility of being open, belongs to our nature. We were made to be open, so we cannot help but feel the impact, as Azurmendi did. He was faced with something unexpected when he thought the game of his life was over. And as can happen even to a soldier in the SS, like the one Elsa Morante describes in her novel: he sees a flower and all the crimes he has committed did not prevent him from feeling the impact provoked in him by the beauty of the flower. “If I could go back and stop time, I would be ready to spend my whole life in adoration of that flower,” (E. Morante, *La storia [The Story]*, Einaudi, Turin 1974, p. 605). The fact of the flower contains the totality, up to the One who made it. That thought is unavoidable, even for one who is closed, battered and humanly destroyed like that soldier, because his capacity for destruction cannot completely block that last possibility of openness. Incredible! But a moment later he says: “No! [...] I will not fall again, for certain tricks” (ibid.). It is in front of the flower that he verified his openness. There is always the potential to be open and available, even in someone like him, who has committed endless crimes, but this does not prevent, nor does it guarantee anything: it does not prevent one from being challenged by the beauty of a flower, and does not guarantee that, having experienced that openness looking at the flower, you follow it. Following the lead of something you have seen is always a decision; it is always linked to a sympathy—as I noted at School of Community—to that thread of tenderness created for something that is present. This is what happens in daily life. If a person is seriously ill—I used to give this example to my students—he doesn’t care whether the doctor has a temper, because if he heals him—excuse the joke—he will grin and bear the temper the doctor has, because he’s grateful that there’s someone who understands his illness. Before, he had met other very nice, attractive doctors who chatted with him, but they didn’t understand anything about his illness, and each time he went home sad. But the day he found one who healed him, at Christmas he gave him a gift out of gratitude—despite his bad temper—because without him he would still be stuck with his disease. Sometimes it’s our need that can open a crack. I said yesterday, in a greeting for the online living Nativity organized by the Sisters of via Martinengo, that if we are not ready to follow the announcement of Christmas right now, or if we

pretend to not want to hear it, it still reaches us regardless, however we respond to it. And perhaps some tomorrow, when we are more aware of our need, He will find in us the readiness to welcome Him that we do not have today.

What Julián was saying about following the lead of what is given to us seems like a really crucial question for our common life, because I see how often we are struck by the positivity that comes forth, for example in community meetings, one of the characteristic practices of our experience. It is a positivity paired with total realism, so there is no need to pretend to say things are not so bad when they really are. Seeing this makes me feel really accompanied, because I realize that the origin of it cannot be a certain temperament or optimism. This is, how can I say it, the latest reflection on our faces of that indestructible trust of which you spoke to us last summer, of that “yes.” The positivity that, along with all our limitations, we witness to one another comes from this “yes,” and from the people who are the greatest signs of this for me. I think the help we need to give each other is to recognize the origin of these witnesses, because I see that they are people who look to those who are older, who let themselves be generated, so the School of Community is their working hypothesis for each day; perhaps with the fragility we all share, but with this hypothesis. This is what really gives me hope, because then it becomes a path for me to follow, too; maybe one that can challenge the nihilism that I, too, find inside of me in certain moments of difficulty. In short, those presences are in dialogue with the nihilism that is us as well as in others. That’s why I thought, just seeing the secret behind these witnesses and what they point us to, of when, during School of Community, you reminded us not to verify something other than the proposal of the charism. I think this helps us in our common life. We talk to each other, we tell each other things, and we are friends with each other, while asking each other, “Which proposal are we following?” These people who are clearly following a proposal form a companionship for me.

Carrón. Perfect. This is the real question. When a person finds the proposal incarnated in someone he has to decide if he has a different or a better idea to face reality. And we will see it happen before our eyes and will follow it. Or perhaps he does not manage to live according to his idea, and so he sets out to follow the lead of the person in whom he sees the proposal incarnated. Life is simple. There are not so many options: either we are the ones to decide each moment, based on what we have in our heads, or we follow the lead of what we see happening before our eyes in people who are differently precisely because they let themselves be generated, as we have said many times. “Where does this newness I see in him or her come from?” This is the fruit of being generated: a different humanity that makes us ask, “Where does it come from? Who is the ‘father?’ What is its origin?” We are again faced with a challenge—as I said before in reply to Fr. Michele—do we find ourselves open to what we see happening before our eyes, where we see that Christ conquers, or are we apathetic, preferring to do something else? Anyone can choose to do something else; in any case, it is always better to do something rather than nothing, because at least you can verify something. Rather than just standing there doing nothing, it’s always better to risk something, because that way your idea is deflated if it’s inadequate. Just like the prodigal son. Paradoxically, it was better for the prodigal son not to stay there, warming a seat in his father’s house, because by leaving he verified the image of a full life that he had in his head. I said this recently in the Exercises for university students: in the parable of the talents, Jesus reproaches the servant who did not invest the talent he received out of fear he would not succeed. The servant knew the master was an odd man, who reaped what he had not sown, and with this he justified his own inactivity. Instead, you have to take risks, and if something goes wrong, you learn. The point is not to avoid making mistakes, but to keep walking.

