

Notes from School of Community with Father Julián Carrón
Milan, June 18, 2014

Reference text: J. Carrón, “PRESS ON TO MAKE HIM MY OWN.” Fraternity Exercises 2014, pp. 15-44.

- *Romaria*
- *Non nobis*

Glory Be

We will start by continuing our work on the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises. I will read an email that arrived: “My most urgent need is to see Christ again in my life – or better, to decide to see Him again. I met the Movement about 10 years ago, and I know what it means to have someone who accompanies me, who guides me, who sustains me. However, lately I am really unable to entrust myself to Him. What I am telling you scares and hurts me enormously, not just in a moralistic way, but because I see in my experience that something has changed. I went from being a sunny person to having a constantly gloomy disposition, from looking at everything in a different way and with gratitude to feeling only resentment and anger for what is happening around me, from being always willing to listen to others and tell them about myself to being closed, grumpy, and excessively proud. As the quote from Fr. Giussani says in the third point of the Fraternity Exercises’ Saturday morning lesson, “‘If we are so defeated, how can we possibly win? [...] *Someone needs to come from outside* – can only come from outside – who sees our battered dwelling place and rebuilds the walls. [...] This is the major difficulty as far as Catholicism, authentic Christianity, is concerned: it is through *something other* – that comes from outside – that man becomes himself. [...] [But this] is immediately ‘uninviting’ because it opens the door, it welcomes something that does not correspond to our imagination or to our image of experience, and it appears abstract in its claim.” This “something else” – Christ – seems abstract to us. And since He seems too abstract to respond to the urgent need to change, to build, “we come to a halt [...] in an impotent aspiring to find a remedy *or, in a fraudulent, lie-filled claim*. In other words, *we identify the remedy in our own head and according to our own desire to make good*” (pp. 31-32). This is precisely what is happening to me. But what hurts me the most is that I am not moving, I am unable to take a step forward to correct a life that is becoming completely flat and that no longer allows me to be surprised, to rejoice, to laugh, and to be proud of it. This kind of limbo is dragging me down so much that I feel as if I am my own prisoner. So I ask you: Why do I live in a way that brings me only anxiety, instead of following my true good? What does it really mean when Giussani says that everything that happens is permitted by God for the maturation of those He has chosen? Thank you for always reawakening my sleeping ‘I.’” What this person says is striking, because it shows what is essential for living. When the essential is missing, evil and fear prevail, a sunny person becomes gloomy, goes from gratitude to anger and resentment, from being open to being closed. It is so essential that life changes drastically. It’s not essential because we give a speech on the essential, but rather it is essential because our life changes drastically. Contrary to what we think, Christ is so concrete and essential that He makes our life change drastically. What happens when we are not open to this? This is our poverty, in the truest sense of the word: “If we are so defeated, how can we possibly win? [...] *Someone needs to come from*

outside.” But often we are not open to this and therefore – says Fr. Giussani – we identify the solution with an idea: “*We identify the remedy in our own head and according to our own desire to make good.*” Instead, it’s easy – when we recognize Christ, we don’t need to invent anything in our heads; it is enough to follow with simplicity, and then what she described as positive happens. When this doesn’t happen, everything becomes negative. Christ’s presence is so real – albeit mysterious – that when we don’t recognize it, “when this doesn’t happen, I am totally flat, unable to be surprised, to rejoice; everything becomes flat, like a limbo into which I sink.” Why is this for our maturation? Because a person can distance himself, but in that moment, he truly realizes what the nature of his need is. When one realizes that he cannot eliminate the nature of his need, that he cannot take care of his own need, then he realizes more and more that the beauty of what happens in life is generated by recognizing Christ. We are all familiar with this experience, otherwise none of us would be here. Why does this help our maturation? It is helpful because now she feels the urgent need to see Christ again in her life – or better, to “decide to see Him again,” because it passes through our freedom. We can get stuck, attached to an idea of what life should be like and how it should be resolved, and this idea is not able to change us because it is an illusion, like smoke – made of nothing, without any ability to bring about a change or something new. It would be so easy to just follow what happens. Following my idea makes me sink, while following the place where this happened and continues to happen to me, generates me (so much so that she feels that her “sleeping ‘I’” is reawakened precisely by a place). It is enough to follow and accept the modality – not decided by me! – through which the Mystery has pity on my nothingness.

