

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, February 26, 2014

Reference text: “Christ’s Conception of Life” in At the Origin of the Christian Claim, McGill-Queen’s University Press, pp. 92-98.

Song *Parsifal (Song of the Ideal)*

Song *Witness*

Glory Be

We had given ourselves a question to work on: “Who is Jesus?” What more have we come to know about Jesus by working on Chapter 8? It isn’t a rhetorical question, asked at the beginning and then forgotten, because the entire chapter revolves around this question. There isn’t one line that doesn’t address it. At the same time, I am not only re-proposing the question, but I am going even deeper: How does working on this chapter, and what we have come to know about Jesus, allow us to face and judge the challenges with which we are presented, the challenges that society, culture, and legislation are placing before us? Is it possible to stay in circumstances, to live these challenges – with all of the drama that these issues introduce into our life – with the light that radiates from the School of Community? Or, on the contrary, is School of Community ultimately an exercise in inwardness, that doesn’t help one to face the great anthropological and ethical challenges debated in today’s society? These are the questions that we need to answer as we work on the second part of the chapter, as we did with the first part.

I will start with a question that I was asked. *“I was very struck by the question that you posed many times at School of Community: How do we answer the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’ How has each of us answered the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’ in the past month? [Not in an abstract way, getting an idea from this or that fact, but precisely by doing School of Community.] Each time you asked the question, it made my heart jump, and I desired with all of myself to try to give an answer. I speak very often of Jesus, with Jesus, but I wasn’t able to answer the question, and this makes me feel uncomfortable. In the past year, I have seen Him at work many times, I have recognized Him, and I have experienced Him...in fact, before I was very cynical and hesitant, but in saying ‘yes’ to Him, one is happier. I intuit that my happiness consists in abandoning myself to Him, but considering that I am not able to answer the question, ‘Who is Jesus?’ how can everything else have a foundation, a meaning?”*

Another person wrote the same thing: *“I left School of Community surprised by the concise question you asked toward the end: ‘This chapter has to raise the question in us, “Who is Jesus?” and whether or not we are getting to know Him more.’ The question seems almost too simple, but it hadn’t even crossed my mind [and yet, it is the first question that Fr. Giussani asks! As you can see, we can do School of Community while overlooking the chapter’s key point. Therefore, if we don’t take this essential point seriously, then we can even say very beautiful things about the chapter, but we don’t understand it according to how Fr. Giussani conceived it]. I was totally fragmented as I tried to understand each passage of the chapter, and I even thought that I was comparing myself with the text. However, your question is what brings me back to a loving dialogue. While I was going home, I asked myself, ‘Who are You for me, Jesus?’ I kept the question in my mind, hoping to recognize it in reality. Our small group at my school had asked us to prepare*

for SoC by considering your words: 'It isn't abstract reasoning that makes us grow and broadens our mind, but finding in humanity a moment of truth reached and proclaimed.' Here we go again, I thought. I am an expert at this! Honestly, I work on School of Community, but very often I get lost in perfect lines of reasoning that take me further away. But where am I? It is terrible not to have a serious and loving gaze toward myself, but it happens often. I was reading the School of Community about that gaze with which Jesus looks at me and loves me, and as I did, I was there trying to get rid of my nostalgia. I was feeling sad and 'amputated.' Then, one day, something I never would have expected happened. My 13-year-old daughter Letizia came home from school, just like every other day. We sat and ate lunch together with all of her siblings. Strangely enough, she monopolized the conversation (usually she is pretty quiet) and told us that her Italian teacher had taught them about the poet Leopardi. She went to her bedroom, got her book of poems, and read some verses. Her younger siblings quickly got bored and left, which gave her more space to speak. I have a special love for her, because she has a sunny temperament, but she is also 'sad.' She is often the one who shows me the way. I have understood many things through her. In short, she is a great resource for us. She went on reading and recalling things that had happened in class. She quoted these words by heart: 'The person who loves much, but is not loved, is destined to live of this lack.' Then I understood that the Leopardi explained in class was not just the poet of *Il sabato del villaggio* [Saturday in the Village], but that her teacher had gone deeper into Leopardi's heart. So I asked her, 'Tell me why you like it so much, and why you are telling me about it.' I cannot forget what she said, and now it permeates my days. She answered, 'Because he is sad and this makes me feel close to him. But he is too sad. One cannot live his entire life like that. I am telling you because you, Mom, are a person who likes to make a lot of jokes, but when I look at you, I think that you are made of nostalgia, and I like it very much.' I was speechless. A piece of reality was explaining reality itself and what I am made of. I had found in my reality 'a moment of truth reached and proclaimed' that none of my perfect thoughts could ever have been able to reproduce." A mother truly realizes who she is, who she is as a person, because she has in front of her a daughter who makes her understand things better than all of her reasoning. This is possible because something happened to the daughter that made her able to look at her mother in that way. Then, the mother can become aware of who she is once again. Why? Only the divine saves the dimensions of humanity. We can recognize that we are getting to know Christ, not because we make a speech about Christ, but because He makes us become ourselves.

