

**Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, May 29, 2013**

Reference text: J. Carrón, "Introduction" in "Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" booklet in *Traces* no. 6, June 2013; *J. Carrón, "Ubi fides, ibi libertas,"* *Traces*, no. 4, April 2013; *J. Carrón, "In politics, too, the other is a good,"* *la Repubblica*, April 10, 2013 http://english.clonline.org/default.asp?id=559&id_n=20175

Song *L'iniziativa*

Song *Romaria*

Glory Be

We resume School of Community with the work we had assigned ourselves: the Introduction to the Fraternity Exercises, the text "*Ubi fides, ibi libertas*," published in the April issue of *Traces*, and the letter I wrote to *la Repubblica* this past April 10th. They are all tools to help us go deeper into what we told each other in Rimini.

*One thing struck me right away on Friday evening at the Exercises. It was your first statement: all the things we do are not enough to reawaken our humanity. This point provoked me a lot, because even if I am sure that I don't deny this statement, in my daily life the opposite often happens: often what prevails is organizing, doing, in any case my wanting to fix the situation and the day, in the deceptive attempt that this may help my humanity, that it may reawaken my humanity. Then I discover that the Lord uses the most unusual, even the most ordinary circumstances to correct me. This fact happened to me: one morning I arrived at the office and they told me that there was a client who needed to talk to me, a client that I wasn't expecting at all. I went to greet him reluctantly (because I had already planned what to do that morning). It was someone I have known for quite a while, a very nice, good-hearted and highly esteemed person, who in the past year was hit hard by life. He asked my opinion regarding a matter that involved money. I asked him a few questions to get a better picture of the situation, and at a certain point he told me, "Listen, I know that I am not entitled to that money, however if I have the slightest chance, if there is any loophole that allows me to get even, I want to do it, because they treated me poorly." At this point I started to give him my opinion. Towards the end of our meeting, while I was saying goodbye to him (I could have ended it there, indifferently, because in any case this had been an interruption that was making me waste time that morning), the need to not let go of the essence of what he was telling me emerged in me in a striking way. So, I asked him, "Excuse me, but is it possible that you want to answer to an injustice you suffered with another injustice? Is it possible to live like this, from this point of view?" It ended there, like that. I was struck because it made me understand that within me - in us - there is something irreducible, that I can attempt to censor or hide, but that in the impact with the provocation of reality surfaces: at one point it surfaces. I think it is the same thing you said in the letter to *la Repubblica* that struck me, because contrary to many comments I had read and heard on the Italian situation that said (and I am quoting from the kindest), "We have to get together again, we have to forget our past hatred to do something for Italy," you didn't stop at that, but you went*

to the core of the origin that permits this coexistence, this possibility of staying together. For me this position originates from faith, that is, from a man who has been taken hold of by the event of Christ and who is able to look at reality with such depth and judge it like this.

Why do you think this has to do with faith?

I think it has to do with faith because only a position of faith like this can reawaken the humanity within me.

This means that reality is what reawakens our humanity, as we always said beginning with chapter X of *The Religious Sense*. You described real facts. Period. This is what reawakens us. The point is that the more I live the faith the more my humanity surfaces, precisely because it is reawakened in the encounter with the exceptional Presence; precisely because sharing our life with Christ, as we said in “*Ubi fides, ibi libertas,*” makes us more and more able to experience that things speak to us. Indeed, you were amazed by the fact that you could have ignored what was happening to you that morning, during that unexpected visit, as I could have not become aware of the origin of the political chaos. This has to do with faith because in living in the presence of Christ, in living in a place where Christ happens, the Mystery educates us to be ever more available, and therefore to let ourselves be struck by everything; not because things are different (another person runs into the same reality I run into), but because the capacity for being struck is different in an ‘I’ that has been taken hold of by Christ. This is why faith doesn’t flatten our humanity. On the contrary, faith exalts our humanity, since the religious sense is the verification of faith and this is why it has to do with faith: to be more and more amazed that reality speaks to me (not by the fact that I am able to do something), so that building my life – as you said so well– doesn’t start from my doing, but starts from this allowing myself to be constantly struck by a Presence who constantly reawakens me, so much so that everything, any circumstance, becomes a sign. This is our desire: that we may live everything like this! Because, the alternative is to be indifferent in front of anything that happens.

