

**Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron
Milan, 2/10/10**

Text of reference: L. Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", vol. 3, Charity", p. 3-19

Song "I Wonder"

Song "Ballata dell'amore vero"

"I wonder that Jesus should come to die for poor lowly people like you and like I". This song we began with is born from the wonder of somebody who becomes aware that someone had pity of his nothingness. This is what we have to ask for, every day while we do School of Community: to share in the wonder of this song; if we do not share in this wonder, we haven't understood what School of Community says.

While reading the chapter on charity I realized that this love happened to me, and it is still present. What I'm asking myself, though, is: why then, in life it happens that other loves seem more real? Last time, when you gave the introduction on charity, you said that to speak about charity we first need to be aware of our need; so, the first thing that comes to my mind is that the reason why another love seems more real is because one doesn't know anymore who he is, what he really needs. But, the other thing I was thinking of is that, maybe, we also don't understand exactly what is happening to us as it is happening, which –by the way- is something he says on p. 5: "In addition, from the moment of the encounter, what reason desires to be able to understand most is that thing there".

Thank you, because this helps us to get into this chapter. When I gave the presentation of this third part of "Is it possible to live this way?" in Ireland and in the US – you can find the text on the February issue of *Traces*– I started from a quote of Pope Benedict from *Deus caritas est* : "God's love is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are". I was surprised that to speak of charity the Pope raised two questions that we have to answer: who is God and who are we (this became clear already at the last SofC, when our friend tried to help his father and immediately experienced the repercussion of his own need, he couldn't make it; so, only if we become aware of our need, we can really understand what charity is). To express this need in another way, here is a poem by Mario Luzi: "What is this lack a lack of,/ oh heart,/ of which all of a sudden you are full?/of what?/ Once the dam is broken/ it floods and submerges you/ the inundation of your poverty.../ It comes,/ perhaps it comes,/ from beyond you/ a recall/ which you now do not listen to because you are in agony/ But it exists, fostered by strength and music/ the perpetual music will return./ Be calm". If we try to identify with these words of Luzi – and we can do it, because we all have intuited at certain moments in life the magnitude of this lack of which we consist -, if this awareness is constantly with us, then we can really understand what the charity of the Mystery for us is; and we can understand what happened to us with the Christian encounter, when we crossed path with someone and we perceived a totally limitless answer to our lack. How is it that afterwards we confuse it with other loves? We can confuse it with other loves only for one reason: because we have forgotten what our lack is lack of. If we reduce our lack, if we don't become completely aware of it, then we are under the illusion that everything corresponds to us. And this danger, my friends, is always a threat to us. Someone wrote to me: "I perceive a contradiction between what it is said (that the Church is the place where we experience now – in the present -

