

Notes of the introduction by Julián Carrón
at the Spiritual Exercises of the San Giuseppe Fraternity via video link
Friday evening, August 7th, 2020

Entrance music: *Franz Schubert, Piano Trio no. 2, opus 100–Spirto gentil CD 14**

Let us begin this event by asking the Holy Spirit to open wide our entire humanity, our entire heart, our reason, our affection, so that we may identify in the depths of our being, through this openness, the method by which He makes Himself present between us; so that He may truly pull us from the nothingness which, so often, infiltrates our lives, down to our bones.

Come Holy Spirit

- *Far finta di essere sani*
- *Luntane, cchiù luntane*

“What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?”¹

It is hard to find a more succinct expression of the gaze that Christ has for every man, for our greatness as humans. That question is an invitation to realize that if we gain the whole world, but then lose ourselves, we will have made a mess of our life.

From the start, with this phrase, He has given us—having already having made us vibrate, and continuing to make our lives vibrate—the criteria of judgement by which to judge anything that may enter the horizon of our lives. In this manner, Christ shows us how God has thrown us into the mix of reality, into a universal confrontation with everything, with this *detector* within us, this humanity of ours which is so great that one gets goosebumps just considering it. One might not feel Christ’s question directed towards them, but—as Gaber sings—one cannot avoid forming a continuous comparison between what one is, what each of us is, and all the images of fulfillment, of answer, that one finds. A man can buy a motorbike, “a chromed frame and handlebar, with many pistons, buttons, and strange accessories”; a woman might buy “necklaces and hand creams”, all to “pretend to be well”; one can avoid considering the point of life by burying oneself in “study groups, the masses, in texts”² as varied as one likes, pretending to be well; one can even plan trips far away, but one cannot avoid making this comparison, which is inevitable. In fact, just as *Luntane Cchiù luntane* makes us vibrate, we cannot pretend that in us there is not the greatness of which Christ speaks. There has been no figure in history who has affirmed the humanity of each of us more potently than Christ.

What is man? What am I, who can gain the whole world but lose myself? To understand this, each of us can list the things thanks to which he or she has tried to gain his or herself—like Gaber’s list. Often, we live with an image, we cede to an image dictated by the common mentality, but this image does not coincide with what we are. We discover this not when

* “Listening to this extraordinary Trio by Schubert I was made to realize once again that the meaning, the sense of a thing is made possible by a view that is complete, more comprehensive of the whole of the object that a person has before him [...] “It expresses the desire to get to the heart of things, and at the same time the awareness of the inadequacy of the means available: hence its agonizing sadness” (L. Giussani, *The Beauty That You Cannot Abandon*, Sony Classical, 2000, p. 1-2.

¹ Matthew 16:26.

² «Far finta di essere sani», music and lyrics by G. Gaber. [«telaio e manubrio cromato, con tanti pistoni, bottoni e accessori più strani», «collane e creme per mani», «far finta di essere sani», «un gruppo di studio, le masse, [...] i testi»]

things are not going well, but—as I always say—when things are as we wish, when we manage to succeed in the journey or the project we have in mind. Recently, a friend from Kazakhstan, which whom I had a meeting online, told the entire community that an initiative of his had been successful, but he had experienced—it was clear to him—that something was not right. Like him, each of us will discover this as we live. We needn't go far, or seek out particular locations. It is in living daily life, in the 'I' in action, that we discover how much this name—Jesus—is capable of fulfilling our humanity. We saw it recently, when we met at the Advent retreat.³ We have been challenged as never before by the Coronavirus and the resulting lockdown, with all the consequences still being played out, because, as we can all see, it is not yet over. It is a circumstance which we did not choose, and which we all share, because no one has been able to escape this circumstance. From the start, we faced this unforeseen circumstance by empathizing with Giussani's gaze. Reality appears before our eyes. If we observe the "structure of the reaction" which each of us has to reality, we become aware of the factors which constitute us. Thus, the first thing we are invited to do is to observe ourselves in action. If we consider the human dynamic which each of us lives and experiences in our impact with reality, we can note that this impact sets into motion a mechanism revealing the factors which constitute us. Yet many times we do not follow Giussani, because we feel we already know these things, or we do not appreciate their import; we thus miss a great opportunity to see what constitutes us emerge in everyday life, in front of our eyes; an opportunity to distinguish the constituent factors of our life, of our being, of this human which we are, which can gain the whole world and lose itself.

So, at least for a few days, let us allow ourselves to be led by hand by Giussani, to observe what is happening in us, and what has happened recently, paying attention to the impact this disruptive reality has had on each of us. What have we discovered? This is decisive, because, as don Giussani says, "if an individual were to barely live the impact with reality, because, for example, he had not had to struggle, he would scarcely possess a sense of his own consciousness, would be less aware of his reason's energy and vibration".⁴ In other words, he or she will not see the constituent factors of his or herself emerge.

The first thing to note is that reality provokes us in a manner which is irreducible to our own ideas: reality is stubborn, it is a fact we cannot cancel, we cannot tame, which we cannot reduce to any measure of our own. It is enough to think of how, over the last few months, each of us will have had a thousand thoughts on this virus and its consequences, on the best way to face the situation. Reality proved to be stubborn, and forced each of us to confront our thoughts with what was happening, with a reality which did not stop surprising us in its irreducibility.

We saw how Giussani's suggestion did nothing other than describe how a truly attentive observer of what is happening can be provoked to recognize the truly educative power of reality. Each of us must be ready to engage with this, to not pretend, and to let ourselves be surprised, moved and encouraged, to the point of—as Giussani always told us, quoting Jean Guilton—"submitting reason to experience",⁵ submitting our thoughts to the experience we are having. How many times, in the last few months, have we witnessed the truth of that Shakespeare quote which we often repeat: "There are more things in heaven and Earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy".⁶

³ See Notes from the Introduction and Homily by Julián Carrón at the San Giuseppe Fraternity Advent Retreat (Pacengo-VR, 29 November 2019), 05/12/2019, clonline.org

⁴ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal-Kingston-London-Buffalo, 1997, p. 100.

⁵ [«Sottomettere la ragione all' esperienza»], J. Guilton, *Arte nuova di pensare*, Edizioni Paoline, Cinisello Balsamo (Mi) 1986, p. 71.

⁶ W. Shakespeare *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V.

This, paradoxically, has made us conscious of our own humanity, our vulnerability, our limits, our restlessness and our questions. We have perceived this vibration of our reason, which is not content with any old explanation, which continues to investigate, until it finds an adequate answer. The more one lets oneself be struck, the more one sees—to the point of speechlessness—the “Eternal / mystery of our being” of which Leopardi had such a profound and acute awareness. The more we experience an impact with reality, the more our true nature emerges, with its fragility and its greatness. “O mortal nature, If thou art / Frail and so vile in all / How canst thou reach so high with thy poor sense?”.⁷

I ask myself: what awareness have we gained? This awareness was so familiar to Giussani that he constantly repeated how he had never found a companion in whom he saw this vibrating humanity more than Leopardi.

I repeat: what have we learnt from reality? What have we learnt about our humanity? Why do we not live this dramatic relationship with reality? There is no human experience which does not consist of this impact with circumstances which provoke us, which reawaken us, challenge us. Life is never static. Often, we want to escape, but we cannot ever avoid being on the stage of the world, of reality. Never offstage, always in the scene! As I have said, man becomes aware of his constituent factors only by observing himself in action, in the dynamic with his humanity, in his relationship with reality. Reality, any reality, however it may appear, whatever appearance it has, or impression it makes, is always something good, because it causes the constituent factors of the ‘I’ to emerge, but only if we make ourselves available to accept the impact that it provokes in us.

I have learnt that reality is good for me so many times! I didn’t just dream of it: aside from how reality might have appeared, it was always there, provoking me and forcing me to face it. This is how it is for me, as for all of us; an ever more fascinating adventure, in which everything becomes a companion. 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’. Thus, a challenge like the one we have lived through recently, and continue to face, has reawakened us—paradoxically—from the numbness with which we so often live.

As a journalist once said, we have been living anaesthetized for too long, part of a system too often wrong in its foundations. Yet there are moments in which reality challenges us so potently that it is difficult to soften the blow, to ignore or evade its provocation. What has happened has, with the help of our freedom, given us back our attentiveness, putting our reason into action, making our demand for meaning emerge, which expresses our true nature, the need for meaning which constitutes us; an urgency which reemerges powerfully in the impact with a cruel, harsh reality. Thus, over the next few days, it is crucial to observe oneself, each of us, in order to see what the structure of our reaction to this circumstance has been. Often, we try to flee, to escape reality through distraction, dreams, images which we construct for ourselves. Or we defend ourselves from reality and end up in a bubble, to protect ourselves from impact. Or we do not listen to the provocation, we do not allow our reason to emerge with all the urgent need for meaning which constitutes it. So—Giussani says with an amazing phrase—it is as if it would “murder what is human”.⁸ What happens might require an exhaustive explanation, but we prefer to stop at a sentimental reaction, saying: “its good, bad, pleasing, displeasing”, instead of fully understanding reality’s provocation. We thus see nihilism win out, more and more, making us think that reality is nothingness. Without accepting the provocation of reality, we become increasingly fragile, weak, less

⁷ G. Leopardi, «Sopra il ritratto di una bella donna scolpito nel monumento sepolcrale della medesima», XXXI, trans Ezra Pound, *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, London: Faber & Faber, 1953, p.445.

⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 115.

aware of all the factors which constitute us. It is as if everything conspired to flatten us, rather than exalting us.

Someone once told me that they repeated a phrase we have quoted to a sick patient: “Stop and think”. The patient, from his bed, corrected the phrase, completing it: “Stop, think and look !”. He added: “The more I stop to think, the more tis dynamic plays out, the more I look at things differently, surprising even myself, my wife, reality, my grandchildren, my children”. See how amazing it is when we accept the method by which the Mystery, which has made and continues to make everything, calls us!

Sometimes, what Chesterton says happens: “When you’re really shipwrecked, you do really find what you want”.⁹ Because we are so inside a bubble that we do not really notice things anymore. The more our thirst for meaning emerges, with the urgency for a response, the more we can truly understand what we read in the liturgy. In this sense, I was struck recently by a passage from the prophet Isaiah: “All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come [equally] receive grain and eat [...] without paying [...] drink wine and milk”.¹⁰ This is the thirst which constitutes us. When we live, the impact with reality pushes from within us, with all its power, for an answer which can truly sate that thirst. It is not a question of money, it is simply a question of heeding the thirst that we find within us, because this thirst—the Scriptures tell us this in many ways, but always with a fundamental deep insistence—is the criteria of judgement for recognizing what can truly sate us. So the prophet challenges us: you who have this thirst, why do you spend your money on things that are not bread, your earnings on things which will not sate you? What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Why do we spend our money and our lives, what we have earned, on what does not sate us? Why is why the prophet Isaiah is telling us: we have within us the criteria of judgement to recognize what sates this hunger and this thirst, so constitutive of our ‘I’. We never lose this ability. Like it or not, we are always pushed to recognize what it is that sates us. As Lewis said: “What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing”. We cannot cheat: “You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed to go very far before the warning signs appear”. You can verify yourselves whether you are going in the right direction, or whether you have taken a wrong turn: “You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you”. He finishes with this wonderful phrase, encouraging us to search: “The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it”.¹¹

What is the criterion? Our humanity—as we said at the Advent retreat. Our humanity does not just make us suffer, a burden which we owe despite everything, a chasm which cannot be filled and hinders our relationship with reality. On the contrary, our humanity is the criterion which enables us to be interested in everything, to see everything vibrate with possibility, as happened to that patient who was able to realize more than ever the value of his wife and children.

It has always uplifted me to realize that there is, within me, this capacity of judgement. I often repeat the fact that what has saved my life is a loyalty to this humanity which vibrates, with which I did not compromise, but rather accepted, recognizing it regardless of the situation I found myself in. That is how I discovered that the nexus of needs and evidences within me was the criterion for judging everything that happened. This is exalting, as Dostoyevsky says: “One can err in one’s ideas, but it is impossible to err with the heart, or lose one’s conscience through error”.¹²

⁹ G.K. Chesterton, *Manalive*, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1912, p. 62.

¹⁰ Isaiah 55:1.

¹¹ C.S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, p. 177.

¹² [Si può sbagliare nelle idee, ma non è possibile sbagliarsi con il cuore o smarrire la propria coscienza per errore] F. Dostoevskij, *Lettere sulla creatività*, Feltrinelli, Milano 1991, p. 55.

Why is this so important? Why is the circumstance we have faced recently so important? Because it has reawakened our 'I'. And only if our 'I' is reawakened, pulled out of the confusion we so often live in, from the nihilism which penetrates us, can we find the truth. Our sense of loss, often, is not because the truth is not in front of us; the reason for it is that we do not have the capacity of recognizing it, being so overcome by numbness; it is as if the truth was of no value. Instead, when one has this reawakened humanity, as messy as you like, but reawakened, the none can truly recognize the Lord as He enters reality, and respond: "You". The prophet Isaiah continues: "Heed me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Come to me heedfully, listen, that you may have life".¹³

God enters history as a Presence which has the sole objective of responding to this thirst, this urgency that reality constantly awakens in us. But where is this God? We can we find Him? We can find Him in a witness, someone in whom we see Him occur.

The prophet Isaiah continues: "I will renew with you the everlasting covenant [where? How can we recognize it? Through what?], the benefits assured to David. As I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander of nations".

We can see Him in the belonging of a people who are witnesses like David. We can recognize this alliance that the Lord forms not because He does so with any kind of discourse, but because I see Him occur in someone who provokes an attraction, and makes my desire to find Him emerge. It is so evident that even people you do not know will recognize it. With His presence, He will attract people you do not know, who recognize what He brings. The prophet Isaiah continues: "So shall you summon a nation you knew not". You will call them with your life, with your presence, with your manner of belonging. You will attract people you do not know, people who are ready to seek presences in whom they can find hope for their life. "So shall you summon a nation you knew not, and nations that knew you not shall run to you, Because of the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified you." The more one sees the Lord in front of one's eyes, so desirous of responding to the thirst of our hearts, the more one encourages others to seek Him. "Seek the LORD" says the prophet, "while he may be found, call him while he is near". But to look for Him, one must heed this need which often goes against the common mentality. Many, in fact, prefer to remain flat, because it seems unrealistic that there may be Someone who is interested in us, capable of responding to our thirst. Thus, it is necessary to think: Let him turn to the LORD for mercy; to our God, who is generous in forgiving. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD".

The Mystery challenges us according to a method which shocks us. This is why His design seems so distant to us, far from our way of thinking, that we do not believe His calls to us, because we think we are more realistic than God. We say: "We are not so naïve as to believe in an exorbitant promise!". We prefer to follow our own paths, so far do we feel from His, because we are. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts". What loyalty is needed to trust this promise! Only those who have this audacity will be able to see that promise fulfilled, that promise come true. Yes, in joy you shall depart, in peace you shall be brought back; Mountains and hills shall break out in song before you, and all the trees of the countryside shall clap their hands. In place of the thornbush, the cypress shall grow, instead of nettles, the myrtle". In this change, this flowering of life, the truth of God will be manifest. "This shall be to the LORD'S renown, an everlasting imperishable sign."¹⁴

The Lord invites us to not be naïve and irrational in following Him. Whoever agrees to follow Him will be able to verify the fulfillment of this promise: instead of thorns, cypresses

¹³ Isaiah 55: 2-3.

¹⁴ Isaiah 55:3-13.

will grow, instead of nettles will grow myrtles. Life will flourish. Whoever follows Him and heeds Him will be surprised by his or her own flourishing, and the Lord will thus reveal His truth. His glory is precisely this shining out of His truth and it is the sign of His victory. The glory of the Lord is an eternal sign that will never be destroyed. Thus, whoever has encountered Him cannot—as the psalm says—but have his or her eyes open, awaiting, such is the certainty that He will reply sooner or later: “The eyes of all look hopefully to you; you give them their food in due season” according to a design which is not ours: “You open wide your hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing” [...] [because] The Lord is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth”.¹⁵ Why is the encounter with a reality which reawakens us in all our need so decisive for recognizing and finding the Lord and His promise? Because—as don Giussani said—“we Christians, in the modern climate, have become detached not directly from Christian formulas, or Christian rites, or the Christian handbook directly. We have become detached from our human foundations [...]. We have a faith which is no longer religiosity [...], [a faith which no longer responds to the urgencies of life, and is therefore not aware], a faith no longer aware of itself”.¹⁶ Because “nothing is more astonishing than an answer to a question which has not been asked”.¹⁷ And this has a crucial consequence for faith today. The reason people do believe any more, or believe without believing, as one often sees, reducing belief to formal, ritualistic participation, or to mere gestures or moralism, is because they do not live out their own humanity. Thus, the provocation we have experienced in the last few months has been decisive for our faith. Do not think that the Mystery cannot use everything that happens for the most important objective, that of helping us understand what responds to our needs. The reason people do not believe, or believe without believing, is that they are not engaged with their own humanity, their own sensitivity, their own consciousness and thus with their own humanity, as if the electrocardiogram were flat, as if the ‘I’ was as numb as can be. Faith thus becomes something incidental to life. This is why don Giussani invites us, has always invited us, to “live always the real intensely”,¹⁸ indicating this as the formula for true religiosity. Living reality intensely means allowing the power of one’s own humanity to emerge, one’s own reason, and urgent need for meaning. If we do not have this affection towards ourselves, towards our humanity, if humanity is missing in us, we will end up in nihilism. This lack of humanity will be the greatest sign of how much nothingness prevails in us. We can continue to formalistically engage with religious events, but nothingness will prevail. What can save us?

The consciousness of this humanity of ours will help us recognize what can save us. It allows us to understand the import of faith, the human convenience of faith, the pertinence of faith, of the Christian proposal, to the needs of life; it will thus impede Christianity from being identified with any of its common reductions: moralism, discourse or ritual. No reduction is capable of taking what is most intimate from me. And if it does not attract what is most intimate in us, we will remain in nothingness, despite all our formal practices and our rituals. The ‘I’ is so irreducible that only when it is surprised by a correspondence with something it meets will it realize it has encountered what is truly of value for life. I will then understand

¹⁵ Psalm 145,15-16,18.

¹⁶ [«noi cristiani, nel clima moderno siamo stati staccati non dalle formule cristiane direttamente, non dai riti cristiani direttamente, non dalle leggi del decalogo cristiano, direttamente. Siamo stati staccati dal fondamento umano [...]. Abbiamo una fede che non è più religiosità [...], [una fede che non risponde alle urgenze del vivere e quindi non è consapevole], una fede non più intelligente di sé». L. Giussani, *La coscienza religiosa nell'uomo moderno*, 21 novembre 1985, in Quaderni del Centro Culturale “Jacques Maritain”—Chieti, gennaio 1986, p. 15.