I was very struck by the last School of Community, and I will try to say the things that struck me last time, and that I have since verified in the past month.

I thank you already for this first sentence: “The things that struck me last time, and that I have since verified in the past month.” If this is not the method of School of Community, then don’t expect to be changed by it. Last week, I was struck while rereading Chapter 6 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, where Giussani says, “Even a definition must reflect the experience of an acquisition. Otherwise, it would prove to be a schematic imposition” (p. 61). That’s it – School of Community offers suggestions to make what we say become our own as an experience, otherwise we just repeat definitions, and definitions don’t change life. So, if one thinks that he can sit here just waiting for the next definition or the new keyword that he can then go around saying, he shouldn’t have any hope that something will change – because what changes life is not repeating a definition, but something that one acquires in experience. If this acquisition is missing, not even our participation in School of Community can change us. That is why I thanked you for how you started, because it makes us face this fact again. So, I challenge all of you: How did School of Community help you this year? What kind of journey did it help you to make? How did your way of doing School of Community change? I am asking this in order to verify whether we expect everything from a miracle or from a journey. Let’s go.

I was saying that last time I arrived at School of Community after having had a conversation with a person in the afternoon – someone who, like me, has belonged to CL for a long time, and who was objecting to your way of leading the Movement: “Fr. Giussani would never have said this; he would never have done that.” At first, I simply defended you. Then, at a certain point, I said to him, “Excuse me, but you, who followed Fr. Giussani for many years, did you ever see him say or do something that you were expecting? Didn’t we – you and I – follow him precisely because he was always unimaginable? Why should it be any different now? Why would you like what the

Movement says now to coincide with what you have in your mind? Wouldn't that be the end of it? Why do you have this expectation that Carrón will say what you think, if our liberation – yours and mine – is a presence that has never said nor done what we think?" While I was returning home, thinking about the conversation that I had had with this person, I was struck by the realization that what corresponds to the heart never – never! – corresponds with what we imagine. This is the first difficulty with which we have to come to terms. Thank God that it doesn't correspond to what we imagine, because it would be hell! With these thoughts, I arrived at School of Community that evening. At this time of the year, like every June, I am overcome by tiredness and I easily feel fatigued, I am easily affected by sadness, by the moments of anger and resentment, and I feel very edgy. During the last School of Community, I was struck by the realization – not after being angry, or sad, or tired, but while I had those feelings – that Christ is a powerful, incomparable presence in my life, notwithstanding my mistakes. To the point that, this past month, the words that I have found myself repeating more than anything else were, "Lord, I don't know how, but I know that I love You." Because I am much more defined – in my experience, not a priori – by the hold that He has on me than by all of my rebellion, since at the core of all the evil there is an ineradicable nostalgia for One whom I know. I realize that this may not immediately change the way that I feel, but it is true that becoming aware of this is always a liberation. So I was startled when, at the last School of Community, you said, "Every blow from reality, every circumstance, every experience of solitude, every misfortune and tragedy, everything is like gasoline on fire, it ignites nostalgia. [...] It is really something else. Christianity is something else!" (p. 4). Then, the letter – which deeply struck me – from that young woman who was recounting a life like the one I was living in those days (and also like the life that I lived during this month)! Some of her words stayed with me: "In this whirlwind, I almost forget Jesus." But you made a comment (and I am very grateful to you for these comments in brackets, because these are the experience of liberation): "Almost: everything is in this 'almost'," because it is true, it is imposing – I cannot forget Him. The other thing that struck me very much at the last School of Community was the passage that happened in that hour, from Mary Magdalene and Zacchaeus to voting in the European elections. I was very struck by this, because I noticed the difference – cultural and political, too – between applying a discourse and living these situations with the veil of that face within me. They are two different worlds – and I encountered the second, not the first. The last thing that greatly struck me is that, in rereading the first lesson of the Exercises, I noticed the sentence with which you start, as you comment on Ojos de cielo: "In order to understand this line you need to have seen vibrating in the eyes of a person the Being that makes him exist now. In order for hell not to be wiped away just sentimentally, those eyes must vibrate in such a way that they do not allow me to remain at the appearance of the vibration, but in a way that pushes me to see in the vibration of those eyes the Being that makes them, that makes them vibrate this way" (p. 15). I am grateful to you, because there is one thing that Fr. Giussani often repeated and that I remembered when I reread these words: "Mystery and sign coincide." There is a way of interpreting these words that takes the mystery away from Christ, in order not to feel it; and there is a way of hearing, of living, these words that, far from taking the mystery away from Christ, fills everything and every person with Mystery, fills reality and our companionship, identifying it with the keenest aspect of the reality of Mystery. Our companionship has never been so mysterious for me, because only the Mystery is my salvation, while it seems that hell coincides with remaining at the appearance.