Christ's embrace in all its intensity) and my eternally unfulfilled need. Everything is too little, small as compared to the capacity of the soul, Leopardi would say. Why this cursed need of a carnal and physical embrace? Is something wrong with me? Or is it really a sign of my greatness? Why, then, does it make me suffer so much? You can't imagine how happy I was when I read in the CLU Spiritual Exercises: "How I would like to embrace all of you, one by one, to communicate to you this deeply moved emotion with which the Mystery looks at us". Maybe I receive this embrace [she says: "maybe"], but not according to the way I have in my mind [that is: immediately after, one cannot sustain this lack and he reduces it to the form he has in his own mind]. I would like that everybody could stay with me, not only some people, because then – I think – I would feel that I am fine the way I am, it is as if I need to see it written in capital letters: "You are fine the way you are", but how many times Fr. Giussani told us so, why do I need confirmation? Is it only the sign of my disease, or do I need to change my perspective? I wish that one day what happened to Zaccheus could happen to me, and that someone who looks at me like that would tell me: "Today I want to come to your house". I ask you to help me and to correct me". But, didn't what happened to Zaccheus happen to us as well? Isn't this what the first witness was talking about? How many times has it happened to us? And how do we know that it exists, if not for the fact that it happened to us? You don't need additional confirmation, it exists; we need to open to what we have lived, to what we have seen, to what we have recognized. Because, I can find a person and say: "This one, this is the one"; but this doesn't spare me the drama, the drama of having to recognize this person tomorrow and the day after tomorrow; and I don't want to be spared this. This means that – once I have encountered Him – life is always dramatic, because I can recognize Him or not, and not because He is not present: He is present, otherwise I wouldn't have had this experience. What I have encountered, is. Is! Because He is the factor that corresponds to the needs of the heart. But I cannot put it in my pocket, I have to recognize Him every day. Excuse me: didn't the disciples have to recognize Him again and again? Were they spared this experience? Are you spared this experience with the person you love, who is with you in the flesh? So, it is as if all my need were to be constantly involved; and if I reduce it, I cannot understand who Christ is, and I am not amazed by what He is: "God's charity for man is being moved, a gift of self", but Giussani can't help to add right away: "What is man that You should be mindful of him?" To fully understand this sentence, this tenderness of the Mystery, it is necessary to feel the repercussion right away: What is man that You should be mindful of him?" There is no contradiction, but it is a dialogue – as it is said on p. 5 -: "It exists in experience, because it is felt, and, when followed, it produces an effect, it changes things. But above all, it dialogues imperiously with the heart and answers one, another, and yet another need: the constitutive needs of our spirit". Not at all the automatism we would like to reduce life to! Instead, it is a passionate dialogue between my constant need and a constant presence. If it weren't like this, it would be infinite boredom, it wouldn't interest me.

Until recently I always thought: "How can Carron be like this? How much I wish that I could be like him!" Now it is different, I want to have the same experience you have, and I am working on this, so that gratitude is not a good emotion, but a physical thing that has taken hold of me, and never stops. I have two examples. First: "I have started to take with me in the subway, and anywhere I go, the booklet of the CLU Spiritual Exercises (and some of my colleagues asked me if it was my new notebook, because in the end people do notice things). One morning two boys next to me said: "What a bad day, had I known it I would have turned over in bed and kept sleeping". I was reading the point where you say that in order to judge reality we always start from other circumstances,

never from a fact that happened to us (so that the criteria we use are those of another person). And those two say: "What a bad day".....

We would say the same, if it weren't for.....

In fact, I was eager to tell them what you had told us at School of Community, and in that moment, the only thing I was able to answer, in a rough way, was: "Surely, if we think of the people in Haiti, we cannot say that!" But it wasn't a reproach, I wanted to convey that reality is greater. I had only two stops on the subway, so I couldn't say much, but I wasn't happy with my first answer, it could sound moralistic, so I looked at them, and, smiling, I said: "Anyway, have a good day, I wish it may be a good day for you". I thought: "I bet they will tell me go to hell, mind your own business". Instead, they looked at me and they said: "A good day to you too, Ma'am"; I thought: "These two called me Ma'am, but I am not looking that old", but I think that they saw I was reading, it is as if they perceived an experience of communion, I don't know if you understand what I am saying. Second example: few days ago we came back from the weekend, I tripped over my husband's computer and I broke it. He is a journalist: it was a disaster, a huge argument, really heavy words. I thought: "Here, besides the computer, also the relationship with my husband is broken". At the last SofC a young man had talked about his argument with his wife: same dynamics. We woke up in the morning and we did not say hi to each other. The next day I was at the office for the entire day and I was thinking: "But where did that man get the energy to send the famous text-message?" He had said: "Because I saw some friends", but for me it wasn't enough, because I was at the office, in front of the computer and there were no friends, and I wanted the same affective energy that doesn't deny humanity – it seemed to me that the words had been heavy, and words have a weight -, but denies that the circumstance of the argument with my husband may become a tomb. Few months ago it would have been like that. Instead, now, thinking of the witness of that young man and how you answered to him, I decided: "I want the same energy that allows me to start again this relationship, to be forgiven and to forgive him". The only thing I was able to do was to beg Christ –for the entire day in front of the computer – that He would come. That evening I went back home, and with gladness I said hi to my husband; and this is unthinkable for me, even more that to start a conversation with those two on the subway. And – I am saying this to you very timidly, because it is really only a dawning – I begin to intuit that what is interesting in the relationship with my husband is the difference of Christ's face that is starting to emerge, while for years I thought that the good part was the reciprocal satisfaction, to be in tune with each other, to feel well together, the task, to have our daughter. Instead, I am starting to discover in this man a different presence, which is the true face of Christ. And I wouldn't have been able to discover this without the begging and this step. To conclude, compared to two years ago I can tell you that the second child we desired so much hasn't arrived, but I am happy. The circumstances on which I relied for my happiness did not happen, and I find myself moved, without boundaries.