Or very angry.

As we know so well... Thank you.

I was struck, and struck again when I reread the Introduction to the Exercises, but already that evening in Rimini I was struck almost physically, when you ended by quoting from the Book of Revelation, “You have persevered and you have endured many hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet, I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.” And you emphasized, “Where is our first love?” It was like a stab to the heart, on the one hand freeing me (because it was as if I could finally touch what really interests me), and on the other reopening the wound. My first love is the only thing that interests me, and bringing it up again is what makes me live, what puts me in motion again. I’ll recount two facts. At the end of April it was the anniversary of my ordination, there was a celebration (a good party, I would say) and there was a mix of people with different backgrounds, possibly many of them didn’t even know each other. We had a roast pig and then we sang some songs together. The first song was dedicated to me. As soon as it started I wanted to run away, to leave, not because I was embarrassed, but because there was something wrong. My first thought was that my reaction was due to my usual Piedmontese temperament... Instead, I understood that the problem was that in looking at that celebration putting my anniversary at its center was to move away from the first love, until I started to suffocate. Why? Because actually it was extremely clear that at the center of this celebration there was a story of friendship created by Him, woven by Him, and that

He was the reason that made the party worthwhile. For me it was extremely clear that He has a physiognomy that, when put at the center fills the hearts, while as soon as you move your gaze everything becomes burdensome. The second fact has to do with a meeting in which you spoke, addressing a difficulty we had had and also a pretty tough discussion that had ensued, in the attempt to settle the issue and help us take a step forward. While you were speaking I noticed that I would have retorted, I would have said, "It isn't exactly like that," I would have dotted my i's and crossed my t's. However, right there, once again, it is as if it became very clear that I had to choose if I wanted to let myself be attracted by His Presence that you were describing, that you were bringing out and putting back at the center, and that was creating a beautiful unity to behold, or if I wanted to dot the i's and cross the t's and keep focusing on something else. I was struck because it is precisely what the Pope says, that is, that the only thing that gives us life is to follow Him as He manifests Himself, in all His attractiveness, otherwise we stick to structures (for heaven's sake, structures of the movement, Christian, that speak of Him) that don't make us live.

How does one see where his first love is and what happened to it? He sees it because one is at a celebration and he realizes that it is very beautiful, that it is organized with the best intentions, but that He is not at the center. It is as if what Fr. Giussani witnessed to us in the episode of that gathering at a *Memores Domini's* house we recounted at the Exercises is starting to become ours. This reveals what journey we are making and it helps us answer the questions we sometimes have. A person writes, "My fiancé has been abroad for a few months. After a short time he was already struck by the fact that, although the city is mostly atheist, or Protestant at best, there are beautiful families, young couples who get married, many children, they work very hard to be able to go home around 4:00 pm and have time for their family. "Very beautiful!" he told me. However, at the same time, immediately, there was his question: "But if these people who are atheists have beautiful families, so beautiful, what is Christianity adding, what is the 'more' of Christianity? Honestly, at first I didn't think the question was pointless, but that the answer was obvious. I was also a bit discouraged by his curiosity and that he was so attracted by the option that a world without Christ could be possible and beautiful. Then the Exercises started with the same question and at this point I had to take it seriously. The following week I went to visit him and I could see and touch first-hand that it is the perfect place where to be good is pointless [Eliot's famous line], where one can do anything as long as he respects the rules, where one is taught how everything is possible, but not the truth of it. When I came back home the question of the Exercises was even more alive: 'What is the difference between being good people and Christianity in the flesh?' " This is the question that becomes ever more urgent. Why? Because many people are good persons and live like this (one can go to a party and be content with it). Fr. Giussani says it well in *L'attrattiva Gesu` (The attraction of Jesus)* on p.165, as he answers to a person who had come back from Africa, "If when you were there you were something much greater, it was because you had this [faith]: be careful not to lose it here. It is easier to lose it here [he was saying this in a *Memores Domini's* house, that would seem the place most fitting to live faith] than in Africa. It is easier to lose it in your house than in Africa. [...] Because your house, created by the influence of Christ, is so full of humanity, so full of colors and flavors and people, it is so different from your ordinary life, that it fulfills you. Therefore, fulfilled by the companionship you forget its roots." This means that we may create a world full of humanity that has its origin in the presence of Christ and then feel no longer the need of saying His name, feel no more the urgency of that infinite tension, of that desperate tension to say His name;