¹⁷ [“niente è tanto incredibile quanto la risposta a una domanda che non si pone”] R. Niebuhr, *Il destino e la storia*, a cura di E. Buzzi, Bur, Milano 1999, p. 66.

¹⁸ L. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, p. 108.

that, “I am not there when you are not there”, as a song by Guccini said, and if you are not there, “I am left alone with my thoughts”.¹⁹

But of whom can I say: “I am not there when you are not there, I am worth less when you are not there, I am victim to my numbness, my thoughts, the coming and going of the world when you are not there”?

Think of what experience Jacopone da Todi must have had to exclaim: “Christ completely attracts me, since He is so beautiful!”.²⁰ Because without our entire humanity, we inevitably reduce Christ. If the human is missing, we will content ourselves with something we decide, even if we use the word “Christ”. Many people speak about Christ, but how many do you know who really need Christ in order to live? Christ can become an empty word, and Christianity can thus become something repulsive. Everything that happens and has happened to us enables us to see our humanity vibrate within us, the only thing that can truly find He who “attracts me completely, since He is so beautiful!”.

Let these days be an opportunity to let ourselves be attract by He who is among us to pull us from nothingness, and to allow us to experience His truth, His glory, the splendor of the truth. How? By making all of our humanity emerge, reawakening our ‘I’. If there is not this impact, if there is not this confirmation, it means we are not really talking about Christ, because when Christ entered into history, those who met Him could not help but say: “We have never seen anything like this”.²¹

We thus ask to be available to let ourselves be struck by His presence. We ask this in the silence we try to follow, wherever we are, helping each other in the testimony of people who are looking for Him, as the prophet Isaiah said: “Seek the LORD while he may be found, call him while he was near”.²²

¹⁹ [«non sono quando non ci sei», resto solo con i pensieri miei»] “*Vorrei*”, music and words by F. Guccini.

²⁰ Jacopone da Todi, «Lauda XC», trans. Elisa Picchiotti <https://www.todiguide.com/tourist-guide-of-umbria/jacopone-da-todi-the-man-the-friar-the-poet/?lang=en>

²¹ Mark 2:12.

²² Isaiah 55:6.

Notes from the assembly with Julián Carrón
At the Spiritual Exercises of the San Giuseppe Fraternity via video link
Saturday morning, 8 August 2020

Entrance music: Johannes Brahms, Symphony no. 4 in E Minor – Spirto Gentil CD 19 *

- *Al mattino*
- *Barco negro*
- *Marta, Marta*

Michele Berchi. We had expected this assembly to be live for the whole world apart from Latin America, given that it is nighttime there; but it seems that Latin America has already woken up, so everyone is connected.

Hello. I have been a member of the San Giuseppe Fraternity for around a year. During an interview, don Michele dismissed me saying: “circumstances, circumstances, circumstances”. I was immediately faced with the fact that my relationship with Christ through the San Giuseppe Fraternity was playing out through circumstance. At the same time, I was struck by you saying that circumstances are vocation, and by your insistence on living reality intensely. At the moment, my main circumstance is depression, which I have been battling for many years. Suffering from depression is not being pulled into nothingness; it is being immersed in it. I realize this when I hear my colleagues speak operationally about work, or I hear the priest I live with organize events for the movement, and I, with thirty years of experience behind me, ask myself: “What is the point?”. The circumstance of depression also literally constitutes an impediment. Sometimes, I do not go to work or to Mass because I am too ill, or I don’t observe silence because I am ill. Now, given that the doctors have told me that I can’t recover, my happiness will be at stake within this circumstance of depression. I wanted to ask you how I can live this circumstance conscious of the extent of my desire. Thank you.

Julián Carrón. Is there a possibility, my friend, or is there nothing to be done? You cannot go to work, you cannot go to Mass, or observe silence. End of story. What do you want me to say?

I either offer this, or become angry.

Carrón. The point is not your offering, but whether there is a possibility, otherwise not even your offering will help. And so? If you go to the depths of everything, truly everything, what do you see? Is every possibility shut off? Is everything finished? Asking oneself this is what it means to live reality intensely, instead of following our mood swings. So, when we get to the bottom, what is left?

His initiative.

Carrón. And what is His first initiative? Let’s work together to realize things. What is His first initiative towards you?

Erm, the tenderness you have spoken about recently.

Carrón. And what is His first tenderness?

Making me understand that I need to be cured, for example.

* “This Other outside us, this Something outside us (which is the first thing evident to a child who opens his eyes and flings his heart wide open to life) has a fascinating, persuasive, irresistible characteristic: something outside that corresponds to our ‘I’. [...] This symphony is like a thrust of reason that stretches toward reality, that opens wide in admiration at the entire world in its richness of organic particulars” (L. Giussani, “A Cosmic Embrace”, in *Spirto gentil*, p. 265).

Carrón. There is something else first. To make you desire to be cured, what is needed? What is the first tenderness that the Mystery has towards you, with your depression; not alongside your depression, but whilst you are immersed in it?

Making me feel the weight of the condition, but at the same time making me accept how...

Carrón. Just that?

He makes me accept it as the condition He wants me to pass through.

Carrón. Even before that, what does the Mystery say to you before anything else?

It is definitely saying to be that it wants a personal relationship with me.

Carrón. And how does it tell you? How? Through something you come up with yourself?

No, through circumstances.

Carrón. And what is the first circumstance?

The first circumstance is my question.

Carrón. Meaning what? The first circumstance is your question. If you go beyond this, who is generating the question?

I do not give it to myself. I agree with others who said this.

Carrón. It is you who ask the question, you! So you are there! And if you are there, what is the first gesture of tenderness that the Mystery has towards you?

A companionship.

Carrón. What companionship? Do not repeat ready-made phrases, because you won't get away with it. What is that companionship?

If I had not that companionship to my pain, I don't know where I would have ended up.

Honestly, I don't really know what else to say.

Carrón. How can you be sure this companionship is not taking you for a ride? There are many kinds of company which serve no purpose.

This companionship helps me to realize that I am not defined by my condition.

Carrón. And how does it tell you that? The only thing you told me is that you are defined by your state.

When I was an ecological worker, for example, I would get up at 4 in the morning, and there was a day when I finished work and felt ill; I told don Michele that day that I did not feel up to going to Mass or reciting the Hours.

Carrón. Who is making you go to Mass? Why do you need to go to Mass? We cannot carry out events that have nothing to do with depression or what is happening to us. I said this yesterday. It is not that we have been detached from Christian formulas, Christian ritual—Giussani told us this. Today, we are detached from our humanity, so we do not know what the human is made for, what depression is for, or what the point is of everything we do—if, in the end, we are still overcome by nothingness. So, I insist, what is the first gesture of tenderness that the Mystery has towards you? This is an awareness to which this companionship should introduce you, if it is authentic companionship, if it is not messing you around.

It helps me to face this circumstance with the full of extent of my desire.

Carrón. In other words, it helps you realize that the first gesture of tenderness that the Mystery has towards you is that it makes you. It makes you. “With age-old love I have loved you; so I have kept my mercy toward you”.²³ The more you are immersed in depression, the more you are able—paradoxically—to recognize that this is much greater than a doctor telling you that you cannot be cured. We cannot survive by trying to sort everything out, because things cannot be sorted out. It is as if that Mystery had taken you to the edge of the abyss; and there, on the edge of that abyss, what can you do? If you use this to live to the full, to live reality intensely, to not remain on the precipice, what can appear more real than the reality of

²³ See. Jeremiah 31:3.

you and your depression? That there is Another making you now. And when you reach that point—depression or not, things or order or not—there is a problem of freedom: will you let yourself be embraced by He who is making you now, or not? Do you need to wait to emerge from depression in order to let yourself be embraced by the Mystery? Do you need to sort things out before allowing yourself to be overwhelmed by the presence of One who loves you with such passion for your life? Do you need to be cured first, or is this the origin, the start of a cure? You are not defined by this, but rather by this incredible love One has for you. Only then will you begin to understand that you need silence precisely because you are ill. Being ill, how can you live without observing silence? How can you love yourself? How can you stand yourself? When we scrape the bottom of the barrel, when we reduce ourselves to eating with animals, like prodigal son, like him, we cannot help but feel the sensation of a desire: in my father's house I lived well! This judgement begins to enter the darkest parts of oneself: there is Another deep within me. There we begin to see Christ's victory, because He make space for Himself, if we allow Him to enter, and He changes our relationship with ourselves. As we said at School of Community: from the event that has occurred to us, a new type of knowledge is born. And if the event which occurred does not make us use our reason fully, but rather remains something extrinsic, decorative, then it means our faith is at risk. As Giussani said, people believe without believing, and it is as if everything we say did not affect what happens to us, reality. At a given moment, we will say: "So what is the point in believing? It is not just self-conviction? Are we just imagining it? It is not just a mood swing?". Every morning we are challenged, you and I, because I too, though I am not in your condition, am called to recognize Him—just as He is inviting you—by looking at myself in depth; I, like you, when I recognize Him in the darkest darkness, "I realize that you are / like an echo [...] I am reborn".²⁴ Rebirth is there, in the depths of depression. But this is not automatic, and does not happen once and for all; it must happen once instance after another, instant by instant, otherwise you would not stand yourself, you would not stand me. Thank you. And good luck.

