

Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron
Milan, 2/24/10

Text of reference: L. Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", vol. 3, Charity", p. 3-19, and J. Carron "Charity: Gift of self, moved" Traces, no. 2/ 2010, Pageone.

Song "Favola"

Song "Negra Sombra"

In reading some of the letters and questions you sent me, I remembered that part of School of Community on friendship ("True following is friendship") where Fr. Giussani told us: "And as I am the one here before you, I tell you. But I know that I am explaining it badly, so I say to you: Come back tomorrow, ok? Because tomorrow I'll try to tell you in a better way, and the day after tomorrow I'll try to tell you in an even better way, and then, finally we will need to tell it to each other every day, because that way, we'll say it to each other better. And after many, many, many days it becomes like something that's flowing, like looking each other in the eye. We look each other in the eye and we understand". This came to my mind because the first question I want to address recalls a question from last SofC, and the answer I gave to it. "I am writing to you about the first question asked at the last SofC. Maybe I misunderstood the meaning of 'concrete', but in any case I think the young woman meant to say 'real', saying that there are some loves that give her the impression of being more real than Jesus' love. I think that in this question there is a division to begin with, since Jesus' love passes really through real people. However, your answer did not convince me completely, where you say: "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". Instead, I think that potentially everything corresponds to us exactly because reality is Christ. As a consequence, it isn't a problem to be attracted by people, by things, by other loves; on the contrary, I think that the interesting challenge is in recognizing in them the presence of the Mystery, looking at these loves as a sign of His Presence, which chooses to come where and when He wants to. How moving it is to think that He deigns to communicate Himself even through me! Otherwise, there is the risk that everything remains divided, and we risk to live Jesus' love as a frustrating lack: "Oh, I can't have that thing, but in any case there is Jesus!". The work I have been doing for a while is to beg for His Presence and the grace of simplicity to be able to recognize Him, but through the force of reality, even through the things, the people from whom generally I don't expect anything. Otherwise, how will I ever be able to recognize that He, His love, is even more than all of this? But, maybe I am wrong, this was my impression, maybe I didn't understand correctly what you said, what do you think?" I am going to answer using other letters I received. At the beginning of the chapter on charity in the book *Is it possible (really?!) to live this way?*, Fr. Giussani says that the first charity is to go to the bottom of this lack, this dissatisfaction that constitutes us, because this is the first charity for ourselves, that we may understand the mystery of who we are, recognize what is not enough – he repeats it twenty times in that text -; and we can see this when other loves happen to us, as we were saying in the first witness of last SofC. If one doesn't truly understand what he has encountered, one can be swept away by another love. A person writes me: "As a premise I will say that I met the Movement in 1985. I got my college degree in 1993, then I met my wife and I lived the past fifteen years totally engrossed in my career, my family, without participating any longer in the life of the Movement, not going to Mass, not participating in any kind of gesture". How is this possible? It is possible. Another love appears and one is swept away by it. He says he lived the past fifteen years only thinking of her, so wonderful that relationship was.....At one point his wife died in a very short time." It was necessary for her to die, in order for my heart and my

