

**Notes from School of Community with Fr. Julian Carron
Milan, 3/10/2010**

Text of reference: L.Giussani, "Is it possible to live this way?", vol. 3, Charity", p. 19-25

Song "Un uomo cattivo"

Song "Amazing Grace"

Today we are starting point 3 "Perfect, like your heavenly Father". To be helped in making this passage let's stop for a moment and try to relate it to the previous point - because we cannot leave behind what we said - so that we can enter into the Mystery of Christ as if by osmosis. Above all, I would like to emphasize these things that Fr. Giussani says almost in passing, things we barely notice, because these are the passages where the soul of Fr. Giussani - through which his testimony is transmitted to us - becomes evident. Only a humanity like his lets itself be struck like he does: that passage in the Bible is available to everybody, it seems completely banal, but why aren't we aware of it? This is why identifying ourselves with the way in which he lets himself be struck is like being generated, like letting ourselves be moved: "Why does God dedicate Himself to me? [...] Moreover, why does He become man and give Himself to me to make me innocent once again [...] Why this gift of self up to the conceivable extreme, beyond the conceivable extreme?" We skip over these sentences, but it is here that Fr. Giussani expresses the repercussion, because this is the way he lets himself be struck by the sentence of Jeremiah that he encourages us to learn by heart: "With eternal love I have loved you, for this I have attracted you to me, having pity on your nothingness". We can say these words without letting ourselves be struck by them, the same way many times we look at others without letting ourselves be struck, but the love the Mystery witnesses to us is this emotion that carries a reason within, that is the expression of a reason: "I am moved by your value, I am moved by your nothingness, but your nothingness is so precious to Me". On p.12 Fr. Giussani continues: "It is beautiful to come across this pity [...] in the Gospel. For example, when - it is said twice - Jesus sees his city from the hill one night and cries over it [...] Weeks later that city would kill Him, but for Him this doesn't matter". And then he tells us how Jesus sobbed at the sight of the woman who was going to bury her son: "'Woman, don't cry,' which was something inconceivable. Aside from the fact that it is between the ridiculous and the absurd: how can you tell a woman in that condition, who follows her son's coffin, 'Don't cry'?. It was the overflowing of pity, of compassion". If we don't experience this overflowing of compassion we do not know the true meaning of what the Gospel expresses here. We think we understand because we are so conceited, so rationalistic....No, we don't understand. How do you know if you understand?. When it happens again. This is why doing SofC and re-reading it thinking of having understood it is so different from doing SofC looking to see if it happens again (and then, it's not possible to skip over, as we often do, because this means to stop at the surface of those words and then we see that nothing changes)! The Gospel speaks of Zaccheus, to whom Jesus says: "Come down quickly, for today I'm going to your house". Fr. Giussani comments (a sentence is enough to tell us all his compassion): "There isn't any possibility of this kind of tenderness among us"; how far from this we are! Or Lazarus: crying for the death of a friend. Only when we identify with this we can understand that God's charity for man is this emotion, this being moved: "Note, then, the point: God was moved by our nothingness". He repeats it to help us to understand, it comes from his heart: "What is man that You should be mindful of him?" The best is when he says that God is not only moved by our nothingness, but even by our pettiness: "I have had pity on your hatred of me. I was moved because you hate me". Your hatred cannot stop me from being moved; all your hatred against Me is not able to defeat, to win over all the emotion that I feel when I look at you, when I look at your destiny. This being moved, this emotion, is not sentimental: it is a judgment; an emotion that carries its reason within: "I value your nothingness and I am moved by it". How does Fr. Giussani explain this? Declaring that "The beat of the heart is pity on your nothingness"!

Notice that this is not the logical premise (as we often use it: "I already know it and so I apply it"); this is to immerse ourselves in a life so that it may become ours. Because, if I am not moved it means that I don't