because we don't miss Him. If this is the case, then one asks himself: "If people who are atheist have such beautiful families, what is Christianity adding, what is 'the more' of Christianity?" This is why, if we don't understand what this 'more' is, if as time goes on and we live our life we don't grasp the difference between the fact that everything goes well and the urgent need for Christ, sooner or later we will lose interest in faith. Since for us it is difficult to grasp this point, then when we feel that something is urgent, when we have a question, a desire, we don't know what to do: "After thirty years in the Movement, married for twenty and with two teenage daughters, I feel I have my back to the wall, I am not happy. I have everything, but I am not happy. I have a wife who loves me, two daughters who do well in school, a well-paid job even in these times of recession, but I am unhappy, that is, I am not happy about myself. I am saying that I feel I have my back to the wall because the desire to be happy is really huge, to the point of making me uncomfortable, of giving me a headache. I will start going again to the psychologist to get some help, but I am sure I will not solve the problem, because I have already been through that. I can see that I am shifting the problem of my dissatisfaction, at times blaming my work and at times the people I love. I truly believe that I have my back to the wall. I cannot lie to myself any longer. I am fifty four years old. You told us that it is in the moments of difficulty that we see whom we hold most dear, how important Christ is and how important our own ideas are." The fact that we experience this tension, this dissatisfaction, makes our need for Christ constant. Pay attention, because the great temptation of the powers that be is to make us believe that we are satisfied. This is the temptation of Dostoevskij's Grand Inquisitor, so much so that Jesus looks like someone who has come to disturb. But we don't want to be disturbed; we want to be left alone! I am asking you: is this being left alone happiness, is it fulfillment, is it the fulfillment of life? At this point each person has to face this question, has to experience it, because these things cannot be understood by explaining them. You keep asking me questions to which you have to answer yourselves, as one person writes me, "In front of the question: "What do I expect from Christ?", I am asking what is the meaning of this 'everything' you talk about?" This is what you have to tell me. Don't ask me! Because, this is the verification of faith. Or another person: "What exactly does it mean to expect everything from the fact of Christ? What does it mean to live of Christ's attraction in daily life?" You need to discover this based on your own experience. Answers... There are too many answers, but there aren't experiences that answer the questions. If I answer with my words, I don't fulfill your dissatisfaction, because it isn't an explanation that satisfies, but an experience! Let's understand that the only possibility to verify faith is if the question in us is reawakened, and that it is right there, in front of life's challenges where I can see the difference: what Christ introduces and what is the 'more' of Christianity. Otherwise, for us the 'more' of Christianity is a phrase written on the wall that we heard many times, but that we don't connect to a known experience. This shows to what extent it isn't enough to repeat certain phrases as something obvious, as a self-evident presupposition. It is precisely by doing this, as many European countries show, that we have lost faith along the way. Either we recognize this, or our first love has already vanished. This is why Christ's question is nothing but this: "But, when I come back, will I find someone who misses Me, someone for whom life is waiting for Me?"

I was deeply provoked when on Friday evening at the Exercises you asked the question, "What is left of the attraction for Christianity?" I had a conversation with a coworker, a new consultant I don't know very well, who is a few years older than me. We were having lunch, two of us