This is the point: if we leave to the Mystery a minimum of space, He fulfills our desire beyond our expectations (even if it doesn't coincide with the form we have in our mind). Before making a move towards the other, one finds in himself something that remains as a gaze, so much so that he takes it with him as an emotion, as a way to live reality, as a way to be in the subway, as a way to face the day. You haven't done anything yet, but your life is already invested, constituted by this Presence, by this gaze. As I re-read the beautiful piece by *Miguel Manara* (note 2, p. 3), I was struck by it, because it describes very well what this is: "Yes, you speak truly Girolama; I am not as I was. I see

better, and nevertheless I was not blind; But it was the light, doubtless which caused the imperfection; For the light from without is a poor thing; It is not that which illumines our life. You have lit a lamp in my heart: And lo! I am a sick man who falls asleep in the shadows, With the dew of fever on his brow and the chill of destitution in his heart, and then awakes with a start in a beautiful chamber Where all things bathe in the shining music of light; And lo! The friend whom he wept for long years gone The friend returned from the ocean lands is there Who smiles upon him with eyes more calm, more wise than of yore, And all the family is there, old men with snowy heads And children clad in the light of harvests, and the fat old dog Is there, his large eyes drowned in tender laughter And his mouth wide open and full of barks of joy to make carnival for the man saved from the deluge of darkness! See what a place you have made in my heart, Girolama. And thanks, and great thanks, to you, Girolama!" It is a presence that illuminates life, that starts to invest us, light starts to become mine, to become ours: "You have lit a lamp in my heart". The presence of Girolama lit a light in the heart of Miguel Manara, a presence that doesn't remain outside us, but that starts to fill the heart and to awaken every step of our life – then one will be able to make some ironic attempt, but this is secondary; if it doesn't happen today, it will be tomorrow or the day after tomorrow - : I already start to have a real experience of this infinite charity of the Mystery, and I start to be grateful for it. Because one can break the computer, but this, which before would have been a disaster, is not a tomb. We haven't yet expressed any charity towards others, it will come. The first thing is to participate in this gaze, otherwise we cannot answer to the lack of which Luzi speaks. And without an answer to it, our starting point is not a fullness and then we depend on how the day goes, on the computer, on every thing else.

I wanted to ask you a question. As a premise I will tell two facts. A student of mine came to tell me that her parents had argued, her father went to sleep on the couch, and the next morning, while he was taking her to school, he burst into tears because he didn't feel loved. At first I said: "In what he told you he expresses a need, a request, hug him more often, give him a present". However, afterwards it became evident to both of us that the desire to be loved is so infinite that it cannot be resolved with this approach. Second fact: I went to the Marriage Preparation Course at my Parish, even happy to do this. The priest started to give some advice: "Every two weeks go out together, sometimes hold hands; if you want to attract your wife every day you have to surprise her"and so on the whole time! I was really surprised by the fact that Jesus was totally absent, and also, all these "recipes" did not really convince me, they would be an illusion. So, the question is: why does Fr.Giussani, given the disproportion that exists between my desire to be loved and to love (especially in this moment) and our inability to do so, insists in telling us that we should imitate Christ's charity?