know it; and if I am not moved, it's not communicated to me, and all the difficulty I experience afterwards is born from this. What Fr. Giussani tells us has become reality in Christ, so there is no other gaze on us, no matter what we have done; because He is moved and cries also for our hatred; there isn't another way we can look at ourselves: only this gaze is true. If I look at myself in another way, it is an old gaze, a gaze that is no more, a gaze that doesn't exist, because since this gaze entered reality, there isn't any reality that doesn't carry it within. We need to refresh our *file*, as I always tell you: it doesn't exist, this way is old, it is like a geographic map without America after America was discovered: it doesn't exist! This is exactly what we have to help each other to understand: "The word charity indicates the very nature of God", that is, He gives Himself with this emotion, being moved for us. How does this become ours? Only God breaks through this estrangement. Someone writes to me: "On p. 22 of *Is it possible to live this way?* (almost at the end) Fr. Giussani says: "And because this Christ exists there is no longer any man who doesn't interest me". Could you explain better this transition: from Christ to men. I have a hard time to understand how the act of mercy towards me can drive me to be interested in every man". This is the transition, and I am going to leave it open because it is what we have to witness to each other: how does this transition happen?

What you said happened to me just the other day.

Perfect. It is what I was waiting for, this is the right witness.

On p. 24 it says: "Another point, parenthetically: attachment to oneself does not exist if it is not based on being moved. Being moved unites while leaving one detached". When I read this sentence I thought: "Yes, the usual talk, distance yourself one step....", I kind of interpreted it literally, as if I were saying: "Well, yes, I know this, I have been in the Movement forever". Then it was as if God had told me: "No, come back", and I re-read the sentence, and He made me remember the daily interaction that has been happening with my older son who is sixteen, how I am becoming aware that he is turning into a person while until recently he was a child. For me it is really moving to discover how my son has the same questions I have, the same desire to be loved and to love, the same desire for beauty, for truth, and this is making me feel extremely close to him, he is becoming very interesting to me.

It's good for you that he is growing.

Also because for me it is fascinating, interesting. In fact, when Fr. Giussani talks about being moved, I thought: "Good heavens, it is the experience I am having with my son". Afterwards, though, he says: "Being moved unites while leaving one detached", and here.....

Eh, the mother here.....

For the first time in my life I did not understand this detachment, it is used with a meaning I don't recognize in my experience. If I think of the experience I am having with my son, I feel moved, interested, I go to see the things he does, I ask him questions, which I never did before; before I was taking care of him, for sure, he was never left wanting, but now, if you tell me 'detachment', 'to be detached', it is really the last thing I would think of feeling for him in this moment. The same goes for the things I am passionate about, because it is the same that happens to me for the things I am passionate about.

You have to start from your experience; then we will think of the word 'detachment'. Does the fact that you are starting to see how your son is different from you, that he is a 'you', that he is 'another', imply a detachment (that is, that you let him grow)?

Yes.

Yes. This is the meaning of the word detachment: it's enough to observe what is happening to you. You were surprised by something that was happening, and that you started to perceive as positive: this emerging of your son as a 'you', because this 'you' is not taking away anything from you, but giving you more, you had somebody to dialogue with, you started to see him develop, but for this to happen you needed to give him some space, to stop thinking he is ten years old, to stop smothering him. This is called detachment. You can use another word if you prefer, but this is what it is. For you it has been an experience, so much so that it struck you and you perceived it as something good: this is to love your son's destiny. As Fr. Giussani says, he started to detach himself since the day he was born: now he is starting to become a true 'you', not only physiologically (which was already a fact), but as an 'I'.

I am a nurse, and this week I met a fifty year-old lady, who was admitted to my ward because she had muscular dystrophy which had caused her to become paralyzed and unable to breathe. Already the day she was admitted, she had grabbed my arm and had told me: "Let me die!". The other night she called me ringing the bell, because she was unable to lie down, she could not stay still; also she always tries to remove the oxygen because she wants to die. Since she didn't want to sleep, I spent some time with her, and she told me about her life: "I had three husbands, but I haven't found the right one yet". Also, she kept saying: "I would like to die, I would like to die: why don't they let me die?". I asked her: "Why do you want to die?". She answered: "Because I am imprisoned in a body, I would like to know, to talk with people, and yet I am here, imprisoned in a body that doesn't let me do what I desire". I was struck by this, I was moved by her desire (and this doesn't always happen to me with my patients), by her desire to know. Afterwards, I happened to tell her: "Look, you still have something to discover, you still have something to discover in life", and she, looking at me, challenging me, said: "Who am I to you? I am not your mother, I am not a relative of yours, you have to tell me who I am to you". In that moment I realized that she was somebody to me, because – just for the fact that I was moved for the destiny of this woman – I recognized once again that this was His initiative for me.