Another friend asks why familiarity with Christ is not inwardness. "I am asking this because the continuous desire for this familiarity [we intuit that there is something in this familiarity that is crucial for our life, but we often have the concern, the suspicion, that speaking of Christ is inwardness, that it isn't truly real] is explained well by Fr. Giussani in a presentation from 1982 entitled Familiarity with Christ. He says that familiarity with Christ 'is as if a wind were to blow through and rip away all that we are. Then, the heart returns to being free, or better, it becomes free: it continues to live in the flesh, which means that it continues to make mistakes like before, but it is as if something else had entered the world.' This is precisely the greatest experience of freedom that I have. I really need Him to free me from what I am in order to renew me as awareness. I ask that this may happen again every day; it isn't always easy and immediate, but I can't stop desiring it. Having said this, however, I don't know what to ask of the companionship [do you see the kind of problems that entangle us?]. While having this desire, at times I feel so unfamiliar even with the people I love, that I wonder if I am not partly making things up in my mind, because, in many years of being in the Movement, I have never felt such a sense of

unfamiliarity. The serious thing is that this wound doesn't heal, but gets deeper, and often I fear that I have already left the Movement. We do beautiful gestures, during which our heart is obviously happy, but in my opinion, this does not then become a judgment to the point of helping us to walk more toward what our heart desires. Therefore, I wonder: How does the companionship help you to have this level of familiarity with Christ? How does the companionship become a journey for you?" That is to say, why isn't familiarity with Christ inwardness? In my case, the companionship helps me to live a familiarity with Christ because it always provokes me, even when it is remiss in living this familiarity in its truth, even when it objects. The companionship always makes me start to seek again, even when I find myself facing issues that provoke me.

Recently, in listening to the Liturgy (which is a 'school'), I realized two things. The Gospel tells us about when Jesus went to Nazareth, and it says that everyone was amazed. It would seem that Jesus' presence makes it easier for people to enter into this familiarity with Him and, therefore, to enter into the mystery of His person. One might say, "Do you see? This keeps me company." However, what is amazing is that I can decide not to follow the person who provokes that amazement in me, to give myself adequate reasons for that amazement. Then, instead of following this amazement in order to understand it more and more, I start to withdraw from the obligation that the amazement provoked by that presence entails. So one can even say (as in the Gospel), "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" This question already contains all of the skepticism. It isn't the question of those who continued to grow closer to Jesus, and who said, "Who is this man? Who is he?" This was a true question, because the more He revealed Himself, the more they were provoked to seek Him. Instead, the other question – "Isn't this the carpenter's son?" – is not a true question. The text ends by saying, "They were scandalized by Him." The companionship was given for a familiarity, and yet for some it became an obstacle, a scandal.

And this is the second thing that I discovered through the Liturgy. The way in which the companionship provokes us can have a totally different face: instead of amazement, a curse. David returns from war, and a man from Saul's tribe starts to curse him (the face of the companionship is totally different; here it is a curse, not amazement), and David's companions all start to say, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over, please, and lop off his head." This is the reaction. But David says, "What business is it of mine or of yours that he curses? Suppose the Lord has told him to curse David; who then will dare to say, 'Why are you doing this?'"