You write: "Our humanity [...] is our criterion for judgement".²⁵ My question comes from the fact that I was so struck by this tenderness towards one's own humanity that I wish to consider it thus in everything, even in what frightens me. The other evening, when I was reading the chapter in your book on carnal presence, a presence which brings with it something which responds to all our need for meaning and affection, I began to cry, feeling a huge desire for this, and also a great sense of loss. I did not sleep well that night. The morning after—it was the Feast of Saint Magdalene—the priest at Mass repeated that step: "On my bed at night I sought him whom my heart loves - I sought him but I did not find him [...] I will seek Him whom my heart loves".²⁶ I was moved by how I felt it was me being described. All of my desire for that kind of love emerged, alongside a little fear of discovering that often I do not find it. Then I tell myself—and immediately correct myself—that I am on a journey, even if, often, I realize that I am only understanding slowly what virginity is, and that I should live this love, instead of living it more like a loss than a carnal presence. I am struck and moved by the fact that it is so carnal that I miss it. This often generates lots of doubts about my journey, on what can correspond. So I think that maybe what I miss is something else: a husband, a house, a different, less complicated job; I am assailed by thousands of doubts and think back to what has happened in the last few months. In the three

²⁴ [«mi accorgo che tu sei, / come un'eco [...] rinasco»] A. Mascagni, «Il mio volto», in *Canti*, Società Coop. Ed. Nuovo Mondo, Milano 2014, p. 196.

²⁵ J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes. What saves us from nothingness*, trans. Sheila Beatty, Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milano 2020, p. 39.

²⁶ The Song of Songs 3:1-2.

months I spent at home, I was almost always physically alone, but I experience this Presence in certain moments in a physical way, something which had never happened to be before. Perhaps this is why I move feel this absence even more. How do you experience this carnality? I am frightened to look at this part of me, but it is too important: I desire too greatly to rediscover this love.

Carrón. Let's start from the end: "I experienced this Presence in certain moments in a physical way". What did you learn in those moments?

I have been greatly struck by these last few months, because I was frightened to be alone, so at the start it was hard, and most of all...

Carrón. But whilst you felt this, you were also aware of not being alone, you were full of that Presence was that even physical. Let's not backtrack! Repeat what you said, because you do not realize the amazing things you say.

It had almost never happened to me before then. Maybe this is why I feel its absence all the more.

Carrón. Previously, you felt its absence because it was not there; now you feel the absence because it is present; in fact, the absence is all the greater because it is present. What does this tell you?

The absence is greater because I experienced it.

Carrón. So where do your doubts comes from? From not recognizing this.

I struggle to recognize every time that it is an absence of Him. I'll give you an example.

During lockdown, I almost always woke up thinking of a person I had fallen in love with; I missed being able to see them, and I told myself I should not miss them. Don Michele told me: "You cannot ask in another circumstance; you must ask in the circumstance at hand". I therefore began not to reject the fact that I missed that person, but I asked Him to accompany in this; I experienced that He accompanied me, because I did not despair, so I can say that I experienced...

Carrón. But in that moment, when you felt the absence of that person, did you doubt that they existed?

No, I had no doubts, but...

Carrón. Perfect. And what was the greatest sign that you had no doubt about that presence? What was the thing that confirmed that presence, that it was not a product of your mood swings?

That I missed them.

Carrón. You missed them. So what should you learn from this? You experienced the absence of Christ, but after you experience the physical presence of Christ for the first time, you missed Him even more. Before the more a person you meet proves to be crucial for your life, the more you miss them. This is the start of virginity. If we do not consider this, then doubts will prevail, because we will not understand that the method by which He makes Himself so present revitalizes my desire for Him, all the absence of Him you feel, which is akin to when you are in love with someone. A sense of absence, nostalgia, is not a sign that He is not there. It is the greatest sign that He is.

But is it normal that one feels this absence 99% of the time, and that the moments of fullness are so few? I say: either this fullness increases in time...but it is not enough to say that this fullness will grow in time.

Carrón. The question is whether you start to experience it.

You might miss someone, but it is better when they are there!

Carrón. What must happen is what a sister of a child told me. The child said to the mother: "Mom, I miss you when you are not there". But then he added—an eight-year-old kid!—"the problem is that I miss you when you are there, too". Because if presence does not revitalize in you the desire of that person, in the end, you can do without them. Christ responds to your

sense of absence and at the same time regranting you your desire for Him. If we do not understand this, ultimately, we will think that Christ comes to satisfy our thirst, which for us means to eliminate the thirst, become stones, so that we no longer feel absence or desire anything. But if you were currently in love with someone, would you definitely not want to miss them? Is this what you would want? Ask yourself! Since you do not understand this, you end up imagining that the ideal is not feeling His absence, thinking that if you feel the absence, it means that He is not there, there is no answer. Consequently, we fill that absence with other images, one after another, cancelling them one after another because none of them respond. If Christ were something that we produce ourselves, it would just be one among others in the pantheon of our imaginations.

So the point is that absence is carnal.

Carrón. The absence is carnal, as you say. But if you do not treasure what you begin to experience, you will not realize this. Absence is carnal. The more your 'I' is needful, the more your humanity is needful, the more you feel that absence. Yet, at the same time, the more Christ is present, as happened to Mary Magdalene, the more you cannot sleep at night because you miss Him. On the day of the Resurrection, she could not sleep; she had to go and seek Him. If you do not have this desire when you wake up, the desire to seek Him, to observe silence to be close to Him, what is the point in getting up? It would be to seek breadcrumbs which would leave you all the more dissatisfied. You wake up differently only if you realize that Christ reawakens your desire like no one else. Why does He reawaken it so potently? Because He is the only one who corresponds. The only One capable of responding to all your desire, and the only One who can reawaken it. In order not to cancel it, but to satisfy it all the more each time. The day you do not feel His absence, you would not care about Christ, or about anyone else, if you did not have that nostalgia. So, the fact that you feel the urgency of this nostalgia more than ever is the clear sign, as you said, of His presence. Now you must desire whether this responds to your desire, or whether to seek something else. Try! You decide.

Recently, I had the opportunity to spend a few days in a community which hosts individuals recovering from various types of addiction; I went after being invited by a friend who founded the place, spurred on by my own journey of verification. They were three intense days, which gave me the opportunity to have meetings and conversations which provoked in me a great sympathy for these people's suffering, dramatic stories, abandonments, incarcerations—some for half their lives—and broken families. Mostly I saw people, many of them young, who let life pass by, filling free time with tobacco, card games, and table football matches. The most beautiful thing I take away with me are the personal conversations I had. In some of these people I saw that it is not just a case of letting life pass by. For example, there was one boy who got excited when he learnt that I play guitar, and he told me he wished to learn to play drums, and that then he would like to go to school to become a mechanic. Another was a brilliant decorator, and taught me to make a terracotta plate. I saw the eyes of another boy, not much older than twenty, light up when I told him I could find out how his brother was doing in prison, who is the person he is closest to. Yet what provoked even more sympathy was the end of these conversations, the bitter taste of those 'but's. "Sure, I desire this, but...". "I could tell you what I want to do when I get out, but...". Everything ended with a 'but'. It was as if there was no value in having a desire, because for them reality was a big "but", not an ally, so we should all just accept what we have. I'm telling you these things because I was struck to see that the engine is there, but it can be choked. It happens to me, too, so I understand it well. When a bit of liveliness emerges, it is better to stifle it, as happened when I suggested watching a film in their cineforum. Afterwards, a boy came to me to tell me that he liked it a lot, and would even rewatch it, but did not want to say so in front

of the others, to avoid looking too enthusiastic. I feel like this time of nothingness and boredom that I saw is like an obstacle course; it elicited a fair few questions. Why does the engine of our humanity work, but is so stifled? Why has desire lost its dignity? And then: who am I in front of all of this? I have this sympathy for them and do not want to lose the people I meet.

Carrón. What does all of this tell you? Firstly, that the engine is there, and thus there is also desire, nostalgia, our desire to live well, even in depression. There is nothing that can eliminate it. We might find ourselves in better or worse situations, but the engine remains intact. The “but”—which jams the engine—is a decision of freedom, and the game is played out there. If I do not fully accept my desire for fullness, because I cannot see how it will be fulfilled, if I block it with a “but”, then the adventure is over.

What must happen for the “but” not to prevail? This is the question. If we do not embark on a journey in life to slowly acquire trust in He who awakens our desire, our “buts” will inevitably prevail. So what does the Mystery do? It challenges all our “buts, constantly reopening a possibility, so that we can understand, as we said yesterday, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy. There are more possibilities than those we can imagine ourselves. Constantly challenging us, the Mystery makes us reasonable, truly open. It makes us, as I said at School of Community, real.

Our battle against nihilism is played out at this level: everything depends on the fact that those young men and women find people in whom nihilism is defeated. That they, and we, may see One, Christ, who wipes away their “buts” with a unique method of showing Himself to them, not automatically responding to every desire: sometimes, He responds, and sometimes He does not. For example, he did not heal all the sick He encountered. If those He healed had not grown in their certainty of not being alone, their certainty that there was another possibility which constantly overcame their own limits, then their “buts” would have prevailed.