You were moved for that woman's destiny. This is what corresponds; this is our experience of God's nature as being moved; all the evil in us, all our fragility cannot stop us – in certain moments – from being moved for the destiny of another, even in this condition.

I own a construction firm with three friends. A while ago we had given a job to do to some people: they did the job and we paid their boss. After a few days the workers called me and asked to be paid. I answered them: "We already paid your boss". They didn't believe me and kept calling for several days. At that point I told them: "Come to the office, my partner and I will explain the situation to you". In short, these workers had been swindled by their boss (and even if they had reported him, it would have turned against them and they would have had to pay some fines). They were getting up to leave, when my partner told them: "Wait. At this point we are not going to abandon you. It's not right for me to pay the job twice, but I can give you work, you can work for me". In tears they said: "People like you do not exist, people who behave like this". And I told them: "It's not true that they don't exist, they do indeed, I could give you a long list, because if we work like this, if we live like this, it is because we have learned from someone who has treated us and is treating us like that". After they left I told my friend: "Do you realize what you just did?". I was struck by the fact that at the end of the pages you told us to read for this evening, on p. 25, Fr. Giussani refers to Mother Teresa: "He can exist!" (it isn't a question, it has an exclamation point). "He can exist!". One only has to look at the way he has been looked at, and then he reacts according to this charity that he has received first.

This evening we need to understand the transition that Fr. Giussani makes to answer this question: how can I be as perfect as our Father is perfect? During a SofC few weeks ago we said: "Don't cultivate plans of perfection, but look Christ in the face"; it's not that now we change the method and we say: "We have to be perfect like our heavenly Father is perfect", and we all go home as if the password has been changed (and

then we ‘get crazy’ because we don’t understand the connection). From this point of view, Fr. Giussani says: “Be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect”. Perfect like our Father: who is capable of that? This is a rash suggestion. As a suggestion it produces the opposite: fear”. How can we become like the Father, then? What step does Fr. Giussani take to help us to understand?

I’ll tell you what happened to me at the last School of Community meeting; it is something that happens to me in every circumstance and yet I find it difficult to communicate. When you read the Pope’s words and told us: “Remain in my love”, I was satisfied and free, not as an afterthought, and not because through those words you were giving me directions on what to do – i.e. staying is enough – but because those words that I was listening to and that were making me happy (again, not because I was told that remaining in His love is enough) were Jesus’ words, that I was hearing in that very moment from the mouth of a living person, a person that I, as well as anybody else, can encounter in any moment and in any circumstance. We don’t generate the Event, and the new humanity is not something we have to make happen: we only have to be simple and live our human need to the fullest. Then, is there anything that I have to do? Is there anything that depends on my doing? My experience is that everything I am does not remotely depend on me; not even the possibility to fully live my human need is something that I can give myself. Which is tantamount to saying that not even my commitment is something that I can generate; it is always given to me as a gift. I really see this in me, as well as when I observe other people.

For example, when dealing with a person who is totally closed in front of life and shows hatred towards those who love him, or resists the beauty of what happens, saying: “You just have to remain,” or “All you have to do is live your humanity to the fullest,” is not enough. Telling him those words as if you were giving him instructions on what to do is not enough, because that person doesn’t have the slightest intention to remain or to change; he can’t do it. To be able to do it he needs the Lord; he needs a miracle, he needs to be touched and taken by Jesus. If that happens, thank God, I can’t keep looking at him thinking that there is something he has to do -something neither him nor I are capable of doing. It would be like telling a sick person: “Now start getting better”. It is Jesus who has to touch him and heal him. Therefore my relationship with the Mystery is simply an entreaty for Him to come, and indeed He comes (and that’s the only thing that gives me peace and happiness.) This is exactly what I mean when I say: “I am You who make me.” He has pity on my nothingness; and nothingness is nothing, not something.