mind to become wide open to some truths - so simple, but so true - that I had encountered, for me to become aware of a sequence of evidences that will prevent me from ever living again as I lived until now. The method of the Mystery is incredible: how taking away from me the flesh of the sacramental relationship, He increased my awareness. The day she died I realized tragically that our telling each other that our relationship didn't consist of looking at each other (as if we were the reason for our actions), but consisted in accompanying each other towards our personal destiny, had been but a discourse: that day I realized that my wife had been the reason for which I was living. Then, in front of death, the need for a reason that permitted me to go on, surfaced, it was inexorably true that she could not be the reason for my living." Until he becomes aware of this, he surrenders to this fact; and the day of her funeral, facing the casket of his wife, listening to the words of the priest's homily, he accepts this, and "in that instant a sense of peace took hold of my heart and became gladness". It may happen, we should not be afraid of this, even if one has encountered Him, it may happen that other loves take over. But, why do they take over? Because we think that they may fulfill us, and this may happen, as you have seen it, in married life, or it may happen to one who has the vocation (as a person in the Memores Domini wrote to me, distraught because one of them had left; and then, one day, she meets a friend, also previously belonging to the Memores Domini, who had gotten married and had a family, who asks her to go together to SofC because her husband and her child are not enough: "One evening, after SofC, she burst into tears for the nostalgia she has for the vocation that God has given her"). Another love can take over, sure it can. So, it is true – as our friend in the first letter says - that potentially everything corresponds to us because reality is Christ; the matter is that exactly because of this need we have inside, of this lack, due to this initial provocation that reality stirs up in us, through this force of reality we are launched towards something else, and only if we have this awareness we don't stop at the sign. It comes to mind what I said at the Opening Day – you have to go back to it – when Giussani, talking about the Christian companionship, said: "How on earth are these people here like this?! So, you begin this path finding a companion, a companionship, or by seeing a group that has something interesting and you follow them and hear these people saying that what they have that is interesting is there because of the Lord, and you follow them, a little bit intrigued, but without being defined by that thing, and at a certain point this attraction gets bigger and you are struck more by that idea, by that word, and you are struck by the fact that the people tell you, ' We are together because of That One, the Lord'. This is a qualitative jump as compared to the first impression. So, you start to take That One seriously, and the more you keep following this unfolding, the more Jesus becomes more important than all the faces put together [this is the heart of the matter, that Jesus – Jesus! – becomes more important than all the faces put together]. And He becomes so important that you understand that without That One [Jesus] the faces would disappear and you would be bored". Without experiencing the lack I stop at the faces; but, without Him the faces would disappear, as it happens often in relationships, in marriage: at a certain point she, the one who moved you the most, doesn't interest you any more. Why? Because, without "that" we are not able to keep a relationship alive, fresh, young, as it was at the beginning. Without Jesus, without Him communicating Himself at the core of this relationship "the faces would disappear and you would be bored", it's not enough, you get bored, you leave. Is it clear?

The day after the earthquake in Haiti I was going to class, and in the hallway I was startled by this thought, this question (I say startled because I was not thinking at all of what had happened the night before): "What does this fact, so huge, have to do with the instant I am going to live in a moment?. And since it surprised me and also caught me unprepared, I decided that my class would start from this. So, I asked my students: "Are you aware of what happened? They gave me some very different answers: "No, they are far away", or: "It is a tragedy because they were already miserable, and now they are even more miserable". Then a boy said: "I am interested in knowing what you felt", and I – still unprepared – told them what I had felt as I had looked at the pictures and at my husband's face while he was telling me what had happened: "First I was struck by how things are limited; second, I realize that things call me to an

ever greater relationship". The week after they asked me again, and a boy, referring to the second point I had made, told me: "I am struck by the fact that you talk about the earthquake in Haiti this way, but actually, this is what I see in the way you work" I was very struck by the loyalty of this eleven year-old kid (because he was loyal to the experience he was having at that moment, to the total experience he was having at that moment, and this was the reason that gave him so much certainty in what he was saying). Also, it struck me because at the time I was feeling bitter, I was doing some work with them and it was not going well, the outcome was always negative, and I had reached the point of saying in a very cynical way: "OK, I am giving this project up, it doesn't matter, it means I was not supposed to go there". Instead what he said made me think: "You see: your inability, your inconsistency, is not enough to erase the fact that He took hold of you in a relationship that is visible". That shifted the problem away from myself and my inability, to the fact that Another had taken hold of me.

What does this have to do with charity?

Because what moves me is His initiative towards me, so much so that this fact prevented me from dismissing cynically and without drama my relationship with Him; instead it made it more intense, it gave it a new depth: "Look: the truth is that it is I who took hold of you, it's not you who has to love Me first". I am the one who has been taken hold of.