Thank you, because only if we are willing to follow the place where this happens, where this coincidence between Mystery and sign happens, can our life then change drastically; but, again, it is necessary that this not be reduced to a phrase, but rather become an experience. She told us how we can reduce the phrase “Mystery and sign coincide:” we eliminate the Mystery by removing it from the reality of everything. Instead, our companionship is so real and mysterious precisely because it offers to each of us what our friend was saying earlier. What do we need? We need to look at the place of our companionship like this, deciding to see Him again, deciding to recognize Him, because often the problem is not that He is not present, but that we have already decided that He is not there, and therefore we are not changed. This drama will be present as long as the world exists, because in facing Jesus’ invitation to Zacchaeus – “Come down, I am coming to your house!” – there will always be someone who is moved, and others who will criticize the fact that He is going to the house of a sinner. One participates in the newness that He introduces into history, while the others remain in nothingness. For this reason, Christ doesn’t decide the drama in advance, but He intensifies it. He is like gasoline on fire, constantly reviving it. Then, the crucial thing is not to reduce the drama to the feeling that may prevail in us.

Though I have seen many beautiful things in my life, now I feel lost. I look at myself only by measuring, I compare myself to everyone, I hate everything that is not right in me, I force myself to do things that are meaningless. What does it mean to be loved just as we are? How is it possible that there is a love that loves me as I am, even if I don’t do things well? And lastly, why should I do everything that I do if, in the end, in theory, I am not judged based on that? It’s like I keep pushing a ball under water, but it keeps resurfacing; and it’s as if I were always on the rim of a precipice. What does it mean that the essential is Christ? For me, the essential is the negative acknowledgment of myself, of my abilities, of the results that I obtain, and I think, “Maybe when I am able to excel in this, the other will love me more.” You have no idea what strength is required to spend all day noticing your shortcomings; it is the most tiring thing ever. Living like this makes me miss everything that is beautiful. The relationship with my boyfriend is one of the most beautiful things, but I am pushing away even this. Everything is losing its appeal, because it is crushed by my expectations. I just want to live with simplicity, to look at everything as it is, and to be myself at last. At times, I feel that I am really suffocating, and I don’t even remember what real peace is. How can one live sadness as a beginning, as an indication, and not as a dead end?

Have you sometimes seen, in your life, something different from the mere negative acknowledgment of yourself?

Yes, I have seen more.

You have seen more. Then why do you insist on only looking at your limit? You are fighting a losing battle, because the problem is that, in reality – as you have seen with great clarity in certain moments – there is something that is not reducible to your limits. The biggest mistake is not having limits – we all have them – but reaching the point in which we see only those. Why? Because of what we were saying in the example of the amusement park. At a certain point, it is as if the presence disappeared, and what you used to see as something appealing – can you imagine that child at the amusement park, with all of the attractions, all excited and full of curiosity? – ended. Reality changes its face, and we are no longer able to see beyond it. But for the child, recovering the bond with his parents is enough to start again and see what is there. Then, the essential is not the negative acknowledgment of yourself, because it doesn’t make you be yourself. The essential is to stay in a place where, in spite of all of our mistakes, they continue to challenge us on this.

Why did you come here? You came because you accepted the challenge of this lesson, because, already in the Introduction, quoting the Prophet Isaiah (49:15), we said: “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me’ [...] and He takes the opportunity to show once again how different He is, challenging our reason in an astounding way: ‘Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you’” (pp. 9-10). The question is whether you are willing to recognize this, which is what you want: Is it possible that there is a love that loves me like this? Yes, it exists! We constantly have the witness of people who, even if they have all of the limits (fatigue, sadness, resentment), discover Christ as an incomparable presence, notwithstanding their mistakes – not after these limits, but within them. Since Christ entered history and introduced His presence... Zacchaeus was full of limits, as you are, but a different Presence prevailed. This is the newness of Christianity. What does it mean? That then you only desire to live “with simplicity” in front of something like this. Let this simplicity prevail: “To look at everything as it is, and to be myself at last.” How can one do this? Only by accepting this Presence. From that moment on, you can start to live sadness as a beginning. *But how can one accept this Presence? Because it seems that – how can I say it? – I look at others like that, I look at them as if their value were not based on their mistakes. In fact, for me, their value is not based on that.*

And so?