We are called, we have been called, chosen through vocation, to see Christ defeat every “but”. He spares us nothing: not depression, illness or nostalgia. He does not spare us anything because our relationship with Him must be so human that we can testify to a humanity, a way of living in reality, that challenges every “but”. Christianity, nowadays, can be interesting for people not because it speaks of Christian doctrine—which everyone thinks they already know, and find disinteresting—or because it is a game of interpretations, but because it proposes a real, carnal presence to everyone, a presence which challenges every “not”, every depression, every circumstance. Thus, we can truly be companions for anyone: this is the greatest urgency that exists today. There are plenty of people touting theories, the internet is full of them, but if there is not someone who challenges that “but”, in the end, the “but” will prevail, in us and in others. This is the vocation to which we are called; Christ gives it to us for the sake of all. So that we can continue to testify to His victory over nothingness.

Berchi. Picking up what you said yesterday evening about humanity, there is an interesting question on the reaction to one’s own humanity, on how it is not an obstacle, and not a big “but”.

What is this humanity we should aspire to? I have always said: “This is my humanity”, and dare to say: “This is how I am”, according to beautiful or challenging situations, thinking that the word “humanity” were a definition for describing the aspects of my personality and temperament. I might have a pleasant experience, and my humanity is revealed to be available and welcoming; I might have a bad experience, and my humanity crushes me, I feel crushed. I am referring to something recent. Last year, I was in a serious car accident, which

didn't involve other vehicles: just my mother was with me. Our recovery times were different: I took 20 days; my mother took 120. After a year, I receive a notice of criminal proceedings for causing injuries to my mother, even though there were no complaints or reports filed. It is part of a new law on deaths caused by driving. This upset us both, more than the accident. My mother lives with me, is 90 years old, and I have always looked after her. That day I was responding to one of her needs. The Lord wanted us to stay here on Earth, but a law written by humans, running its course, makes me suffer, because I experience it as an injustice, as I feel crushed. Is my humanity this reaction, too?

Carrón. What do you think?

I think so, yes.

Carrón. Is this your humanity?

I always say: "This I show I am. This is my humanity". But I realize that...

Carrón. But is this all you are? Are you just this reaction?

No, I am not just that reaction.

Carrón. Perfect. This reaction is part of your humanity, but it does not represent the whole of your humanity. Unfortunately, we often reduce our humanity to what you described: if the situation is good, you are open; if it is bad, you let yourself be crushed. The point is whether—faced with the criminal proceedings—anything happened in the relationship with your mother. *It is a beautiful relationship, as has always been the case.*

Carrón. See? Not even a law on road deaths—a situation which on other occasions might have crushed you—could ruin your relationship. This is the point. It is beautiful that you have an example of a relationship which, not even when it is so wounded, so crushed, can be broken. This is the gift of a relationship which can withstand any test, a relationship which is so strong, intense, and consistent that not even the time bomb of criminal charges can ruin it. "What a joke", you might have said, "I had to look after my mother and now I am facing charges!". Yet this doubt did not affect your relationship. Wouldn't you want this to be the case in every situation? Even if the event shocked both of you, the reaction of your personality did not impact at all on the bond between you. Imagine if we had a relationship with Christ that had that intensity, such consistency that no circumstance, however bad, could wound it or break it. It is a relationship of faith which is created in time, with a certainty which grows in time, just like the bond with your mother. It is identical. It is a journey which, in time, creates a certainty which can withstand anything. Just as happened to Jesus: not even the suffering on the cross could break his constitutive relationship with the Father.

Berchi. There is someone from Brazil which wishes to speak, but for the sake of time, I will read the translation of her contribution. Then, if you wish to talk further, our friend is online. *"I found many excuses to avoid continuing the Introduction of the Exercises. I preferred to reread what you wrote for the Pilgrimage, and it helped me a lot. I fixed on the phrase "It is a sacrifice which the Mystery has allowed as a step on the journey towards our destiny, a step on the pilgrimage of life". I would close my eyes in the evening with this phrase in my mind, saying: "Everything is ok, and when I reopen my eyes, everything will be ok: I will be able to visit my parents, who I haven't seen in a year, I will have less to do at work, and I will stop receiving news of friends' parents dying with Covid". Today, having spoken with a friend from San Giuseppe who has Covid-19 and lost his father yesterday without having been able to go to his funeral and console his mother, I told him he should have made a contribution today. He had just lost his father, and had all the reasons to fall apart, but instead it was he who almost consoled me, telling me that he had experienced this event with the certainty that Christ does not abandon us, and is his family's support. I told him it is a grace to live like this, because even just thinking of losing my parents, I fall to pieces, just as I do when I hear something similar happen to other people. My parents live 2000 miles away,*

and, because of the pandemic, could not visit me in April, as planned; and I do not know when I will see them. I felt compelled to speak at the San Giuseppe assembly for my friend who lost his father: he forced me to trust this proposal, and I did so, reengaging with the text of School of Community, of which I had only read various parts. Honestly, Carrón, this introduction unsettled me a lot. I wanted to send you “grazing”—as we say here—because it felt unjust that, instead of calming us, you kept recalling examples of friends who had shared their experiences of nothingness. I wanted to ask you: “Do you want us to drown? It is not enough that we are living life this? Why do you keep mentioning people, even in CL, who are struggling?”. This even became anger. Why do you not simply say: “It is a moment the Lord is giving us as part of our journey” and leave it at that? I wished to calm my heart, awaiting the end of this period. I thought: “It seems as though our guide wants to mess up our lives”. Rereading this introduction in one go was even harder. Thankfully I did not stop reading, and went to the end, listening to the cry of the blind man Bartimaeus. At this point I realize that shouting is my task right now. I desire to respond to myself and to the Lord. Shouting does not take away my discomfort, but I understand that there is nothing else to do when faced with such a situation”.

Carrón. But there is also more to do. Look at your discomfort. Often, we shout because we do not want to look at it. We seek justification by carrying out empty devoted, pious acts, giving ourselves an alibi for not looking at it. But I do not wish to live like that, constantly looking elsewhere, as if what people were living were not happening. I want to say to everyone—by looking at what no one wants to look at—that it is possible to look at it, that with the power of what has happened in our lives, we can look at everything, truly everything. But we do not realize this: “The gaze which recognizes the desert does not belong in the desert”.²⁷ There is no more dramatic and—we would say—more pessimistic description of the ancient world than that of Saint Paul in his letter to the Romans, a description which has always struck me. Scholars ask themselves: “Why, with all the beautiful things he could say, does Saint Paul waste time looking at the situation?”. Because Saint Paul, who is not a sociologist, looks at how Christ considered disease, how Christ considered all human needs. With Christ in his eyes, Saint Paul could look at everything, absolutely everything. And if we, too, can look at everything, it means that Christ has already won. It is useless to talk to me about Christ, to try to defend Christ with words, if then Christ is just a king of the cemetery, where nothing happens. I am not interested in this kind of faith. Keep it for yourselves, adorn it with empty prayer. I am interested in looking at everything. This is the great challenge don Giussani offered us: religiosity is “live always the real intensely”; it is not escaping from reality to shelter in the world of piety, it is going into reality in depth in order to see how there, within reality, there is a Presence capable of defeating nothingness, thanks to which nothingness does not win in us.

If we do not follow this path, our vocation will be useless for the world, a world in which everyone wishes to escape from reality. Some flee on trips—as Gaber said yesterday —, others fill life with their own theories, and others close themselves in a bubble, as a friend from Kazakhstan told us—she had gone to visit a friend who, out of fear of contracting the virus, stayed at home, stopped working and took sleeping pills. This is the defeat of the human! On the contrary, Saint Paul can look at everything, including the dramatic situation of his time, because he had Christ in his eyes. This is the new knowledge—which we spoke about at School of Community—which is not born of analysis, but from the event of Christ, which enables us to look at everything in a new manner. I always use the example of a child who, accompanied by his mother, will enter any darkness. We, too, can look at any situation when

²⁷ [«Lo sguardo che s'accorge del deserto non appartiene al deserto»] L. Giussani, *Ciò che abbiamo di più caro* (1988-1989), Bur, Milano 2011, p. 432.

accompanied by Christ, if Christ is a present companion for us. How can we know whether Christ is this companion, or an empty word? By our capacity of looking at reality, not fleeing from reality. You must decide what to do. A faith which is not perceived in all its human convenience, a faith which is not recognized as pertinent to the needs of life—as Giussani says—will not last long. Thus, today, it is not our impression of things which is in play; what is in play is faith in Jesus Christ. “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”²⁸

*You have already explained it a bit, but I wanted you to go further on this question of tenderness. Yesterday you described exactly what has happened to me over the last months; the shift from the boredom of lockdown to something which happened and reawakened me. At work, during an evaluation of company performance, two people who rely on me told me that I had not helped them in several moments, meaning they had not reached their objectives; and that this was my fault. They are young, and so it is fairly normal that it is never their fault, but I was knocked down by this, because it was clear that the trust I had tried to create with them had not developed, and I realized they were right about some things. What happened? My self-esteem instantly disappeared, and with it everything which holds my life together; my vocation, Christ’s preference for me, and my friends who could not help with my “I am worthless because I have failed”. This was my definition of myself: the value I gave myself coincided with what I knew or did not know how to do. In the subsequent days, the only thing that uplifted me was speaking with my boss, who revitalized my interest in work, and helped me to consider my mistakes. But this was not enough for me, because from that moment, I had commenced work on the tenderness you speak about in the second chapter of *The Radiance in Your Eyes*. I told myself: “What if work keeps going badly? I will change job and learn. Is this it, do I constitute what I can do? It’s not possible. Everything within me rejects this”. In that chapter, you quote John Paul II: “Tenderness is the ability to feel with and for the whole person”.²⁹ How can one learn this? And, most of all, how can this become a certainty that withstands self-disappointment? Thanks.*