I thank you, because what Giussani says are either just words flying in the wind with no consistency (and we already know the answer ahead of time: it's useless, impossible, given this disproportion, given this incapacity of ours), or it can be a real experience. And this can happen only if we follow what Father Giussani says, because to have the ability to get to what you are asking you have to do the first part first, and this is essential to the method. Because if you don't, you're already off track, as if the whole first part of charity hadn't taken place, and this is the thing that we normally always do: we think about charity, and the first thing that comes into our heads is the charity that I have to do for others, and since I'm disproportionate and incapable, I can't do it. How does Father Giussani correct us? Father Giussani corrects us in the same way that the whole Bible corrects us: the Mystery took the initiative, when God, seeing the people of Israel in Egypt, saw the suffering of His people,

was moved, and came to give us a hand. Everything sprang from this pity that God had for the people of Israel, from the start. And the emphasis of the whole New Testament is this “first”: it’s not about us being up to loving God – we’re not: what else is new? – it’s about God who loved us first! What’s really new, what astounded everyone, to the point that they keep on stressing it, from Saint Paul to Saint John, is this “first.” John says, “Love consists in this: not that we have loved God, but that He has loved us and sent His Son as the expiatory sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). And further on he says, “We love, because He has loved us first” (1 John 4:19). But we usually skip over this, unaware of what you said; so it’s pointless for us to forget all our drama, all our disproportion, all our incapacity when we talk about charity, as if we were just talking about changing our password; and we forget about the whole path we have travelled, we forget about what we are and we talk about charity with the same mindset that everyone else has, as moralism, something I can accomplish without [first] receiving it. Father Giussani corrects us from the first moment on, because the whole stress, the whole emphasis is really somewhere else. The starting point for being able to understand what charity is, is not what I think about charity, what sort of move I make toward somebody else, the incapacity I feel – no! “Charity [...] indicates the deepest content, discovers intimacy, discovers the heart of that Presence that faith recognizes” To understand charity, now, we can’t forget what he told us. We’re not interested in working on charity because now we have to understand what charity is: what concerns us is going to the bottom of the Presence that has fascinated us, because if there’s something new in our life, it’s the encounter with an exceptional Presence, and we want to discover its innermost heart. So to understand charity we can’t think of ourselves first of all (or of anyone else who is as inconsistent as we are) and then complain that we’re so inconsistent; on the contrary, we have to start from that Presence, because only by looking at It will we discover Its deep recesses. And this is a decisive change of method, because otherwise we talk about charity according to the mindset that everyone has, reduced to moralism, and then we whine that we just can’t do it. So what does he say to us about the method? “Let’s start taking the steps necessary to understand something, slowly. Then you can go over them at home [or on the subway...], although these things penetrate us as through osmosis, through osmotic pressure, rather than through a banal analysis [which does no good] that claims to clarify things. They enter into us if we look at the mystery of Christ, like John and Andrew, who watched Him speak without interrupting Him”. We can understand what charity is by watching that Presence, giving time to that Presence, living together with that Presence, so that an awareness that can be experienced can enter us: an awareness that can be touched, felt, of the deep recesses of that Presence that I have recognized, of that Presence that has struck me to the marrow – because I have to understand what struck me like this! Only if I give space and time to the Presence so that the way It showed Itself comes out (how It speaks, how It watches, how It acts, how It judges, how It treats reality), will I then be able to understand what charity is. If we skip over this step, we’ve broken the percorso, that is, the method that Giussani – he travelled it first, following it with loyalty – used to introduce us to the Mystery as charity. He doesn’t give us a lecture on charity, but introduces us through a Presence that allows us to understand what charity is. If we skip over this, then we find ourselves facing questions we can’t possibly answer, because what you are saying is absolutely true, but to take in the full significance of the answer, you have to let yourself be introduced to charity as the Mystery made it. Giussani is the most loyal, and so he teaches us the method; he bears witness to the method. Not because he’s better, but because he’s more loyal, simpler and closer to how reality happens: he’s not learning something detached from the Presence that he recognized. This is how he gives us a hand, because when we distance ourselves, we don’t know how to answer the questions. But by looking at

the School of Community together we are led back to the path and so little by little we'll be able to see how the answer comes out in the percorso he has us follow.