But I can't look at myself in the same way.

You can't say that you can't. You ‘decide’ to look at yourself like that.

But the decision is more powerful than other things.

No! This is the point – you are not the result of your antecedent factors. You have reason and freedom, and you can use them in one way or another, because being stuck results from thinking that you are determined by the onslaught of circumstances. “I can't do it.” No! You decide to look only at one thing. Of all that is present – all that exists! – you decide to look only at this. This is your decision.

What is the point, then, of doing things well, if, in any case, even if I make mistakes...

Forget right now the things that you do well! Reality is more than what you do. When you will see this ‘more,’ then you will be able to look also at the things that you do in a different way, because you will not depend on this. I really like the image used by the prophets – a very beautiful image, very powerfully evocative. You see a dry stump, a huge, dry stump, and in the dry stump, you see a new shoot. You can say, “It is all dry, almost.” Everything is in that “almost,” because the new shoot exists. Does the entire dry stump, which is definitely bigger than the shoot, eliminate the new shoot? No. So you can continue to tell me, “It is all dry,” but you cannot eliminate the shoot by saying that it is all dry. Where is the hope for that stump? In the “all dry” or in the new shoot? *In the shoot.*

Jesus introduced that shoot into history. While people were all looking at each other for what they were doing, in a context in which the Pharisees said that life had value – as you say – only based on what one is able to do, a new shoot appeared – a Man who, in the midst of all the rest, looked at everything differently. To be a Christian is to trust this. Try to trust this, try! Because you will not be convinced by an explanation. If you try to make room for this Presence, then you will start to see, because if Zacchaeus had behaved like you... “Come down, because I am coming to your house.” “No. It's not possible, it's not possible! Considering the list of limits, of shortcomings, of sins, it's not possible for You to love me like this, it's not possible that there is a love that loves me like this. It's not possible.” It is possible!!! There is One who is telling you this. Am I willing

to decide to trust this for once in my life and see what happens? This is your opportunity – decide! Because this is your greatness as a person, my friend. Not even Jesus can force you to accept Him, no one can force you to accept Him. But He continues to say, “Even if your father and your mother abandon you, I will not abandon you, never!”

And how can one turn his gaze toward the shoot?