Carrón. It becomes certainty only by embarking on the journey you described. When you fail in something, you judge yourself thus: “I am worthless because I have failed”, because your definition of yourself is linked only to what you can do, to your ability. Facing circumstances, your opinion of yourself emerges. Yet, at times, as in this case, one can have the fortune of having a boss that notices discomfort and offers a consolation. But simple consolations are not enough, not even from a boss. So where did you get to? So the point of realizing something which I am not sure you did before: that you do not constitute what you can do. Understand? You now have a gaze towards yourself which you could only dream of having previously. But why did Christ not spare you this journey? Because He wishes to free you once and for all from your identification with your ability alone. It is not as if, within the movement, you have never heard the saying that your value does not coincide with your success, but it is one thing to perceive it as an abstract doctrine, and it is another to experience it, so that this notion enters your being, becoming self-consciousness. So—Giussani says—if we are spared this struggle, that tenderness will not enter our self-consciousness, the activity of our reason. Instead, when this tenderness towards yourself becomes experience, you do not need to censure anything anymore, because you acquire the capacity of looking at yourself fully, as John Paul II says. This certainty emerges slowly. And those who do not undergo the journey which you have begun to travel may forget this certainty, because no one can spare them the journey. This is the adventure of life, the

²⁸ Luke 18:8.

²⁹ K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, Love & Responsibility Foundation, New York, 2002, p. 17.

fascination of life, because even when things do not go well, when one fails. And if when we realize that we are not up to standards, we still receive a boss' praise, this is not enough, because it is not sufficient, it is too small compared to the capacity of the soul, to our urgent need for tenderness. If I am enthused by Giussani's teaching it is because of this, because he introduced me to the experience of life which you have begun to perceive. If you are interested in this adventure, you will discover reality more and more. If, instead, you re overcome with fear and hibernate, if you shelter in a bubble to keep warm and no challenge overwhelms you, you must decide whether you are interested in suffocating, or participating in the adventure. For me, there is no comparison. We can lose out on life living—as Eliot says—or we can gain it as we live. What is the difference? Not that certain things happen to me, and certain others happen to you. Things happen to everyone, as we tell each other, but many, not having the freedom and the courage to face them, shelter themselves in something they have imagined to hide their defeat, with reasons that are like an epitaph on their tomb, instead of facing things with the audacity needed. Christ came to introduce, to generate in the world, a new type of person, who will not stop at challenges. But only if you allow Christ to enter your being will you be able to give yourself that certainty you need to live. Now, having faced that situation, you have more humanity than if you had been spared it. If I had not looked at many things in my life, if I had been spared this, that or the other, I would not be what I am now. This is why I have always looked with enthusiasm on what the Mystery did not spare me; it's not that the Mystery has nothing else to do, it is that it has a passion for my and your destiny, like a mother who wants a child to grow, and so does not spare them any of life's challenges, but rather accompanies them so that they can ace the future situations they will find themselves in, in which the mother will not be there to make decisions. Doing so, the mother makes the child more consistent in being able to face challenges. There are two forms of companionship: one which wants to spare us the relationship with reality, and the other, which accompanies us to victory. You must decide which companionship you want. There will always be someone there ready to console you, but this is not what is need to live' even if it appears useful, it is not enough. In this choice, this drama, life is decided.

Berchi. I am going to read the last contribution we received.

“Hello everyone. I have been suffering from ALS for 12 years, but I am not saddened by this situation which Christ has chosen for me, because it has been an opportunity to discover my faith. And yet I am uneasy. I have many thoughts that I often share with Christ: “Can You take some of my thoughts?”. I think of my house, what will become of it after my death, I think of my dear book collection cultivated over many years, I think of my children and those who are unemployed, I think of my grandchildren, who have no faith, and so on. Why I am so uneasy? Why do I not trust the Lord? Thank you for everything”.

Carrón. You are uneasy because you live with the knowledge that everything is an opportunity, everything has been an opportunity, which the Mystery has given you, including ALS; the disease was not ‘against’ you—as we see when we visit you—but it has made you grow. What does this tell you about your question, about the uneasiness you have towards your children and grandchildren? The problem is not whether you can spare them the circumstance that the Mystery has in store for them, just as it did not spare you them, but whether you can recognize in your experience any reasons you already have for trusting, and whether they, too, will entrust themselves as they see you do. This is your contribution as a mother and grandmother. What are you testifying? What are you offering them? What key are you offering everyone after 12 years lived in the way you face your illness? This: only if they entrust themselves to He to whom you entrust yourself, will any situation, even ALS, become full of life. If you have seen it happen in you, why do you worry about your children and grandchildren? He will worry about how He will respond. We must simply be curious—

“How will Christ manage with them? How will He respond to your uneasiness for those closest to you?”—after seeing how He managed with you.

I will finish by reading a text which accompanied me a great deal over the last months, and speaks about precisely this, because not even Christ was spared challenges. It is from a great theologian, von Balthasar. Christ was not spared anything; in fact, even in the moment he was challenged by suffering and death, even that circumstance was an opportunity for him to show everyone, as we see in you, the intensity of His relationship with His Father, which he entrusted Himself to, no matter what.

Von Balthasar writes: “This primal trust in the Father [which Christ has], which no mistrust ever clouds, rests on the Holy Spirit common to Father and Son. In the Son, the Spirit keeps alive the unshakeable trust [in the Father], that the Father’s every ordinance (even the transformation of the distinction of persons into abandonment) [as happens in the end] will always be an ordinance of love [from the Father] which the Son, now that he is a man, must reciprocate with human experience”.³⁰ This is the root of Christ’s victory over nothingness. His way of living as a Son is precisely the victory over nothingness which you are testifying to your children, your grandchildren and all of us. This is why we have been “called” in this dramatic moment in history, but we will come back to that this afternoon.

Thank you.

³⁰ H.U. von Balthasar, *Unless You Become Like this Child*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 1991, p. 31.

Notes from the lesson by Julián Carrón
At the Spiritual Exercises of the San Giuseppe Fraternity via video link
Saturday afternoon, August 8th, 2020

Entrance music: *Ludwig van Beethoven, Symphony no. 5 - Spirto Gentil CD 11* *

- *La notte che ho visto le stelle*

What was the last time something happened to you which meant you could not sleep? That is what this song is about. An event which occurs, unexpectedly, and commands the entire human. If this does not happen, we are stray mines, like everyone else, incapable of pulling away from nothingness. This is the challenge we are faced with. It is not a question, as our Brazilian friend said, of speaking about nothing, but of verifying when we have been so taken, of when our life has been so transformed, so over abundantly that it eludes words, that we cannot sleep. We are talking about an experience, something existential, not of abstract ideas or endless discussions, which hide the fact that we have not been taken, that we are “regressing”, as Gaber says.

In my intervention this afternoon I will try to trace a path answering the question: what can pull us away from nothingness? This will be an aid to reading the whole text of *The Radiance in Your Eyes*.³¹, which we cannot do this afternoon.

Let us remain aware of what we said yesterday evening, which was evidenced by this morning’s assembly. We can belong to the San Giuseppe Fraternity, we can form part of the life of the church, but this does not mean experiencing that often, our lives, as those of others, are at the mercy of a vortex which impedes us from being ourselves.

The question is the one Jesus recalled: what advantage does a man have who has gained the whole world, but loses and ruins himself?³²

Because we can have everything, we can achieve our workplace or interpersonal objectives, succeed in our projects, but it is as if nothing is capable of fully magnetizing us. Thus our humanity, which I emphasize so much—this morning, too—is an unavoidable critical barrier for recognizing when we have found the answer we were looking for. Often, we acknowledge the urgent need for that fullness which the heart cannot help but desire, but our own attempts are insufficient, so much so that we fail to fix our gaze. We can see this clearly. Nor Christian words nor formal rituals are enough to captivate us, magnetize us: this is not the nature of Christianity. Thus, in order for us to be magnetized, the Mystery has filled those concepts—as Benedict XVI said—with flesh and blood.³³

“*Caro cardo salutis*”.³⁴ Only something carnal, historical, can captivate us enough to avoid the triumph of nihilism in us, whatever the form in which we describe it. If you do not like this word, choose another, but the problem is that we can spend days being blown side to side, without anything captivating us. Life thus becomes boring, and unbearable. And when life challenges us with its urgencies, we see how everything is incapable of captivating us.

* “The beginning is the bursting in of an event. The whole drama of the orchestra develops from the event of those four initial notes that are continually repeated. In those notes is expressed that destiny that, in life, passes through the perception of bewilderment, of defeat, of sadness, and at times presents itself in its harshest aspect of trial or temptation”. (L. Giussani, “Like a ray of sunshine through the dark cloud”, in *Spirto gentil*, p. 105).

³¹ J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes. What saves us from nothingness*, trans. Sheila Beatty, Editrice Nuovo Mondo, Milano 2020.

³² See Matthew 16:26.

³³ See Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter, *Deus caritas Est*, 12.

³⁴ Tertullian, *De carnis resurrectione*, 8,3: PL 2,806. Quoted in J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes*, p. 47.