The companionship, the way in which the companionship can present itself to me, which introduces me to familiarity with Christ, can have one face or another. The problem is if, in front of the way in which the companionship presents itself to me – even with a beautiful face (the amazement) – I withdraw, or if I go to the core of it – even if the face is that of a curse, because everything is a provocation to enter into a relationship with Him. Then, let's see if each time the companionship presents itself to us – with one face or another, whatever face it has in front of us – it is a provocation. This depends on if I withdraw or if I go to the core of it, engaging myself to the point of recognizing what it introduces to me. The companionship is always present: at times it can have one face, at times it can have another, but it is always provoking me. On many occasions, the companionship makes Him so present that it moves one to tears, as Jesus' companionship did to those who witnessed a miraculous catch of fish, or when He calmed the waters. He was so present that it was anything but inwardness. There is no inwardness. Everything passes through the relationship with reality through which the Mystery – Christ – comes toward us, because the Mystery comes toward me, calls me, draws me to Him, through any circumstance,

as David says, even through “a dead dog cursing.” The subject behind the sign, the face behind the sign, is always the Lord, but we often withdraw before we can discover it. Therefore, if we do not fully understand that He makes Himself present through any modality – because reality is Christ, and everything that comes toward me is a sign of Christ – everything becomes an objection, instead of being an opportunity to become familiar with the Mystery.

The more one goes on, the more he realizes how giving one’s life to something anonymous is not human, because this “whole” to which we give our life, to which we respond – no matter what it looks like – is a person, is God. This is why someone asks me, “*This time I have to write to you. I think that the work of School of Community is amazing, for the intensity of the contents and for the novelty that it represents for my life. However, now I am stuck, and I think that not understanding what I am reading on p. 94 is something crucial for me. It says, ‘Giving oneself is not human unless it is to a person. Loving is only human if one loves a person [God] [...]. Hence, any duty is consciousness of God’s will.’ I don’t get this! I don’t understand anything! What does it mean that God is a person? What does it mean that ‘duty’ is the awareness of God’s will? What does it mean that man’s action is prayer?*”

I will answer with a witness instead of giving an explanation. “*Starting from what is happening to me and from the School of Community, in reading the point ‘The gift of self,’ I was deeply struck when Fr. Giussani says, ‘Human existence unfolds in the service of the world. Man completes himself by giving of himself, sacrificing himself.’ [Happiness comes according to this paradox.] Further on, he says, ‘In this way, he underscores the paradoxical nature of this law: happiness through sacrifice. And the more one accepts this, the more one experiences a greater completeness already in this world. Jesus called it ‘peace.’” I didn’t have any objections to the first part, but something didn’t add up in the second [and he goes on to say that he fell in love, that his love was unrequited, and that after many attempts, he got angry and avoided the place where he would run into her, because ‘what the eye doesn’t see, the heart doesn’t grieve over.’ Also, he didn’t know how to get out of this situation: how could he say that happiness comes through this sacrifice that he was, in fact, asked to make? At this point, instead of continuing to look in the other direction, or continuing to make all of the attempts that he had already made...]. Going home after School of Community, I thought of the last time I had had an experience of peace and fulfillment [instead of following our dreams, start from experience, as we have always been educated to do: when was the last time I experienced peace and fulfillment?] What came to mind was when I came back from the Holy Land in January. The circumstance was not different from what I am living now – the same non-correspondence in my affections and the same struggle – but I perceived that I was always in a relationship with Him. I remember that when I was on the plane, looking down – it was night, and we were about to land in one city – and seeing all of the little lights of people’s homes, I thought, ‘Lord, You care for all of them, for all of us. You made us so minuscule, but You care for all of us, and we can live only within this relationship with You.’ Within all of the disproportion I was feeling between Him and me, nevertheless there was a present and essential relationship. After I returned to the daily grind of studying and the relationship with this girl, I was aware of the fact that it was this relationship [the relationship with the person of God] that permitted everything, freeing me from being a slave of the ‘how’ and the ‘form,’ making me able to look at her with a tenderness that frightened me – for its intensity and for how little it was generated by me, like when a mother feels the baby moving in her womb. It is hers, it is inside her, and yet it isn’t hers; she is not the one who makes him move, he has his own life, he is ‘another.’ It was the same with the tenderness that I felt for her, that tenderness that allowed me to not see*