Wait a minute. There are a few things we have to go back to, because what you said is absolutely true: what we are affirming now is the precedence of His action on anything else. What you told us about the last School of Community is the description of this at work, not an instruction manual that I have to apply. It is something that happens, something contemporaneous, which confirms that we do not generate the Event; yet we are so overwhelmed by it that we don’t realize it is not our doing . What we need to understand today from your contribution is that you can’t stop this from happening, but it is necessary for you to welcome it: this is simplicity. I can give you a gift, and the gift is entirely yours, is entirely grace, but I can’t accept it for you. This is a banal example (because a gift is something outside of you, while the Event happens in you), but in this case too what is at play is freedom; even though things are made easier for us because the very sign that happens is what helps my freedom move, so much so that answering “yes” is grace, it is caused by this fact that is purely gratuitous. For this reason the School of Community says that gratuitousness is “a reflection of the gratuitousness of my Grace”; it is a reflection, but we have to welcome it. This is what the Gospels call “simplicity” or “poverty of spirit”; whatever you want to call it, this is what Jesus constantly asks, because in order to participate in this – He is so aware that everything is grace, like you said – we only have to welcome Him, we have to be simple enough to welcome Him.

The problem is that this simplicity, to tell you the truth....For a long time I maintained that He needed me.

He does need you!

But through the years, if I have to tell you, nothing of what happened came from me or from others...

That’s true. Even your free answer is generated by grace, yet it is *your* answer so we cannot leave this aspect out, otherwise it is something mechanistic, it is like leaving out your collaboration. Small as it may be, totally gratuitous as it may be -because it is born out of your being moved, out of His grace – it is still *your* collaboration; it is very important not to leave this out. So, even simplicity is given, meaning that it moves your I so that you can recognize it

The power of His grace is shown precisely by the fact that Christ gives it to you through your “yes”; there is nothing greater than this, do you understand? He involves you in the giving of the very grace that you need in order to be saved! For this reason in my entreaty I ask for this simplicity; otherwise why would you need this entreaty?

I need the entreaty for this to happen.

For this to happen, and for you to recognize it.

Today we are lucky to have Father Aldo among us; I can't but invite him to tell us about his experience, about how this gaze, this charity of the Mystery has become his own.

First of all I want to thank you. I am moved because the ever greater miracle that is my life coincides with the grace that you experience of taking what Carrón tells us seriously, word by word. Recently Cleuza and Marcos told some friends, who were asking why they were going to Paraguay: “There is nothing beautiful in Paraguay, everything is ugly, there is nothing worse in the world: dying men, people with aids, prostitutes, transvestites, raped children, homeless people.” “Then, why do you go there?”

“We go there to learn a gaze,” that is the gaze of Christ toward Mary Magdalene, or Zaccheus, or the Samaritan woman. For me this gaze rests on a point of certainty, which I haven't doubted for many years: “I am certain I am wanted, moment by moment, just like I am.” The most tragic thing in life is affective uncertainty, because it is affective certainty that supports life, and for me this certainty is that “I am You who make me,” that the hairs of my head are numbered – words that in Latin America go from Panama to the Tierra del Fuego. I can look at myself with eyes of the You, I can look at my humanity the very same way that Being looks at me; and Being looks at me that way even when I am upset or when I feel bad. Those are just other reasons to affirm “I am You who make me,” because I wouldn't be angry or uneasy without my humanity; therefore the uneasiness, cancer, or depression becomes a reason to affirm “I am You who make me,” because they are factors of my humanity. This moves me; think about what it means to say, even in front of my disease and the sick people I take care of: “The Lord called me from the womb; from the body of my mother He named my name. He has loved me with an eternal love, having pity on my nothingness.” These are words that Carrón keeps telling us and that are like the leitmotiv of every minute of my life and of the life of my friends. You understand that there is no aspect of life that can be negative, so much so that my sick people die smiling, because the heart of the matter is this gaze full of tenderness; this is for me the beginning of charity. The second step is that in Christ I have visibly encountered this “I” moved by the Mystery; how can I be perfect like the Father? I have a criterion: I look at Jesus, at the way he lived, at the way Father Giussani embraced me, at the way Carrón looks at me. It is a very concrete and precise criterion, according to which this “You who make me” becomes You, oh Christ. For this reason for the past months, with Cleuza and Marcos, I have meditated on Carrón's homily at Father Pontiggia's funeral, when he said: “Who are you, oh Christ?” This pivotal question is re-echoing minute by minute, yet it doesn't have an immediate answer, because the answer will be incomplete even in Heaven, otherwise we would grow weary. We will always be able to ask: “Who are You, oh Christ?” Then there is God's tenderness. These are the two points we are working on in depth, because everything was born from the possibility to say: “You, oh Christ.” That possibility generated the certainty that makes me kneel in front of each one of my sick people and kiss them, not because I am not repulsed by the maggots; not because I am not nauseated by the rotting flesh, or because I am better than you: I kiss them because that rotting flesh is the suffering Christ, the quivering Christ, the living Christ, and when you see Christ you can't help embracing and kissing Him. This way the capacity to kiss or to get the maggots off of the sick is filled with gladness, because it becomes a gesture of gratuitousness: you are getting the maggots off of Christ. A God that is moved because of my humanity becomes an I moved in front of each and every man, particularly in front of this “human trash”; I have to keep company to people just like Christ keeps me company, because He doesn't leave me even for a second, do you understand? Christ has a never-ending appointment with me, He is continually beside me. He doesn't tell me: “Come back tomorrow,” no, He is here now, and gladness is the most beautiful sign of this moved gift of my self (which is to say, that everything becomes like a friend to me.) Then complaints are replaced by wonder; my powerlessness, the distance is filled by the Mystery. After all I am not the master of anything; if the Mystery wants this, it means that this is for the best, and everything starts from the I, from my I that is certain of being wanted. Cleuza says: “I wonder how one can doubt, how one can have doubts?” How can one have doubts in front of the crisis, in front of cancer? How can one fail to feel that even that is a way God shows His love for us, that even insomnia is the way God tells me: “I am here by you, keeping vigil with you”? For this reason my humanity is seduced, like Jeremiah says: “Oh Lord, You have enticed me, and I was enticed.” What a wonder to behold! I have been chosen in every aspect of my life, I am You who make