The question proposed for this assembly left me confused: “What is the significance of the figure of the responsible? How does this word help you in your experience as a visitor or responsible?” Our point of reflection was that, without authority, the companionship in which we live would not exist. Thinking about the question—after hearing the first person speak about the difference that

characterizes us at work—I remembered when I first started with St. Joseph, because each of us is responsible of our own relationship with Christ. In answering this question, I came to see that, in reality, the figure of responsible is more of an organizational function I took on to facilitate the life of the CL and the St. Joseph communities, and that responsibility is my response to the fact that I am loved. I do not think the figure of responsible described in the text is necessarily someone who lives this way: with this transparency in his relationship with Christ. Responsibility and authority may coincide, but that is a grace. On the other hand, following the person who is responsible is a concrete way the Lord gives to me so I can live. I do not think authority and the responsible are the same thing; it would be burdensome and unfair to presume this authority always shines through for another person. If an authority emerges for a person, that is a grace; each one of us is “responsible.”

Carrón. Wonderful! This really simplifies the question, because what you are saying is true: the responsible of a small group in your Fraternity, just as it is for other paths, for example in a house of *Memores Domini*, does not necessarily have to be the most authoritative person, but is rather a person who has the task of calling everyone back to the elementary questions regarding the life of the house or the St. Joseph group. To some degree, you can use the word “organizational” to indicate that responsibility, and not in the pejorative sense of the term, so as not to place a burden upon a person that he would not be able to carry. If, then, a person has the responsibility in a house or a St. Joseph small group, the task can be more than organizational because, in addition to organizing a gathering, communicating when it takes place and what you need to bring to work on; in addition to that function, she can also say: “Look at what is happening here; see how that person is radiant before our eyes.” So, the task is not reduced to organization, because it also means being the first to follow the true authority, which is Christ present before us through a person in whom He conquers. In this way, the responsible, freed from the burden of having to generate her own authoritativeness, becomes an authority, because she is the first to follow. The fact that St. Joseph asks you to take on responsibility is a grace: you, because you have this task, are ready and waiting to see what the Mystery is generating in your group. As responsible, you are a spectator of what the Mystery is doing before your eyes, and so you are fortunate, just at the disciples who went with Jesus were. Obviously, they were nothing compared to Jesus, but they could not help but go home each time with their eyes full of all they saw Him do. Get it? Your role, therefore, which is necessary in any kind of “association,” in any people who stay together, becomes a little more interesting for you and for the others. This is how you gain authority, not because someone assigns it to you, but because you recognize and follow the lead of the person in whom you see it happen. If I see Azurmendi and recognize him as authoritative for my life, what better thing do I have to propose than him? As a friend said to me, “With all the Biblical studies you’ve done, you could’ve given an amazing exegetical commentary on the man born blind.” That’s not what I was interested in doing! Last summer, I saw something happen before my eyes that I was interested in placing before all of you, stepping aside so that you might be able to see what Christ is doing. This is much more important than a nice exegetical commentary on the man born blind, because I wanted it to come out that the man born blind followed the lead of a fact, precisely as Azurmendi did. It is not something I, you, or any of you has to generate—this is liberating!—we do not have to carry the burden of generating it. We are called to endorse, to follow the person the true authority, meaning Christ, is generating. Then, everything becomes a grace for us, because we become spectators of the transformative power of Christ. Thank you.

Berchi. Those are all the interventions, and I’d say all the time we have.

Carrón. Perfect timing. If we go over... we lose our authoritativeness!

Berchi. Thank you, and Merry Christmas on behalf of the entire Fraternity of St. Joseph.

Carrón. Merry Christmas to you too, and send my greetings along to all our “traveling companions.”