Pay attention, because this is essential for the transition from the first part of charity to the second; in fact, what is surprising about the kid is that he discovers in her the novelty she carries, which is greater than all of our inconsistencies. It is important to understand this: where does this new being - that makes himself present in the way I move - come from? Not because I make a resolution. On this topic Pope Benedict said some beautiful things during a visit to the Seminarians of Rome on February 12: "'Abide [in my love]' and 'Observe my Commandments'. 'Observe' is only the second level: the first is to 'abide', the ontological level", which is that living together we talked of at the beginning of last SofC: as if by osmosis, staying immersed in a place like ours, if we identify ourselves ever more with this path, little by little it becomes ours. This 'abiding' (which is not remaining in a mechanical way, biding your time, because in that case nothing is communicated: we are men, not mechanisms!), if we make ourselves one with what Fr. Giussani witnesses to us, generates us (because this is the 'generating' that he continues to give us as a gift, five years after his death). Pope Benedict continues: "'Observe' only comes second. 'Abide' comes first, at the ontological level, namely that we are united with Him, He has given Himself to us beforehand and has already given us His love, the fruit. It is not we who must produce the abundant fruit: Christianity is not moralism, it is not we who must do all that God expects of the world, but we must first of all enter this ontological mystery: God gives Himself. His being, His loving, precedes our action [...]. Ethics are a consequence of being: first the Lord gives us new life, this is the great gift. Being precedes action and from this being action then follows, as an organic reality, so we can also be what we are in our activity. Let us thank the Lord for He has removed us from pure moralism; we cannot obey a prescribed law, but only have to act in accordance with our new identity. Therefore it is no longer obedience, an external thing, but rather the fulfillment of the gift of a new life. I say it once again: let us thank the Lord because He precedes us, He gives us what we must give, and then we can be, in the truth and strength of our new being, protagonists of His reality. Abiding and observing: observing is the sign of abiding, and abiding is the gift that He gives us, but which has to be renewed every day of our lives [...], but here too the true newness is not what we do, the true newness is what He did [and what He continues to do] [...]: the newness is the gift, the great gift, and from the gift, from the newness of the gift, also follows, as I have said, the new action". Beautiful! This is the point: if we follow, that is if we remain with all of ourselves, at a certain moment this new being is transmitted and emerges not because on that day I made a resolution, but because He makes it possible for others to recognize Him in us.

Last time I went home having shifted the starting point to what SofC says: the discovery of that Presence that the heart recognizes. For me the past two weeks were dominated by this, and by the sentence of Jeremiah that Fr. Giussani quotes: "With eternal love I have loved you, for this I have attracted you to me, having pity of your nothingness". I was struck by how Fr. Giussani talks to us about God being moved by man as if he were describing his own emotion, and I can say that I do understand this emotion. I can recall specific moments in my life (day, hour, place, facts), when it was clear that I was entering reality with this emotion, that leap of the heart because you are glad, you feel free, because it is different. I don't question any of this at all, but afterwards it is as if I were saying:" To me all this being moved happens intermittently". I would like to be helped on this point, because I cannot doubt what happened to me, it is a fact, it is an evidence, nobody can question it, but.....

Beautiful! The first point is that sometimes in front of this discontinuity it is as if what is missing prevailed (which is still intermittent), instead of the already existing fact, that fact of which in certain moments you are totally certain (not even the discontinuity can shake off this certainty). The problem is that in us – because of what is still missing – the feeling of what is missing almost prevails over what exists, and so an instant after we are blocked, even if we are walking the path. This is why I have given this example in other occasions: imagine that someone had an accident, he is completely paralyzed, unresponsive. If one day he starts to move a leg, we are very excited, and if someone were to tell us: "But he is moving only a leg....." we would respond: "Are you crazy?! You don't understand anything, he was totally unresponsive, and now he is moving a leg!" What is prevailing? What is still missing, or what is starting to move? This confusion is very common among us, since it is as if what is missing still prevailed; but, who is more realistic? One who starts to recognize this, hoping that it may take over the rest, or one who, being obtuse, looks at things in a reduced way? It is what we were saying last year about the small shoot. One sees the dry stump and says: "Only a small shoot!".....But if it exists, all can be reborn from it!