Only starting from experience can we identify what will defeat nothingness. The point is finding something which corresponds so greatly that, as we sang, we cannot sleep. We cannot avoid our life being invested by this Presence which claims us down to our bones, arousing our desire, because just as it makes us experience an unimaginable correspondence, it makes our desire emerge in all its scope. Only stumbling across an exceptional presence can fill what Milosz calls “this emptiness in life”.³⁵

We come across many carnal presences every day, but not just any carnal presence brings with it something corresponding to all of our expectancy, and is thus capable of magnetizing our being.

So what can truly defeat nihilism? Only being magnetized by a presence, a carnality which brings with it something that corresponds to all our expectancy, all our desire, all our need for affection and tenderness. If this experience does not occur, we will not emerge from our nothingness; even if we are culturally shaped by religious discourses and busy ourselves in any way imaginable, we will speak of Christ in an empty manner. This is why Benedict XVI says that only in the incarnation, the eternal Logos has so bound himself to Jesus such that [...] [through Christ’s humanity] God touches man [...] always through the man Jesus.³⁶ Thus, the incarnation of Christ, God made Man, is a watershed in the history of man, and no one will be able to tear Him away from it. This is the great contribution don Giussani gave us: he made us understand that a Christianity reduced to discourse or rules will not interest anyone. It is in flesh—Giussani says—that we can recognize the presence of the Word made flesh. If the Word was made flesh, we will find it in flesh. Those who find Him will be aware of facing the most decisive event of their lives. There is a before and after. We see this happen. As a passage from the Gospel, which we read recently, says: that woman full of limits, who had sought fulfillment in every way possible, when overcome by tenderness, by a human presence, Christ, could not help but be magnetized by Him. Let us re read that passage: A Pharisee invited him to dine with him, and he entered the Pharisee’s house and reclined at table. Now there was a sinful woman in the city who learned that he was at table in the house of the Pharisee. Bringing an alabaster flask of ointment, she stood behind him at his feet weeping and began to bathe his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and anointed them with the ointment. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, that she is a sinner.” Jesus said to him in reply, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Tell me, teacher,” he said. “Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days’ wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?” Simon said in reply, “The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven.” He said to him, “You have judged rightly.” Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment. So I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little”.³⁷

Who would not desire to be met by a gaze full of tenderness, as happened to that woman, overcome by Christ’s gaze? Whatever she had done, however she had lived her life, none of it was an obstacle for her. Thus, none of the circumstances we described this morning should be an obstacle for us, after having read this passage from the Gospel.

What did that woman need in order to be “taken” by Christ’s gaze?

³⁵ O.V. Milosz, *Miguel Mañara. Mefiboseth. Saulo di Tarso*, Jaca Book, Milano 2010, p. 4.

³⁶ J. Ratzinger, «Cristo, la fede e la sfida delle culture», *Asia News*, n. 141/1994.

³⁷ Lc 7,36-47.

Only her humanity, as wounded and messy as it was—as everyone’s is. When she met that Man, her humanity, despite all her errors, was entirely magnetized, so much so that she could not be stopped: she faced the hostility and disapproval of everyone at that table, to go and wash Christ’s feet with her tears.

See how nothingness can be defeated? Blown all over the place, as we all are, that woman was suddenly overcome by something unforeseen, something she awaited and yet was unexpected, so much so that she had the audacity to be herself in front of everyone, showing how much she had been magnetized, not caring what everyone else thought. She thus showed how nothingness can be defeated, what can defeat a life which is blown all over the place. The presence of Christ had generated such an attraction in her humanity, wounded and full of limits, that nothing could stop her.

From when Jesus appeared in history, those who encountered him could not help but feel their openness challenged, to let themselves be struck and attracted by Him. We were speaking of limits. Here, limits are irrelevant, people’s pasts are irrelevant, what we have done in the past does not matter, none of it matters, because Christ, now, is capable of accepting all of us as we are. It is so impressive to hear Giussani affirm that no human being has ever felt so radically affirmed as by that gaze introduced into history by that man, Jesus of Nazareth, going beyond any success or failure.³⁸ With his vertiginously affirmative gaze towards the human, Jesus says to the woman, who has washed His feet with her tears: “Your sins are forgiven”, they no longer count. It is that gaze which prevails. All the wrong, all the errors, pass into the background. He is the preponderant presence for that woman. It was so astonishing that his fellow diners began to say: “Who is this man who can forgive sins?”. But He says to the woman—as if He were totally disinterested in the others’ incredulity, or, today, in the rejection of those who do not recognize Him—and to those who let themselves be attracted by Him: “Your faith has saved you; go in peace!”.³⁹ She is first overcome, saved from her nothingness, her waywardness, and then comes Jesus’ affirmation, which described the experience she was already having, the salvation she was already participating in. The sinner in the Gospel was not thus pulled from nothingness by her own thoughts, resolutions or efforts. It was a Presence that had such a passion for her, such a preference for her person, her ‘I’, that she was won over. The trajectory of her life was totally changed, revolutionized, by that encounter: the gaze of others no longer mattered, because she was now totally defined by Jesus, by that gaze, that presence in flesh and bone. No one else in her life had ever looked at her like that man. Otherwise, she would not have dared to enter that house with a freedom capable of challenging everyone. She would not have washed His feet with her tears, or dried them with her hair. This is what shows—not words, or discourse—that her ‘I’ was pulled from nothingness! This is what speaks, and will always speak, to every human who finds his or herself at the mercy of nothingness, and awaits nothing more than being freed. And we can be freed only by One person, as happened to that woman.

Imagine the certainty that woman must have had to challenge the way she was looked at by the Pharisees and the whole city! Without this certainty, one ends up at the mercy of comments, our own and those of others. Yet such comments are nothing in front of “that” gaze. They have no power in front of “that” attraction. They cannot be removed, but they are impeded in their power to block our thoughts.

We can say, with von Balthasar, that it is “a certainty based on the human understanding’s own power of conviction, but on the manifest evidence of divine truth [...] not on having

³⁸ “No man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements. No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this!” (L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010, p. 1).

³⁹ Luke 7:50.

grasped, but on having been grasped”.⁴⁰ It was not her who captivated that man, it was she who was totally captivated by Him.

I am not surprised that this great theologian, von Balthasar, said many years ago that this is the key question of modern Christianity. If it is not this, if it is not the experience of being captivated like that woman, Christianity will not interest anyone. It would not interest us, let alone anyone else! We could maintain certain rituals, carry out “religious” acts, meet continuously to fill life with events, like the members of a club, but none of this will captivate us sufficiently. This is why von Balthasar says that today, faith will be credible for the world that surrounds us—and for us—only if “it first regards itself as being worthy of belief. And it will only do this if faith [...] does not first and last mean ‘holding certain propositions to be true’ which are incomprehensible to human reason and must be accepted only out of obedience of authority. While fully upholding the transcendence of divine revelation—nay, precisely because of it—faith must bring man to an understanding of what God is in truth, and in doing so it will also [...] bring him to an understanding of himself”.⁴¹

Through the carnality of that Presence, the woman in the Gospel experienced divine truth. The certainty and faith of that woman relied on the “manifest evidence of divine truth”, on that victorious attraction, that incomparable gaze of Jesus, by which she felt affirmed and grasped, and on the experience of a correspondence with her constitutive needs, never before experienced. This “revelation of glory” is so powerful, so resplendent, this splendor of the truth is so powerful, that it “needs no justification but itself”.⁴²

From the start of his educational work, Giussani shared Balthasar’s emphasis, in the awareness of how important this evidence is nowadays for the credibility of faith: “I was deeply convinced that, unless faith could be found and located in present experience, and confirmed by it [through the experience of a correspondence], and useful for responding to its needs, it would not be able to endure in a world where everything, everything, said and says the opposite”.⁴³

One can understand why Giussani, so enthusiastic about the experience he was living, could not help but say, in Saint Peter’s square, in front of the entire Church: “Only Christ takes my humanity so completely to heart. [...] ‘Who could ever speak to us of the love that Christ has for man, overflowing with peace?’ I’ve been repeating these words to myself for more than fifty years!”.⁴⁴ What an experience he must have lived!

Only if our humanity is captivated and embraced like this will we truly become ourselves. It does not depend on our efforts, but simply from letting ourselves being captivated entirely. Christ completely attracts me, since He is so beautiful!⁴⁵ But how can we have the same experience as the woman? Only if He, Christ, remains contemporary. Only the contemporary nature of Christ can pull us from nothingness. Only His presence, here and now, can be an adequate answer to nihilism, a lack of meaning, being blown from left to right. “Jesus Christ”, Giussani continues, “that man of 2000 years ago, is hidden, but becomes present in the guise, in the form of a different humanity”.⁴⁶

This means that Jesus becomes present today, carnally present, not in our thoughts, or our imagination, but in people we meet in whom we perceive a difference, a gaze, a capacity of being in reality, a freedom, a boldness, a knowledge, which amaze us. This is what many

⁴⁰ H.U. von Balthasar, *Glory of the Lord* vol I: *Seeing the Form*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, p. 134.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 140.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 126.

⁴³ L. Giussani, *The Risk of Education: Discovering Our Ultimate Destiny*, McGill-Queens University Press, 2019, p. xxxiii.

⁴⁴ L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World.*, p. 1-2.

⁴⁵ Jacopone da Todi, «Lauda XC», trans. Elisa Picchiotti.