It is possible because you are more – more! You are reason and freedom, not a piece in the mechanism of your being stuck. No, you are more! This is the modality with which the Mystery makes you yourself. What you desire – “to be myself at last” – happens only if there is one who tells you, “Stop, you are not just this, you can leave this situation that blocks you.” Then, you can decide that you don’t want to leave – but I assure you that the day in which you get tired of not leaving, you will be able to recognize that it is possible. It is enough to be simple, as you were saying (which is what you desire most). At least ask for it. Because the challenge that you describe is very clear even from another point of view, as one of you writes to me: “I participated in the satellite connection last month. And no – it’s all fine, but this story of nostalgia, no! Because for me, it’s not like that. It’s not as positive as you say. You have to explain it well to me, because I notice that if I don’t see my friend for two days in a row, if I don’t hear from him, if I cannot tell him what happens to me, if I don’t tell him how my life is going, then I suffer and I miss him enormously. What can I do? How can this nostalgia be positive? I hate it. It is too much for me. Can you explain this better? I realize that I feel this nostalgia precisely for what I have with him, for how we treat each other: as human beings. Answer me if you can, don’t keep me in suspense.” This surprises me, because I have often faced this objection. Another friend recently talked to me about this nostalgia: “I was scandalized by the fact that I felt this nostalgia after encountering Christ.” I say, the first thing that we have to understand is that it is useless to do School of Community, if we then forget that, for three months, in Chapter 8 of *At the Origin of the Christian Claim*, we studied that the answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” is – as Fr. Giussani says – in a gaze that reveals our humanity. Where do we recognize who Jesus is? In the fact that God saves all of the factors of our humanity. This is the sign of the divine in that man, Jesus. But, for us, the fact that Christ reawakens our humanity, that he reawakens our nostalgia for Him, is not the sign of salvation, of the fact that Christ is God, but it is a condemnation. Do you realize what kind of judgment we make about nostalgia?! Jesus, who came to reawaken our humanity, is perceived by us as the opposite of what He is – that is, as something that scandalizes us and that we hate. Why does this happen? Because we start from an idea and not from experience. In fact, when she speaks of experience in her letter, she describes precisely this: that she cannot but feel the nostalgia of the experience that she has with that friend. This is experience: she cannot but feel nostalgia for him. Instead, in us, in our collective imagination, we got the idea that the modality of Christ’s answer has to coincide with the elimination of the human drama. I will explain it with one line: it is as if marriage were the tomb of love and Christianity were the tomb of desire. “If Christ came to resolve the drama of living, then in order to respond to it, He has to eliminate it.” This is our idea of salvation – to no longer feel nostalgia, to no longer have desire, to no longer feel this need that becomes asking. In this case, Christ is affirmed in a way that erases the need, the nostalgia, and the desire. Don’t you understand that this is precisely why many people abandon Christianity? If Christ doesn’t save our humanity, but instead He flattens it, then what would be the point of following Him? This is our way of thinking, the best! “I can no longer stand the nostalgia, the desire, the need.” We say this as the highest expression of ‘our’ Christianity! I have nothing to do with ‘your’ Christianity! Because if Christ didn’t come to reawaken man, then we ascribe to Him

what Giussani ascribes to the powers that be: reducing, flattening, and erasing desire. What would make being a Christian interesting? But we say this easily – in fact, the opposite seems shocking: “I hate this nostalgia.” Instead of reawakening our need, our asking, our desire, all of our humanity, Christ would have come to flatten it all. What kind of salvation would that be? Do you understand that people who desire to live will run away from such a proposal, precisely in order to avoid ending up like this? And we say this, we who belong to a charism, to a movement in which we saw Fr. Giussani proclaim precisely the opposite! When I say that we are losing the charism along the way, I am saying this, because it passes on an image of Christianity that has nothing to do with Fr. Giussani. Why does this happen? Because, instead of abiding by experience, we identify reality with our own ideas. But life is really interesting – when one falls in love (to give the clearest example), all of the desire is reawakened! A far cry from being brain dead! For this reason, only if we belong to a place that constantly reawakens our humanity, will we be able to be interested in Christianity. Because what we all desire in the end is to be able to get up in the morning with the desire to see Him again, to encounter Him again. So, if we don’t reflect on the experience that we have in our life, we subject ourselves to saying things that, instead of opening the way for us, close it (even if we think that we are saying who knows what kind of wonderful thing). Precisely because Christ is present and reawakens our need, our asking, He embraces it. He embraces it, He doesn’t leave it like it was before – but He doesn’t flatten it, so that He may constantly interest us more.

I wanted to recount what is happening to one of my colleagues and, through him, to me, as well. In the Introduction to the Exercises, you told us that the crucial question is what the essential is for us, and the essential is what answers the question of how one can live: “How can we discover what the essential is for us, without self-deception? Once again, Fr. Giussani taught us the method: observing ourselves in action, in experience. [...] Then, what happens when you engage with all the factors of life, with all of life? The more you live, the more the nature of your needs appears before your eyes” (p. 7). I was very struck by this dynamic that you described, because it is precisely by observing ourselves in action that we discover what the essential is for us, and at times it happens that if one sees it taking place in another person, he is reawakened. Because, in seeing Him at work in another person, one can’t help saying, “It is Him.” At the school where I work, a few of us teachers belong to the Movement and, after the Exercises, we had the desire to meet and work on them, also to share what each of us was living with our students and colleagues. We met for the first time at lunch in the school cafeteria, and on this occasion, a colleague of ours who doesn’t belong to the Movement, but who is our friend, joined us. I went with little enthusiasm, with no intention of having a CL group in the school. We ate, and each person tried to say why that moment could be interesting; then we started to work on the Introduction to the Exercises. I went home not very convinced that that moment had been useful. After a week, we met again – and again, I went with a certain resistance. At one point, though, this colleague of mine started to speak, and said that, during the weekend, he had been away on behalf of the school to meet the people responsible for our institute, which is Catholic. While he was with them, he was saddened and irritated by the fact that the people from whom he expected the essential were instead concerned only with organization, that is, that everything would run well. But what surprised him the most was that the more time he spent with them, the more he felt nostalgia for the lunch he had had with us the week before!