Second point: you mention moments that are evident, and this is essential because it is like a point of no return: moments that mark our life, that take such a form, that mold us in such a strong way as to become a point of no return. I understand well your desire that they may become ever more common, the norm, but I want to insist on the fact that this discontinuity should not lead us to dismiss all that is positive generated by the recognition – in those moments – of the evidence of that Presence that moves us deeply. "With eternal love I loved you": it is as if each time I emerge from this discontinuity, when the Lord by grace grabs me by the hair, pulls me away from my distraction, I become aware of this once again; and it is a feast:" "Thank goodness that He still exists and takes hold of me again". This is what little by little – because it happens little by little – has to become habitual. Fr. Giussani spoke very well about this in a text I used for the Memores Domini retreat last weekend. Somebody asked Fr. Giussani this question: what does it mean the awareness of a Presence in every instant of life (that is, without this discontinuity, without being intermittent)? Fr. Giussani answered that it is impossible for this to happen in every action, and it isn't even necessary. What is important isn't the number of times, but the value it tends to, the "tendential value": there is an affectivity, a lovingness, that slowly takes hold of us, and this repetition, even intermittent, tends to become habitual. "It is as if slowly the memory becomes like a perfume, a freshness that communicates itself at the core of your being [it becomes yours, as we were saying earlier, it becomes yours], that permeates every initiative you take to act [...] and it becomes stable and makes it easier for you to multiply the memory". We live at this level existentially, it is exactly that 'abiding' Pope Benedict was referring to. This is the grace of the charism: the truth Pope Benedict presented to us so beautifully, is transformed by Fr. Giussani into a possible experience, as he introduces us to a method that allows us to take steps following a path so human (without getting into a frenzy about measure, how many times) that it becomes ever more habitual. He says: "Suddenly old age becomes more youthful than youth. Because you reach a point in which you realize that you have made it easy not to become distracted - which is the memory - , and familiar the sense of leaning on Christ present [...]. It is exactly the trajectory that someone who were to fall in love –truly though, and it is difficult! – having the woman present right

there, would live with that woman: first the memory is in fragments (memory is like a note book with many dots and the best is in the spaces that are empty). As times goes on, the more one is used to write in the notebook of memory, the more that memory becomes permanent. At first it becomes permanent as need – if she goes away....oh, my God, what a heartache! -; later on, as she goes or stays, it will be more painful or more joyful, but it is the same [because she has become part of the I, he cannot say “I” without her in his being, as an awareness at the core of his being]. As we exist we are one thing, one. As if one, reaching you stealthily, suddenly said to you: “What are you thinking of?”, “Ah, I am thinking of work”. Another time, seeing you a bit thoughtful, he says: “What are you thinking of?” : you are thinking of her. Substituting this ‘her’ with ‘Him’, first of all invests every ‘her’ – all of them -, it invests them according to the priority your heart demands, according to the predestination of proximity that God has established, with a richness in variety –therefore - , with a truth in respecting the proportions of things. [...] And the more you multiply the habit of these gestures, the more they become permanent, as a permanent substrate, as the permanent freshness of all your actions. Until it becomes exactly the precise, objective, content of your thought and of your heart, and you would never want to stop being like this. [This is the way it becomes ours, the way it communicates itself to the core of our being] [...] Then it is another world, unknown to all”. Reality is greater than our philosophical interpretations, and so, slowly, that discontinuity is filled and it becomes more constant, not in number, but as “tendential value”, because of this affectivity that is expressed this way.

I am starting from last week's provocation, when you said that charity makes us think automatically about being charitable to others. At first, I said: “He got the point, it is true, I am like that”. However, looking at what happens with this provocation in mind, I realize that it is not true. I am giving you an example: due to a family situation I am taking care of someone, and when I do that gesture I am filled by such a deep tenderness, that I perceive in the depth of my heart that I am the object of a gesture of charity, and that this is what truly happens first.

Thank you.

I am going to tell you an ugly story, unpleasant and not very original, and it will help me to be self-critical. I rushed through the last ten-twelve months doing three documentaries at the same time, because I received three requests, and I got good results (they paid me in full, the clients are super-satisfied, the people not involved in the job are very impressed). The ugly part is this: that I conquered the world, but I lost myself. Why? Because I thought that every moment of memory was a waste of time. In every single day of those ten-twelve months there was always something more important, and I was saying: “Darn, the five minutes Carron talks about!”, but there was always something more important to do.

Do you see how other loves win? There is always something more important: this is a judgment.

I was truly recognizing this debasement in me, this hardening of my heart: what made me cry before, now left me indifferent.

This is the problem, my friends, that we may have had an experience like this, and at a certain point – says Fr. Giussani – certain things that moved us to the core, if we let ourselves go, don't mean anything any more.

I wish I could tell you that I won an Oscar.....Then it happened that (at times I don't sleep at night because of my worries, and I work) I imagined to meet Mary Magdalene and I told her: “Excuse me, He had risen and He told you ‘Do not touch Me’, as you were trying to embrace Him. Why did you obey

Him? He was right there in front of you!” And I understood that I would have hugged Him close, because I do not have Him in front of me, while she didn’t need to.

Because there is a way to possess which is more intense than an embrace; it isn’t that there isn’t an embrace, that there isn’t a true relationship, but there is an intensity, that unknown world is an intensity greater than what we have in our mind: it’s called “virginity”.