married and two not married, or actually, two with children and two without children. At one point we were talking about marriage and this person said, "Actually, I would like to get married, but then you hear all those stories in which one has children and then things go wrong and they end up sleeping in a car because they have no money left." Another answered fittingly, "Look, married or not it is the same, if they have to take away something from you..." I said, "Excuse me, but beyond the practical reasons, the fact of being able to be married, to be with a person for your entire life, is this something desirable to you?" "Sure it is desirable, but I realize that I cannot say a phrase like the one you say when you get married ("I promise to be always faithful to you"). If I am honest with myself I cannot say it." "You are right, but is it desirable or not?" "Yes, it is desirable." Then I told him, "Then instead of focusing on the fact that you are not able to, it may be interesting to understand from the people who are able to do it where they obtain their strength." I didn't know if he belonged to the Church and so I was cautious, because I was obviously interested in the topic, but I didn't want to force the issue saying things that maybe he didn't understand. I continued, "Look, based on my experience what I have seen is that in Christian marriage there is precisely a greater strength that comes from the Sacrament." He told me, "But I haven't made this journey of faith. I understand that this journey is a personal journey I should make, but I haven't made it." I told him, "Look, it isn't so much something subjective, in the sense that you have to think about it. Undoubtedly, it is a personal matter, but it is something one recognizes, it is something one sees and then desires to do. This is how it was for me." Then the conversation went on. In talking with him and later thinking back about it, I realized that it is true that undoubtedly one desires to love his wife and his children no matter what. However, what I saw in Christian marriage is precisely that gaze of Zaccheus and Jesus that you described: what experience of being looked at must Zacchaeus have had when he was called by name! I had the experience of forgiveness within my family and this cannot happen if one is alone. There isn't this possibility of looking at the other person regardless of their mistakes. After that conversation I told myself: everything stems from here, precisely from this gaze able to embrace the person as it is. I know two friends who are expecting a daughter who has some malformations that are probably linked to some syndrome, etc., who are saying, "We want this child." There is the standard option of having an amniocentesis, but I saw the gaze of this mother who said, "I don't want to have these tests, I am not interested, I want to see this child face to face." This cannot happen unless there is someone who looked at you like this and whose memory you carry within yourself. Then, perhaps during the day you have a thousand other thoughts, but this thing marks you and sustains the marriage, sustains one's life. Therefore, the attraction of Christianity is present here. If it weren't there, objectively these circumstances couldn't hold up.

Thank you.

I am starting from something you said at the Exercises: that the alternative is clear, either recognizing the fact or not recognizing it, letting our measure prevail. I am starting from this and from what you later explained about following, that Fr. Giussani says that following means to follow the experience of the person, not the person himself. As we went to Rome to see the Pope this fact happened to me: I went without any big preconceptions, but also without great expectations, very serene about the person of the Pope, but without expecting who knows what. But actually, when he started to speak and while he spoke, I discovered that I was 'glued'. The speech ended and I hadn't missed a single word. It had never happened to me, so much so that

the only thing I was able to write, even to those who asked me how it went, was this, “I didn’t miss a single word.” Afterwards, in questioning what happened, I realized that when one witnesses to a fact that is so true for him, as the Pope told us in his personal way, the fact goes beyond the individual. It is so true that it reawakens in me all my experience, allowing me to reconsider many things. For example, many conversations I had with friends about the Movement, about the leadership of the Movement, in which I always found myself defending you, defending a certain type of thing...

Defending the territory.

Instead, I discovered that I was defending myself! That is, defending my experience and my faith. Therefore, also when the Pope was saying, “Christ happens,” this is what happens, this experience happens to me.

Beautiful! This is already introducing us to what we will say about following: what strikes us is that when one introduces us to an experience, this is the very thing that glues us. This is what Fr. Giussani invites us to do not to lose all the beauty of what happens, trying not to reduce following to one of the reductions we listed at the Exercises. True following, what strikes us, what sweeps us away, is participating in the experience of the other.