me, the hairs on my head are numbered: "Who are You, oh Christ?" Every time we see each other: "Who are You, oh Christ?" in everything, in every detail. This is the charity I live.

Do you understand now why Father Giussani can say: "The first object of man's charity is called Jesus Christ!" This is the passage from the Old to the New Testament: in order to make us His own, in order to make us become like Him, God not only gave us the users manual that are the commandments, he became Man so to attract our whole affection toward Himself. "Who are You, oh Christ?" For this reason the first object of charity is this being magnetized by this charity of His, Christ's charity; this coincides with that remaining we were talking about earlier, remaining in this, remaining attached to this You.

One who had encountered Him cannot avoid being attracted, enticed. That is the point of departure of everything, everything else is the development of this; but we can't go from loving God to loving this way, if not through Christ – it isn't about reading a users manual or the definition of charity and then...No! Father Giussani makes this further step, which is the same that Christ made: the first thing that happened to the disciples wasn't that they were charitable towards people; the first thing was that they were fascinated by Christ; the first object of their love, of their charity was Christ, everything else was born from there. For this reason we couldn't end without becoming aware of this passage: "To love Christ and in Him (because we are enthralled, seduced by Him), that is, according to His way, your brothers." Péguy talks about "...to find in them a certain gratuitousness. A reflection of the gratuitousness of my Grace." And Father Giussani concludes asking himself: what is the source of this being moved?

"The source of this movement in Christ, just as in myself, is the Spirit of Christ." The Holy Spirit is the one we have to invoke, to entreat. For this reason Father Giussani makes us say: «Veni Sancte Spiritus, Veni per Mariam»; this is what he is urging us to ask. Because, as we said last time when we read the Pope's words: «"love one another as I have loved you" [...] It is not a new commandment; the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself already exists in the Old Testament". Others say: "This love should be even more radicalized; this love of others must imitate Christ who gave himself for us; it must be a heroic love, to the point of the gift of self". In this case, however, Christianity would be a heroic moralism.» We can change the nature of Christianity using the same words of the Gospel; with the same words, with the same ingredients we can cook a totally different soup. « It is true that we must reach the point of this radicalism of love which Christ showed to us and gave for us [it is true, this is the goal: to participate in the very nature of God], but here too the true newness is not what we do, the true newness is what He did [...] the newness is the gift, the great gift, and from the gift [...] the new action. St Thomas Aquinas says this very succinctly when he writes: "The New Law [it is not a more radicalized commandment, one that is more complicated to carry out] is the grace of the Holy Spirit". The New Law is not another commandment more difficult than the others: the New Law is a gift, the New Law is the presence of the Holy Spirit» The Spirit is the way Christ penetrates the very marrow of our life, making us become truly His own.

- Glory be