or get in touch with her – not in order to avoid her, but because I was full of a superabundance that also gave me a curiosity in studying all by myself, a patience in poring over the books and preparing my exam... This is what I am missing [this is what he needs in order to live everything in this way, so that through this sacrifice, he may reach happiness]. Remembering when I experienced this peace within sacrifice, I understood what I was missing [then one understands why and what it means that God is a person]. I miss the relationship with Him [with this Presence]; I miss living while resting in the certainty of His Presence in the flesh. Only when I am in a relationship with Him, can I love her gratuitously [as everyone who has experienced this knows, he couldn't say it unless he experienced this; otherwise, as before, only the sense of missing something and being angry for not being able to get it would dominate], either from a thousand miles away or close by, neither dreaming nor suffering. Weary, yes, but not crushed. Only in this way can I affirm her destiny, love the fact that I am not the companion chosen for her, that perhaps this companion is the person I can stand the least and whom I think is least suitable for her. Therefore, sacrifice is not a defeat, it is not a castration of desire, but it is letting Him take hold of me according to His design, which is my true good. I don't say this because it is the correct thing to say, but because, up until a month ago, this was my experience. I desire to remain in a relationship with Him [do you see to what extent this is what defines a person? When we are in a relationship, we start to understand what God is as a person]. And now that I am not living this relationship fully, I really feel like an orphan.” It is so real that, when we sever this relationship, we are like a child who truly misses Him, who feels like an orphan. How can this relationship be nourished? The answer is in the experience he recounted: only in recognizing Him again as he had recognized Him previously – because he knows that He exists, and therefore he can constantly open himself to His presence.

We could continue to read other witnesses, but, as you can see, they often do not answer the question. They are all true responses, and they offer points that can be meaningful, but they don't answer the question posed by this chapter. Because this chapter answers the question, “Who is Jesus?” Where do you see it in the entirety of the chapter, in the whole chapter?

To this end, I want to read a passage that can help in understanding the connection of this whole chapter with the circumstances that we have to face. In the Conclusion of Chapter 8, Fr. Giussani says, “Jesus did not come into the world as a substitute for human effort, human freedom, or to eliminate human trial [...]. He came into the world to call man back to the depths of all the questions, to his own fundamental structure and to his own real situation. If certain basic values are not safeguarded, all the problems man is called to resolve in the trial of life do not dissolve, but rather become more complicated. Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity*, without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie.” Here Fr. Giussani offers us the criterion for verifying whether we are facing the problems we have, the challenges we inevitably have before us, in the correct way. “Jesus Christ came to call man back to true *religiosity*, without which every claim to a solution of those problems is a lie.” He doesn't mince words: “It is a lie.” Fr. Giussani says that the criterion for judging and solving human problems is in true religiosity and in a lived dependence. What responsibility and task arise for each of us in the present historical and cultural situation in Italy, where we see the attempt of those in power, politicians and the media, to overturn the Christian idea of man and family, imposing a certain education from the very first years of life? (See the education in the schools according to gender ideology.) Obviously, it is in complete contrast with true religiosity and with the concept of freedom that derives from it. It is a hot topic. Is there anyone here who hasn't heard about these challenges? Newspapers and

television are full of this. So, each of us can verify how this chapter was useful to him in answering this challenge. Otherwise, first, we wouldn't be able to understand how this chapter answers the question, "Who is Jesus?" and, second, this chapter would be reduced to "CL spirituality." But then, in order to respond to the challenges that we are facing, we would have to use other tools. That is why I want to take my time in answering, to help us face those questions.

[Text from PageOne, Traces, March 2014](#)

The next School of Community will be on Wednesday, March 26th, at 9:30 pm. We will continue our work by starting Chapter 9, "The Mystery of the Incarnation."

The time of Lent and the time of Easter have always been a privileged occasion for the Church to put herself in front of who Jesus is, of what He did, so that our life may become more human, true, and happy. Fr. Giussani wanted the Spiritual Exercises, as well as the days of Holy Week for CLU and GS, to accompany us in this work. The invitation to participate is an offer to each person's freedom.

Veni Sancte Spiritus