I am very scared, because I feel that if things go well I’ll be done for.

No! You will be done for not because things go well, but if you forget who you are. Look again at the beginning of SofC: if you forget what that lack is lack of, if you forget who you are, you follow a judgment that makes you go after something that - by its very nature - cannot fulfill you, and this is why you feel that you are getting lost. In moments like this one understands what kind of charity one needs in order to be so truthful to himself, to recognize this lack. This is what makes you ever more aware that that memory is what allows you to breathe, because otherwise you lose yourself. Once, someone asked me this question: “How can I have this memory in the middle of this situation?” (it was like the one you just witnessed). I answered: “How can you live in this chaos *without* memory? Only losing yourself”.

That is: we barter the birthright we have received for a plate of lentils...

And why do we do it? It is a problem of judgment, because we don’t understand that the lentils, even if they were lentils “à la Oscar”, wouldn’t be enough. The more aware of this we become, the more we don’t go after other loves. Then one understands that true charity is what corresponds to this expectation of the heart, because without it I feel lost, no matter how successful I am. This is the matter: that one may start to get aware of this, that one may start to ask it: it isn’t a matter of accounting for every minute, it is the ‘tendential value’!

To conclude I am going to read you a piece as an example of what this “gift of self, moved” which is charity, is. It is a text, given to me by a friend, on the Russian pianist Maria Yudina, the one who was able to move even Stalin. It recounts this: “In my group there was a boy about 8-9 years old who was a pain in the neck, his name was Akinfa. Practically, he had no family. He lived with some relatives he didn’t love and who didn’t love him. He was annoying, he was provoking with everybody, he was making fun of the Jewish kids, he was getting into fights, and so on. We all used to encourage him with our words and with our example, particularly me since I was in charge of him; but, at one point Akinfa went too far: he beat one of the other kids, insulted the adults, committed a petty theft, and so they decided to expel him. When the time came to carry on the sentence, the moment of the final separation, I don’t know why, but I broke into tears, and in that moment the second birth of Akinfa took place. He broke into tears as well, he asked everybody for forgiveness, gave back what he had stolen, and from that moment he started to follow me around everywhere in the camp like a faithful puppy, explaining to everybody that never in his life had he seen a teacher break into tears for one of her students, a teacher who cried - to say it in his own words - “over the soul and the life of a rascal”. Such was his sense of amazement and his desire to get back on the right track”. This is what Christ does: this gift of Self to the point of being moved for our destiny. This is the charity we can see also in a teacher moved in front of a child. I am struck because this is how God is moved, how the Mystery is moved for each of us, no matter what happened.

Next time we will continue with *“Is it possible to live this way?”* pp. 19-25

I want to say a few words about the Italian regional elections. According to the perception of faith we have, as Fr. Giussani handed it on to us, the event that happened to us invests everything, has to do with

everything, with all the factors of reality, even with politics. This is why the elections are a moment of verification: if we do not perceive this, then a piece of reality starts to break away, and as time goes on others will break away as well: tomorrow it will be our wife, and the day after it will be our work. Why? Because reality is one. This is why it is essential to help each other to understand that for us the elections relate to the entire journey we are making, they have to do with faith, they have to do with this way of living our relationship with politics. We see already some signs indicating that when this isn't lived in an organic connection to a total experience, indifference and lack of interest start to take over. We see this everywhere, in many who do not care anymore; and since also the newspapers strongly feed this attitude, then we follow this alienating way of thinking. Instead, the way we act isn't born of what the newspapers say, but of that Presence that is the source of our interest for everything, also for this reality that is politics. As we have always said to each other, we don't expect the answer from politics; we expect the answer from faith, from what happened to us. But we ask politics, and this is why we are interested in participating, to defend and guarantee the space necessary to have an experience of life that may be good for ourselves and for others. In fact, when we live faith in an authentic way, it is communicated to everybody and it becomes a good for all. This is why the elections are a top-notch educational opportunity, a verification of our education, because we don't want our faith to remain only at the level of "piety" (as a devout inspiration), but to be expressed in the totality of our "I" until it generates in us a passion for the "res publica" (the common good) for the good of all.

The Easter Poster will be available for distribution in the next few days. It is the painting of Marc Chagall *Le fils prodigue* (the prodigal son) with texts by Pope Benedict and Fr. Giussani.

Veni Sancte Spiritus