I was deeply struck as well by the questions with which you opened the Fraternity Exercises: “When the Son of man comes, will he find faith in me?” or when, in reading the letter, you said – and this is the question that disturbed me most – “What is left of the attraction for Christ?” Precisely that evening, the evening of the Fraternity Exercises, while I was going to bed I understood that what remains of the attraction of Christ is you, Julián, you who give it back to me, you who ask me these questions that I wouldn’t ask myself anymore. Therefore, you who continue to talk to me, to correct me, you are the mercy that recreates faith in me. Perhaps I am saying something unorthodox, but I thought a lot about it in the past months: if Fr. Giussani had given me and told me everything that he did give me and tell me, but he hadn’t given you to me, he would have cheated me, because I wouldn’t experience this attraction any longer. This is the second remark I wanted to make: it is a presence that allows one to perceive these questions as a promise and not as a condemnation, because otherwise I wouldn’t ask myself these questions because to me they feel like a condemnation. Then life becomes a series of consequences drawn from a presence that was and is no more, and the first love becomes a self-evident presupposition. This struck me in a series of facts, the last being how you corrected me yesterday. For me this was the culminating point of this period, judging an uneasiness I have felt in the past several months (that had as its starting point particularly my responsibility in GS), finding in me a resentment, a disappointment that seems to me like the inevitable trajectory of a generous impulse, because, as you said years ago to the Memores Domini, “Generosity sooner or later sends you the bill,” and I am sending the bill quickly! After yesterday’s great correction, I suddenly realized that I had been talking of Christ for a long time, but that I wasn’t talking to Christ anymore. This for me marks the difference between faith as a self-evident presupposition and the recognition of a Presence. So much so that I was looking forward to the evening to have the hour of silence, something that hadn’t happened to me in I don’t know how many months, not because I wasn’t having the hour of silence, but because the hour of silence was about reading things on Christ, reading a discourse that made sense, but no longer talking to Christ. This is where for me the attraction dies.

This introduces the theme for the next School of Community on the attraction of Christianity as an event. Because – let’s use this witness to introduce ourselves to the question – I can speak of Christ without feeling the urgency of looking for Him. Do you understand? Recently, a person told me something similar to what you were telling us now, regarding a meeting in which several things happened: “What I remember from the entire meeting is that moment in which I saw a person living for Christ, and since that moment I couldn’t help feeling this great nostalgia for silence.” You reminded me of this just now. That is: Christianity remains as an event and not as word, not as a discourse, not as an instruction manual. It is like when for someone is not enough to know about the beloved, but he wants to go and see her. This means that the attraction is for Christ and not for all the rest: the attraction is for Christ. Therefore, even if everything goes well, nevertheless one knows how to answer and say what is the ‘more’ of life. One doesn’t need a catastrophe or something sad to happen. No, nothing special may happen, but in everyday life all the desire for Him, all the desperate tension to look for Him is reawakened. This is something else: it is something that shares the same nature, in its simplicity, of the beginning of Christianity. After their first encounter Jesus didn’t say to John and Andrew (it is not recorded in the story told by the Gospel), “Come and see Me again tomorrow.” There was no instruction manual, but they couldn’t resist the need to go and see Him again, to go and look for Him the next day, and the day after. Not out of moralism, but for the attraction of Christ.

I have a very simple, very basic question that perhaps you already started to answer. Nevertheless, I am asking it again in the very way it came to me regarding Friday evening, which for me was a crescendo of more and more intense questions, starting with the initial one: “But when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?” And then: “What is left of the attraction for Christ?” And then: “Do we still believe that Christ can fill our life?” up to that question that has already been recalled several times, from the Book of Revelation: “You have persevered and you have endured many hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet, I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.” “Where is our first love?” This insistence had the effect of making me question myself precisely about what I realized I was living as a self-evident presupposition, as something taken for granted: my faith. This happened not only that evening at the Exercises. This sense of confusion and wavering of a certainty I thought I had, stayed with me in the following weeks. However, I realize that this questioning of what I had taken for granted, in these weeks felt like something held against me, to use the words of the Book of Revelation. I felt as if it was highlighting my infidelity, my being fulfilled, satisfied with what I have, and not getting to the real point. I wonder if that’s where you wanted to take us. Because things don’t add up if I think of the journey made in the past years, when you always warned us against measuring ourselves based on our performance. Instead, this questioning myself had in part this effect on me, like saying, “I am not there, while I thought I was.”

This question is great, because it helps us to see the difference. We often perceive these questions as a reproach, as a measuring of our performance, which may be partly true, but is not what I am interested in right now. Because, as I was preparing the Exercises and choosing the title, I had clearly in mind all that we went through in the past year, during which we were spared nothing, and each of us is well aware of his or her performance and the impressions we gave. Therefore, what you are saying was clear even before starting. Instead now the question is if we are more discouraged or more enthusiastic about our faith. What I am trying to highlight is not our performance, but if right here, in the midst of all the things from which we were not spared,