The other time you talked about the difference between eros (lacking love) and agape (overflowing love), and you were saying that the latter springs from the superabundance that the Trinity is living in Himself and that He wants to share with human beings. What I'm starting to understand, thanks also to the close comparison with the School of Community that you're having us make, is that this superabundance is not being filled up with things, money, success, and so on.

Why not? You see, without being aware of it, you've already distanced yourself, because Father Giussani is not talking about your superabundance; he's talking about the superabundance of the charity of the Mystery! Excuse me, I'm interrupting you in order to help us all, because we get ourselves off track without being aware of it. It's almost automatic, without being aware of it – do you get it? It's not the superabundance of other things in you; no, it's the superabundance of the Mystery. The word *agape* is the attempt to explain (with a word other than the lack inherent in *eros*) not our, but the Mystery's superabundance.

Then I understand why Father Giussani talks about distraction as a betrayal, on page 11, when he says, "When did we seriously think of Him, with our heart, in this last month, in the last three months, from October until now? Never. We haven't thought of Him as John and Andrew thought of Him while they watched Him speak" I intuit that, paradoxically, one is more capable of gratuity when he is aware of his own nothingness, of being needy, because it's then that there's more of a chance for Another to break into our life. Now I'll ask a question that I think is something I have confused in my head. These days I've been granted the experience of what you define as the here and now of Christ that you also spoke about before, but it seems to me that it's neither obvious nor automatic, if someone experiences the here and now of Christ, that it triggers the experience of superabundance; instead, in some relationships, in fact the most meaningful ones, what happens to me is that I in fact experience a greater perception of this lack that we talked about before. But isn't it the experience of the superabundance that should have me saying, "If Christ is not a presence now, I cannot love myself and I cannot love you now"? Can this mean that in these facts or people an experience of the here and now of Christ didn't really happen or I didn't really have it?

Do I have to tell you when you have an experience of the here and now of Christ? Or can you recognize it when you have it?

As you were saying before, someone recognizes that he is having this experience because of the fact of seeing himself with this love, which doesn't happen automatically...

This is why, now, you have to forget about when you don't have it. Instead, start from when you have this experience, because this is the method. Even the disciples could say, like you, "Many times we don't have it." But the point is that when they were with Him and heard Him speaking, they saw Him looking [at things] in a certain way and they felt so looked at, they had this experience. Then, a moment later, they talked amongst themselves (the Gospel has no shame in making it obvious how they crumbled a moment later) and they wanted to know who was the first, and so on; we can make an endless list, but in that situation where they lived all their weakness, all their inconsistency, all their incapacity, the gaze of Christ constantly broke through and made itself here and now, and little

by little this is what took over. It's not that it happened at every event of their life, but when it happened, they could recognize Him in this way. When are you able to recognize now that Christ is here and now? Not when you decide, or when you're thinking about doing this or that – no. It's when once again you are astounded because you're with someone who forgives you or with someone who looks at you in a way you've never felt looked at before, or you find that you have a joy, a fullness, a superabundance that you can't give yourself. Then, in that moment, you have to go to the depth of this experience: "Faith is obliged to make us recognize it. Why are we obliged to recognize it [here and now]? To be obliged means we would not be reasonable if we didn't recognize it. Why? Because reason is awareness of reality according to the totality of its factors. We are in front of a factor that corresponds to the needs of our heart – or better yet - it brings those needs out, as in the case of one who stands on tiptoes to see something he wants to see yet still doesn't see it; he stretches his neck and still doesn't see it, but the thing is there, because its voice is heard. This factor is inexplicable; that is, you can't deduce it through human experience [but it's there: you can acknowledge that it's there in that experience]. [...] exists in experience, because it is felt, and, when followed, it produces an effect, it changes things [which is the difference between any kind of sentimentalism, any kind of spiritualism which changes nothing, and the proof that "it exists if it changes things"]. But above all, it dialogues imperiously with the heart and answers one, another, and yet another need: the constitutive needs of our spirit. We can understand neither how nor when, but His exceptional physiognomy, His exceptional presence, is there. If I don't recognize Him as present because I don't understand it, because I don't understand how He can be present, I go against reason, because reason says either 'He exists' or 'He doesn't exist' [it's a judgment]. To say 'He exists', while adding 'I don't know how to explain it', leaves reason perfectly and honorably in accord with itself". I acknowledge that it's here, but that I can't grasp it. So how can you know that the presence of Christ exists, even if you can't explain it?