⁴⁶ L. Giussani, “Something that Precedes All Else”, in *He is if He Changes*, 30DAYS, No.12, 1993, p. 44.

people testify, as you can read in the book. I will read a single testimony, that which gave the book its title.

“I never thought that on the cusp of fifty someone could be born again. I lived for forty-seven years convinced that Jesus Christ was not indispensable for me. All these years I pursued objectives that did not stand up to the test of time: the university, my profession, my family. [everything can go well, but] Each time I achieved one of my goals I didn’t feel satisfied and I always went in search of new objectives. While most people thought I had a beautiful life, I sensed that I was nourishing myself with something that didn’t sate me. All this generated a deep crisis. [Because if everything goes well and it is not enough, what is enough?] I felt useless and my relationships with friends, colleagues and loved ones began to be difficult. I wanted to be alone. [Instead, the unforeseen occurs]. One day, through my children’s school, I met a person whose eyes were radiant”. It was the radiance in someone’s eyes—not a doctrine, or an effort—in which the same experience was happening as in that woman. “We became good friends and this made me want his company. We went on vacation together with our respective families and I became more curious about him. I began to spend time with his friends, who then became my friends. I started participating in the gestures of the movement. I began to pray again, to go to Mass and confession. At times, I asked myself why I was doing this, and my answer was that it made me feel better”.⁴⁷

There is no other reason to look at myself in a different way, to embrace my humanity, to look at myself with the tenderness I have encountered. “I am happier!”. I thus live of this Presence; and of the companionship of friends who recall me to Christ. This is the method by which faith has always been communicated, and will continue to do so: an unforeseen encounter which awakens our desire and moves the individual to verify the promise that he or she brings, participating in the life of the Christian community.

To discover the truth, all that is needed is sincere attentiveness. Yet this attentiveness is anything but obvious, as Simone Weil explains: Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue. [...] Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty, and ready to be penetrated by the object”,⁴⁸ so that it can take it all in.

Accepting what our attentiveness notices, I slowly become more certain, to the point of trusting completely. Why could Peter trust Jesus? Only because sharing a life with Him had convinced him that if he could not trust that man who made a different experience of humanity possible, who could he trust? Faith consists in this recognition: “Faith is having the sincerity to recognize, the simplicity to accept, and the affection to cling to such a Presence”.⁴⁹

As Giussani said in Saint Peter’s square, it is easy, within reach of all, regardless of one’s history, one’s life: “It was a simplicity of heart that made me feel and recognize Christ as exceptional, with that certain promptness that marks the unassailable and indestructible evidence of factors and moments of reality, which, on entering the horizon of our person, pierce us to the heart”.⁵⁰ This is what can magnetize life.

But how can we be introduced to this way of living in reality?

Jesus lived on Earth like all of us. Like a real human, He dealt with particular, finite, fleeting things, suffered trials and tribulations, up to His death on the cross. But what enabled Him not to succumb to division and nihilism, in which everything vanishes and nothing captivates us? How is it possible that Christ, having lived a human experience like ours, was not also overcome by nihilism, having dealt with the same things as us?

⁴⁷ J. Carrón, *The Radiance in Your Eyes*., pp. 64-65.

⁴⁸ S. Weil, *Waiting for God*, Harper & Row, New York 1973, p. 111.

⁴⁹ L. Giussani-S. Alberto-J. Prades, *Generating Traces in the History of the World*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 8.

He lived the relationship with every aspect of reality as a great event which made Him face everything with intensity, like someone in love. In the experience of love, everything that happens becomes an event—as don Giussani always told us, quoting Guardini—everything acquires an import which would otherwise be weaker, but becomes an event in light of love. And what makes everything become an event? For someone in love, it is the relationship with their beloved. What relationship was so constitutive of Jesus that it determined his relationship with reality as a permanent event, a constant exaltation of reality in its entirety? What allows him to live reality with this intensity? His relationship with the Father. Jesus did not place His hope in self-affirmation, in His own projects, in His own aims, but lived everything as a great event in light of His relationship with the Father. Jesus thus introduced a new way of living reality into history which does not succumb to nihilism.

Thus, the big question is: how can this enthusiastic gaze towards the world and oneself, towards reality, become familiar, historically, for each of us, without ending up in boredom? Only if we learn and experience the same gaze that Jesus had towards reality.

Giussani tells us: “if man does not look at the world [every aspect of reality, however ephemeral] as something given, as an event, starting from the gesture of God which gives it to him now, it loses all its attraction”.⁵¹

Now we understand how, if we do not live reality like this, as the event of One who is giving it to me now, as we experience when truly in love, then everything becomes boring, and loses its attractiveness.

What made everything different for Jesus? His relationship with the Father. Thinking about His Father was not removed from His way of living a relationship with concrete things. Just as thinking of a person beloved is not removed from the actual relationship with them. It is the beloved person who makes everything else interesting, fascinating. Giussani says:

“Thinking of the Father is a truthful way of thinking of things, the true way; it is gaze you carry towards your wife or husband, your children, your work, the good and bad things that occur to you, towards yourself”.⁵² As our sick friend said: stop, think and look differently. When this happens, we cannot help but look at everything differently. Andrew returns home after meeting Him: his wife realized what has happened to him from the way he hugs her. This is what makes everything fascinating, but if this is lacking, then everything becomes boring. The question is thus how we can learn to be children like Jesus.

How can we become children in the Son? The disciples were introduced by Jesus to awareness of His relationship with the Father. “To those who did accept him”, says Saint John, “he gave power to become children of God”.⁵³

Who can we be introduced to this experience by, today? It is always Christ who introduces us to a relationship with the Father. But how?

Christ, as we have said, erupts into life now, attracting us to Him, through a presence, a specific presence, a persuasive encounter, through which we can experience the same relationship with Him as the first few who met Him. Thus, it is in the Son, in the relationship with Christ present here and now, in a different humanity, that we become children, that we learn to say: “Father” and to relate to reality like Jesus, with His Presence in our eyes.

The Son makes the Mystery of the Father familiar to us through the Church, and becomes an event for us through the grace and encounter with a charism, a gift of the Spirit. Charism is the method through which the Spirit of Christ enables us to perceive His exceptional presence, and gives us the ability to adhere to it with simplicity and love.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 29.

⁵² [Pensare al Padre è un modo veritiero di pensare alle cose, è il modo vero di pensare alle cose: è una modalità dello sguardo che porti a tua moglie o a tuo marito, ai tuoi figli, al tuo lavoro, al bene e al male che ti accade, a te stesso] L. Giussani, *La convenienza umana della fede*, Bur, Milano 2018, p. 132.

⁵³ John 1:12.

One particular individual enables us to relate to reality, and has a name and surname: Luigi Giussani.

Through the gift that God has given us, we have been reached by a gaze, a paternity, which has captivated us so much that we have experienced faith uniquely in our relationship with reality.

As we remembered this year, this is what we call “authority”: “Authority is when one sees in another that what Christ says corresponds to the heart. This is what guides the community”.⁵⁴ It is by becoming children that we can take, like any child, stock from the father. If we accept it, we, too, can be amazed by living reality with the same enthusiasm we saw Him live, with that unique freedom, that capacity of captivating our life. Authority is a present paternity. Having a father is a permanent asset, but generation is something present. Thus, if it does not reoccur now, it becomes a memory of the past, incapable of captivating us, of magnetizing us to enable us to have a totally new experience of reality.

Without this regeneration in the present, our relationship with the Father will not become living awareness, and no effort of our own will pull us from nothingness. Thus, authority is an essential factor in the construction of life.

Authority, as it is understood globally, is power, alienating despotism that creates nothing. Authentic authority, on the other hand, is an indispensable factor for the growth of the ‘I’, because authority, in a certain sense, is my truest self.

Yet today we find ourselves in a cultural moment in which authority is perceived as an obstacle to the growth of the ‘I’, not as a factor in its growth. It is in virtue of this promoted and lived estrangement—Giussani observes—that Today’s culture holds that it is impossible to know, to change oneself and reality “merely” by following a person. Our era cannot conceive of the person as an instrument of knowledge and change [...] Instead, for John and Andrew, the first two who ran up against Jesus, it was precisely by following that exceptional person that they learned to know differently and to change themselves and reality. From the moment of that first encounter, the method began to unfold in time”.⁵⁵

The entire aim of life is finding people on our path who help us to grow in this manner, who are so decisive for our way of living in the world. Because only this, as in the past, will pull us from nothingness. The experience of a novelty present today, of a carnality in which one can see that what Christ says is true, captivates me entirely, allowing me to start living reality without succumbing to nothingness. In today’s nihilistic culture, this is what can convince the modern man, the humanity of which we are part: encountering people who are so present that it is overwhelming. Because, as von Balthasar says, “love alone is credible”⁵⁶ to the world.

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⁵⁴ [L’autorità è una persona vedendo la quale uno vede che quel che dice Cristo corrisponde al cuore. Da questo il popolo è guidato] From a conversation between Luigi Giussani and a *Memores Domini* group (Milan, 29 September 1991), in «Chi è costui?», *Tracce-Litterae communionis*, n. 9/2019, p. 10.

⁵⁵ L. Giussani, “From Faith the Method”, in *Litterae Communionis Traces* 1 (2009) p. 5.

⁵⁶ H.U. von Balthasar, “Love alone is credible” Ignatius Press, San Francisco, p. 144.