we have recognized His presence; if the fact that everything was taken away from us, all the criticism we heard against us, can separate us from the love of Christ. This question wants to bring to the surface that nothing, not even all the things we went through this year, could have ripped this evidence away from us. However, we cannot reach this –as we often think– regardless of what happens, but only by living through what happens. Saint Paul wasn't spared huge difficulties, but those difficulties brought him to this certainty: "Who, then, will separate us from the love of Christ?" The question is not asked as a test of our performance, but rather to see if we recognize with amazement that we have been taken hold of by Christ. The test wasn't on us, but on Christ! Because it is there, in that moment, that Christ shows His difference, that He makes clear to our eyes who He is. What endures? It isn't our performance that endures (we know it well), it isn't our energy that endures, it is He who endures, His Presence. The One who endures is He who has taken hold of us. What endures is the recognition of His presence, which is not a willful effort of recognizing Him, but the incredible amazement of the beginning multiplied to infinity. Indeed, we think, "It is fine that He loves me at the beginning". The problem is that when He knows everything about me, when He knows all my mistakes, He can still have pity on me, He can still take care of me, He can still be so crucial for my life, so that nothing and nobody can separate me from Him. This makes me say, "But, who is Christ?" The purpose of Friday evening's questions is to bring out all the newness of Christ, because this is what allows us to be grateful, what allows us to live faith as the recognition of a presence so exceptional that it leaves us amazed. Therefore, what endures is not us, but Him, He is what lasts. Truth is what endures through time. He is what endures. We saw it: the God of Israel can bring his people into exile to show that He is a different God. For all the other nations, when the empire falls it is the end of their god, but He can allow the exile to show that He remains forever. This is what gives us all the certainty to walk the road; it is a point of unshakable certainty, not rooted in our performance, but in Him. This is the journey of faith we want to continue to make. The road – as you can see – doesn't consist of the comments made on the text, but in seeing, accompanied by the text, all the experience that unfolds in reality right in front of our eyes. All the difference is here. From this point of view, it is striking to be able to make this journey even accompanied by what Pope Francis told us when we went to Rome. In his disarming simplicity he showed us this, he witnessed to us this: in facing the crisis of our humanity (that cannot be reduced to sociology, because an organization is not enough to resolve it) Jesus is needed, Jesus! Therefore faith is an encounter with Jesus, it is a recognition of His presence. This means that the communication of faith can be done only by witnessing, that is, by putting in front of others an experience. It is precisely this that allows us to follow the Pope in all the ways he continues to surprise us: what an experience of Christ he has that he needs prayer, that he needs to be looked at by Jesus! Because, if one – as Pope Francis says – can live life letting himself be guided by Jesus, it is because Jesus is not a character or a discourse of the past, but He is contemporaneous and He is acting in life. It is He who through the most ordinary circumstances calls us to answer, who reawakens us. Therefore, if we have clear in mind, also as we work on the Exercises, all that the Pope witnessed to us in his simplicity, we can find a precious help to touch first-hand what faith as a lived experience means, not simply – I am using the Pope's image – as theological reflections done at the table while sipping tea. Far from that! This is why we need to go out into reality and verify it there, instead of being like a brooding hen.

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday June 19th, at 9:30 pm. We will work on the First lesson of the Fraternity Exercises, as we already said today.

As you know, the **Pro-life Movement** has proposed the initiative “**One of Us**”, to which all the Catholic associations have adhered. It is a petition through a collection of signatures all over Europe to request the end of funding activities that favor abortion and any research that implies the destruction of human embryos. You can find the form for the collection of signatures also as an attachment to the June issue of *Tracce*. We recommend that you collect the signatures where you work or study, among family members, friends and acquaintances, in Parishes where it hasn't been done yet and, possibly, in collaboration with other associations.

It is providential for each of us to support this initiative while we are reading the Book of the month *The Power of the Powerless*, because this book doesn't pose questions that are dated only to the time of the Soviet Empire, but it re-proposes with clarity that the true power every man has, that the 'I' has, is the love for reality and for the truth of things. This is what allows a person not to be conformed to the dominant mentality that perhaps today is even more persuasive than that imposed by the Soviet regime. The Christian experience intensifies this love for reality and for the truth of things, and affirming this is important for our self-awareness and for the growth of our humanity more than any result in the present instant.

Veni Sancte Spiritus