Did you understand? The more he stayed with the others, the more he felt nostalgia for the lunch he had had the previous week.

The discussion went on, but, in my mind, I kept going back to this nostalgia. So I stopped and asked him, "Nostalgia for what? What do you miss about that lunch?" He answered, "I am realizing that I can no longer live without certain relationships and certain judgments or ways of facing circumstances that some of you have," and that a new and unique way of seeing things and a new gladness are being generated in him. When I heard this, I melted – I felt my resistance melt away, and an affection for that place was reawakened in me, and for the One who can arouse that nostalgia and generate a new and unique way of seeing everything and give gladness to the heart. How beautiful and how liberating to be able to enjoy things like this! Thank you, because in following you on this journey, these moments are becoming more and more numerous.

Thank you. Your colleague is a newcomer. How is it possible that, in the encounter with Christ, all of the nostalgia is reawakened in a newcomer, while instead, for us, the Movement is the tomb of nostalgia, to the point of hating it? What is the newcomer telling us about what this place is? That at a certain point – I don't know what happens in our brain – we end up saying the opposite of what the newcomer is witnessing to us, like Fr. Giussani says: the newcomers give us back the gift of what we have, but of which we are no longer aware. Then he cannot live without certain judgments, certain relationships, a way of facing certain situations, discovering a new and unique way of seeing things that generates gladness in him. This is what the Mystery gives to us in order to answer our need, because it melts away our resistance and reawakens the affection for the place where this happens.

I came to the Exercises with this question: Why am I here, why am I in the world? In fact, the week before the Exercises, from Sunday to Friday, had been rough in my family, and had brought me to ask myself if what I do for my family is useful, because I felt useless. I give my family everything, it is the road that I chose and my vocation, but – as I would then understand at the Exercises, because Fr. Giussani describes it well in the details – caught up in the anxiety of 'doing,' I lost the origin of my vocation, that is, that there is One who called and calls me, who gave and gives me my husband and my children so that I may come to know Him. However, if I don't rediscover this in every gesture that I do, I lose it. So, I arrived at the Exercises with this open wound and with this question: Why am I here in the world? Is there someone who wants something from me? Because of how the Exercises unfolded, and because of some things that happened to me while I was there, this question changed into a different question that I find difficult to explain with words: the need to continue to hear His voice and to become aware of His Presence in every instant. It is a need that becomes asking, that accompanies me constantly, to the point that I realized that it is the first way in which the Lord accompanies me, because I am not able to ask like this. Then, every morning I also ask that this need and this asking may continue to be present in me. Every morning I try to go to Mass, and this is something that – when I think of it – makes me smile a little, because the Lord has been having some fun with me. When, in February – at the Mass for Fr. Giussani – Archbishop Scola invited us to go to daily Mass, I had thought that it wasn't for me. Instead, now I need to go to daily Mass, because it is the place where my asking can be best expressed in all of its depth. When I get up in the morning, everything is a prelude to my going to Mass. This asking accompanies me in the small challenges of every day, as well. I realize that, because of the desire to have Jesus keeping me company, I am more patient, in the sense that I often stop myself from stepping in, as I wait for a detail that clarifies what to do. Or, at times, it happens that I listen to some outrageous conversations, and while in the past I used to stay quiet, now I try to step in and say something that is truer. I have also faced more serious challenges, and I am going to tell you