Because I experience it.

Because you experience it, through the effect it provokes in you. And this is not something I have to tell you: you know very well when you are looked at in a certain way, when a Presence comes to you that makes you breathe, when something corresponds to your needs (just as you know when someone treats you unfairly and it doesn't correspond to you and all your needs come out and you get mad at that someone). Don't think you're not making a judgment: you are judging in either case, when it corresponds and when it doesn't correspond; we are always judging, and so this is where reason starts out, where (as Father Giussani says) the irresistible desire to go to the depth of that Presence we recognize springs forth. But the here and now of Christ is not something different from this superabundance, this new gaze, this tenderness you find embracing you, this forgiveness. Why is it Christ? Because it corresponds, because you can't explain it without the unmistakable mark of His presence as the Gospel describes it to us. You find today, in the present, the same gaze, the same fullness, the same superabundance that the Gospels describe. This is the here and now; it's not about how great I am. After the familiarity with this Presence, living together with this Presence, His charity starts to enter inside us, to fill us up; and little by little, you relate to reality in a new way that you never dreamed of before, as we were saying about poverty: you are glad, you are free, you lack nothing. But this is the effect, and we don't have to concern ourselves first of all with the effect, because if we follow, it will happen. We think we already know the path that we can follow by trying on our own, instead of following. This is why he says, still on page 5, "But it understands that it can't even show how this can happen; it must simply follow" It's all here, if we have this loyalty

to all our questions. He takes us by the hand and brings us. We only need the simplicity to follow. That's all. So let's try to follow with simplicity. Let's try to experience this osmosis that passes into us as we watch the Mystery of Christ, like John and Andrew. The text is full of these Gospel passages that Father Giussani uses to put us in front of that Presence, so that His heart can more and more become ours. So for next time we're on the same pages, along with the reading from Page One of the February issue of *Traces*. We need a familiarity; we need to live together with the text so we can be helped, led by the hand, so to speak, so that it can become ours. Changing the method leads us into being confused.

Signing up for the School of Community is a sign of taking part in the movement. It's a small gesture that educates us; with it, we want to express our willingness to take this work seriously. We have made a judgment that we cannot perform our gestures automatically; we have to be aware of the reasons we have for doing things. This is not meant to be an organizational reminder, but one that educates. In fact, how can you see that something is changing in your life? From the fact that we are starting to take part in a gesture that doesn't end when our gathering ends, but starts to become our own, and gets us to take up the text (for example, on the subway, as has happened).

Signing up for the School of Community is a sign that something that we're doing is making a mark. We don't care about signing up in a mechanical way; we want this gesture to make a mark in each one of us. This is why we decided to open up the possibility of signing up till the middle of March, to give anyone who hasn't already signed up the opportunity to do so.

This month we have the fifth anniversary of the death of Father Giussani and the twenty-eighth anniversary of the pontifical recognition of the Fraternity of Communion and Liberation. The Masses that will be celebrated throughout the whole world on this occasion are more than anything else a huge thanksgiving to God for the life of Father Giussani, and next for the fact that this reality that was born from him still exists, that it's alive and that it teaches us to identify more and more with his charism. The more that time goes on, the more we grow in our awareness that his charism is the most fitting response to the circumstances that we are living through. We note with gratitude that after five years since Giussani's death, as we said on the day of his funeral, by following him, he becomes more and more a father; he generates us more and more. I see this as I travel around the world, when I visit our communities. It is striking how he can continue to be present and continue to accompany us with everything he left us and with everything he does in us and through us in the present.

•*Glory Be*