about one of them. One evening, my son told my husband that he wanted to do something that worries us a lot. In the past, I would have gotten angry, I would have attacked him verbally; this time, instead, I stayed calm and listened carefully to all of his reasons and explanations, as I never had before. I wanted to take his desire seriously, which is also mine, because I have desires that are reduced, too, and I wanted to get to the bottom of it in order to find what we really need. So I spoke about myself a bit, even telling him things that I had never told him before. Then I asked him questions, so that both of us could better understand what was at the heart of the desire that he was expressing, in order to find true satisfaction. This let me do what Fr. Giussani suggests for facing life's problems: not examining the problem directly in depth, but looking more deeply at the nature of the subject that is facing the problem. It's not that while I was talking with my son, I had those three lines of the Exercises in mind, even if I had read them many times – but when I reread them later, I understood that it had happened to me. In any case, my son was so struck that he reconsidered. After a few days, he wanted to talk about it again, and he changed his perspective completely, deciding that he wanted to try and do what his father and I had proposed to him. What interests me about this is not so much the end result, which could just as well have not happened, and which is also the fruit of his relationship with the Mystery, of conversations and encounters that he has had. It's not the result that interests me first of all, but the fact that the presence of the Lord is so real that it arouses a powerful need in me, which becomes asking. And another thing: what I discovered is a road, it is a method.

Thank you. This “is a road, it is a method.” We often reduce everything to the anxiety of ‘doing,’ even in our family, and this prevails over the fact that we have been called. Then, one goes to the Exercises desiring to continue to hear His voice, to hear His call again, to become aware of His presence. And she realizes that this makes her experience her own need, her nature, so deeply that, when she has to face the problem of her son, she is able to speak differently, and says something that I consider crucial as a method to work on the Exercises, as well as on everything else: “It’s not that while I was talking with my son, I had those three lines of the Exercises in mind.” This means that she didn’t treat them like a quote, but that she has them within as experience – and therefore, she can speak by starting from this “I” that has been generated by the presence of Christ. First we acquire something in experience, and only afterward do we understand the definition, the significance of the definition. Then, what interests me is that His presence is so real that it can arouse a need in me that allows me to face everything, even the problem of my children, in a different way. The more the disciples stayed with Him and saw Him act, the more they were wondering, “Who is this Man?” (If, instead, Christianity is an answer that erases the need, that nullifies it, then why would it be interesting?) Only a method like this helps us to make a journey, the journey that Jesus introduced by taking flesh and becoming a presence so real that it amazed everyone, reawakening the need, the asking, the desire, and the nostalgia. Now we can better understand the question asked by another person: “How can we remain fixed on the true essential? Because I think that my alternating between ‘essentials’ is due to the fact that I don’t do enough work on myself, I am not used to judging. Saturday morning’s work helped me a lot, because it made me ask, over and over, during the day: Where are those eyes that erase hell? What makes me feel that I am reborn when I feel down? What happened today that made me happy? And why did it make me happy? In the end, what do I really need? This work, this constant looking at myself, asking this kind of question – and asking my friends, too – is making me become more attached to the true essential. For this reason, I think that it is crucial to give time to this work on ourselves, but I wanted to know your opinion.” How can we remain fixed on the essential? By participating

in a place where this provocation to make a comparison, this work on ourselves – which is what constantly reawakens our awareness of the essential – continues to happen. With regard to this, the gestures are crucial, because our companionship, the ‘geometric’ place – as Fr. Giussani describes it – where Christ happens, is constantly full of gestures, like that of the food collection.

“It is good to respond to people’s needs, but we are not here for this.” These words from the last School of Community were replaying a lot in my head when I started the gesture of the food collection, because the collection is obviously born as the response to a need. Therefore, I was forced to ask myself: Why am I here, if not in order to respond to the need of all of these strangers who are hungry? What else can bring me to make this effort on a Saturday morning, getting up at dawn and staying in the supermarket from 8:00am to 3:00pm, well aware that on Monday I have a very important exam and I am not studying? And, above all, what allows one to do all of this with joy? Because I experienced a gladness that was not mine – in spite of many things that happened, even some setbacks, things that didn’t work out, etc. When I went home in the afternoon, I read the Exercises: “We are in the world to cry out to all mankind, ‘Look, a strange presence is among us [...] there is a man [among us] who is God. The happiness of humanity, the joy of humanity, the fulfillment of all the desires of humanity is He who brings this fulfillment to its conclusion” (p. 35). That’s it. That is the reason that made all of that effort worthwhile, because I saw that my life is full, and it is full because there is One who fills it. He fills it so much that it becomes natural to give it back, and I give it back in the way dictated by the circumstances, which means that if there is a food collection, then I give it back there. I spent all of those hours working there, first to affirm the One who fills my life, and to say this first and foremost to myself – because in making that gesture, I was reminding myself and then everyone else – and second, also because it is within this perspective that the need of all of those strangers became close to me, and I could try to respond to that need with my small attempt. Because the One who responds can pass through that small attempt, the One who answers can pass through that gesture, as well as through the studying that I went back to on Saturday evening.

Thank you. How can we remain fixed on the essential? By responding to the invitation of the food collection, she was helped once more to recognize the essential, because the gestures that the Movement calls us to do are the modality that the Mystery can use to bend down to our nothingness and make us aware of what the essential is. Summer is full of these gestures: from the vacation, to the moments spent together, to the Rimini Meeting (in the different forms of collaboration), they are all opportunities to be saved from nothingness, events through which we can recognize why this Presence is essential for living. Everything is in front of us as the modality with which the Mystery continues to have pity on our nothingness. Our task is to respond: either we follow our imagination, or we follow the modality with which the Mystery calls us, through the gestures that are proposed. Then, at the end of the summer, each person will be able to verify what happened.

Books and texts for the summer

- *Vita di don Giussani [Life of Father Giussani]* is the book that we gave ourselves for the entire year. Given its significance, summer is a wonderful opportunity to live it, to continue to read it.

- We also propose Page One, “**Europe 2014: Is a New Beginning Possible?**” because it’s not just a text about Europe and the European elections, it also helps us fundamentally to understand the terms of the historical context in which we live, as well as how we can be Christians today in this context. For this reason, I think that working on this text is crucial. That is why we are proposing

it again, so that we can help each other to read it together and understand it more and more deeply. If there are questions, you can send them to me, because then we will continue to work on this text.

- *Choruses from "The Rock"* by T.S. Eliot.

- *It Is Midnight, Dr. Schweitzer* by G. Cesbron.

- *The Glorious Folly: A Novel of the Time of St. Paul* by L. De Wohl.

- *Il movimento di Comunione e Liberazione (1954-1986). Conversazioni con Robi Ronza [The Movement of Communion and Liberation (1954-1986): Conversations with Robi Ronza]*, the new edition by BUR, Rizzoli. It is a new edition, because the book has been sold out for a while.

How does the work of School of Community continue during the summer?

Until the community vacations, we will continue to work on the first lesson of the Fraternity Exercises, together with the first answer in the assembly, as well on the text **"Europe 2014: Is a New Beginning Possible?"**

From the end of the community vacations until the Beginning Day, we will continue the work on the Fraternity Exercises, going over the second lesson and the assembly. Afterward, we will move forward by working on the text of the Beginning Day.

The theme of the **community vacations** will be "What are you looking for?" in order to give a suggestion that is in continuity with the work that we are doing on the Fraternity Exercises. In choosing the title, we tried to find a modality, a question, that would prevent us from starting from definitions or from giving our own opinions. We are definitely not interested in those, because what is interesting is – as we were saying – discovering ourselves in action, in order to see what we are looking for, to see where the essential is for us. That is why we cannot answer this question with a definition, but with a comparison, with an observation, by recognizing what we are really looking for. To the question "What are you looking for?" we added a passage from the Exercises that speaks precisely of this, of the distinction between the intention that Christ be the essential and the discovery that often, in experience, this is not the case. "The criterion for discovering it comes from the Gospel. 'Where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.' Here you see the distance between the intention that Christ be the essential of life, and the discovery that often in experience this is not the case. Here the difference between intention and experience emerges. Thus, we can discover that even in good faith, the essential has become something else, and is no longer Christ; we have shifted to something else, maybe even in the name of that essential that continues nonetheless to be quoted in our discourses" (p. 8). So what are we looking for? It is an attempt to help us to make this journey, so that, as we live our life, the content of our self-awareness may, more and more, be Christ.

The title of the Rimini Meeting this year is **"To the Ends of the Earth and of Existence."** As you know, the title is closely tied to the Pope's insistence on sending us to the outskirts of the world, so that all of the outskirts may be reached by the Christian announcement and by Christ's mercy. Why? The second part of the Meeting's title says it: **"Destiny Has Not Left Man Alone."** At the Meeting, we want to shout this to everyone.

The Beginning Day will be on Saturday, September 27th in Milan, and in connection with many cities in Lombardy and other parts of Italy.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Have a good summer, everyone.